

1992

## "Dive Bomber: Learning to Fly the Navy's Planes," and "Fighting Squadron: A Sequel to Dive Bomber"

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3,597 shells fired—that is 2.75 percent for the Grand Fleet, 3.39 percent for the High Seas Fleet. Put another way, though outnumbered twenty-one to thirty-seven in dreadnoughts and battle cruisers, Scheer's force matched Jellicoe's in major-caliber hits.

My sole disappointment was in the battle narrations. They are a jumble and will put off many readers. It is a common problem among narrations of sea battles, and perhaps there is no getting around it: to grasp the "macro" of tactics one must sift one's way through the "micro." Still, I'm waiting for a genius to come along who can synthesize a battle and reconstruct the vision of it in a way that helps a reader to grasp the sum of the parts. Better diagrams would have helped; Grove's are not original and not very clear.

That having been said, Grove's theme, which is how technology changed tactics from 1905 to 1916 to 1944, is solidly communicated. It is not the well known *fact* of the change but the detailed *how* of it that makes the book worth reading. Since we are probably entering into a period of sweeping change in naval technology and tactics, high on every naval officer's professional reading aspirations should be gaining an intimate familiarity with how materiel and tactical progress have gone arm-in-arm in the past.

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Winston, Robert A. *Dive Bomber: Learning to Fly the Navy's Planes*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991. 182pp. \$17.95

Winston, Robert A. *Fighting Squadron: A Sequel to Dive Bomber*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991. 191pp. \$17.95

At best, autobiographies and biographies provide later generations with a better perspective of an individual. At worst, they are vehicles for self-justification and rambling minutia. Fortunately, Captain Robert Winston's autobiographical accounts are firmly in the former category.

These books provide a perspective of U.S. naval aviation both before and during World War II and are primers about what it was like to fly the aircraft of that era. *Dive Bomber* is about Winston's experiences as a naval cadet in the training command and at sea aboard the *Lexington* and *Enterprise*. *Fighting Squadron* is appropriately subtitled as the sequel to the former book, and describes the author's experiences during World War II, particularly as a fighter squadron commanding officer.

*Dive Bomber* was first published in 1941, when Winston was a lieutenant. Although the author's fascination with dