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Flying Black Ponies,

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His focus is an examination of the development and potential of the Japanese navy in the context of the U.S.-Japan Defense Security Alliance.

Rising from the ashes of World War II to become a legitimate regional power, Japan has developed the "second most powerful naval force in the world's largest ocean." This has led the United States and others to press Japan to contribute more to the security of the democratic and free-trading world, while its neighbors closely watch for signs of militarism that would signal resurgent nationalism and imperialism.

Through comparative analysis, Woolley presents the development of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), and the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) generally, in decision-making models developed within each of the book's seven chapters. He sees the efficacy of Japan's military might and fear of its potency as catalysts that will awaken the long-dormant Japanese aim for regional hegemony and dominance.

Woolley begins by examining the cultural implications of the expanding role of the JMSDF, followed by the institutional dimension of the legal constraints imposed by the Japanese constitution on JSDF activities. In subsequent chapters, he traces the impact of strategic purpose on the development of these forces as Japan accepted the role of defending its sea-lanes out to one thousand miles. Woolley follows with an examination of the domestic and international implications of Japan's expanding capabilities and operations as it sent minesweepers to the Persian Gulf in 1991, and how the incremental changes in Japan's defense policy over the last three decades resulted in tacit international and domestic acceptance of its participation in peacekeeping operations. Woolley concludes with a valuable discussion of Japan's changing defense posture and its relevance to aiding the United States in protecting shared vital interests in Asia.

Well researched and meticulously documented with an extensive bibliography, this book is an excellent reference for anyone wanting to understand Japanese defense policy and the forces that affect it. However, it is more than a book about the development of the JMSDF in the last three decades. It is also about the development of Japan's national defense policy and the forces that move Japanese policy makers. It is a concise treatise that effectively uses maps and tables to help the reader understand key points.

Thus, the reader should be cautioned that the title of this book does not accurately convey its value as an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the Japanese defense forces—not just the JMSDF—nor does it suggest the richness of the author's analysis of Japanese policy making. This book provides much more, and it can serve as an excellent resource for gaining insight into the most important bilateral relationship of the United States.

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Lavell, Kit. *Flying Black Ponies*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2000. 376pp. $32.95

Flying Black Ponies is an effective combination of combat narrative, squadron history, and personal memoir, telling the story of Light Attack Squadron 4 (VAL 4, or the "Black Ponies"), a naval aviation squadron stationed in the Mekong Delta

during the Vietnam War. During most of the war, the U.S. Navy made an intense effort with its Mobile Riverine Force to interdict enemy arms and supplies that flowed, primarily from Cambodia, across the Mekong Delta into the area surrounding Saigon. Kit Lavell's book is a readable account of the Black Ponies' important role in this hazardous interdiction campaign.

The Mekong Delta is not an easy place to conduct any type of military operation. It is a lush, steaming, tangled waterscape of swamps, soggy plains, and rice paddies crisscrossed with thousands of miles of rivers, streams, and canals. The canal-interdiction war in the Mekong was limited in 1968 in part by the inability to sustain close air support. The "Swift boats," river patrol boats, SEAL teams, and the overstretched squadron of Navy attack helicopters (HAL 3, or the "Seawolves") that were already in place clearly needed assistance. The new Commander, Naval Forces Vietnam, Vice Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., decided that air firepower was needed that could reach station quickly and remain there for several hours. The Black Ponies became operational in the Mekong during April 1969 in order to give fixed-wing aircraft punch, mainly with five-inch Zuni rockets, to the fight for control of the strategic river delta.

The book follows VAL 4 from its commissioning in San Diego, in January 1969, until its last mission and decommissioning in April 1972. The narrative also contains useful summaries of Navy tactics in the Mekong Delta, briefly describing MARKET TIME, GAME WARDEN, SEA LORDS, GIANT SLINGSHOT, DUFFLE BAG, ACTOV, and other operations in which the Black Ponies were involved. Lavell also weaves numerous other elements of the squadron's experiences into his account. Lavell was one of the Black Pony pilots, flying 234 combat missions in the OV-10 Bronco aircraft during his tour with VAL 4. He effectively describes the frustration of being at the very end of the line of the Navy's support and supply organization in Vietnam, and of dealing with rear-echelon staff administrators. He also pays deserved tribute to the enlisted maintenance and ordnance crews who worked long hours in the heat and humidity to keep the squadron aircraft safely airborne and armed. He portrays the sometimes humorous and somewhat disrespectful escapades of junior officers, particularly as the pullout from Vietnam neared in 1972.

Most importantly, however, this book is about the pilots of VAL 4 and their combat experiences. In three years of flying in the Mekong Delta, the squadron compiled a unique and impressive record. The Black Ponies' ability to "scramble" when the Riverine Force made contact with the enemy continually resulted in direct air-ground firefights. The combat action is sharply drawn, evoking the tension, complexity, and confusion of delivering air strikes, especially in close proximity to friendly forces on the ground. When strikes took place at night and in bad weather (which they often did), the descriptions are even more harrowing. Several of the stories of the aerial fighting are effectively paired with personal memories of the same engagement by other personnel involved—river patrol boat crews, SEAL teams, and Riverine Force troops on the ground.

As Steven Coonts notes in his foreword, *Flying Black Ponies* can be read as a characteristic example of the way America fights its wars. Coonts describes the volunteers that fought the air war—young men of

blue-collar or decidedly middle-class background, mostly from farms or small towns. Their story is an important one, and the first-person accounts of individual sacrifice and aircrew heroism are a needed addition to the narrative of the Navy's nearly forgotten war in the Mekong Delta.

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Gentile, Gian P. *How Effective Is Strategic Bombing? Lessons Learned from World War II to Kosovo.* New York: New York Univ. Press, 2001. 273pp. $36

The issue of strategic bombing's effectiveness is vitally important to political and military leaders. U.S. Air Force doctrine has argued for decades that airpower's ability to operate directly and immediately at the strategic level of war is its unique and defining characteristic—a characteristic that must be exploited. Many disagree, so the debates have been long and heated.

Gian Gentile, a serving Army officer, now adds to the literature on this important subject. Unfortunately, he never really comes to grips with the key issue of effectiveness implied by the title of his book. Rather, he has chosen to replow some old ground, looking anew at the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), chartered by President Franklin Roosevelt to examine and report on the effects of strategic bombing in World War II. Measuring bombing's effectiveness and examining the workings of the USSBS that studied bomb effects are two different things.

The story of USSBS has been told before. In many ways it is a typical tale of wartime America. A need is identified, resources and personnel are mobilized, vast amounts of energy and material are expended, and notable gains are achieved. At the same time, the path to success is not a straight line—there is much inefficiency, debate, and compromise. Sausage is being made.

Gentile does not contest the findings of USSBS. Indeed, virtually no one has attempted to do so in the five-plus decades since they were released. The reason is simple: no one has the time, stamina, resources, or expertise to review the mountain of data collected and analyzed by the thousand individuals who conducted the USSBS.

Instead, Gentile seeks to discredit the survey's findings by revealing flaws and inconsistencies in the survey itself. Primarily, he argues that Army Air Forces (AAF) leaders were so interested in forming a separate air force after the war that they induced bias into the USSBS. He is unable to make this charge stick. The survey was led by noted industrialists, bankers, economists, lawyers, and other professionals, most of whom had had little or no direct involvement with aviation prior to their work with the survey. Gentile admits that General Henry "Hap" Arnold, the AAF commander, stressed to these civilian leaders the need for objectivity, impartiality, and truth in the survey's findings. Yet he treats such admonitions as duplicitous, despite the statement by the USSBS head that "at no time has there been the slightest inclination to interfere with us."

In truth, it is difficult to imagine that men like John Kenneth Galbraith, Paul Nitze, and George Ball could have been manipulated and pressured to distort their findings. Common sense and logic tell us it is more likely that these men—and their hundreds of colleagues on the survey— examined thousands of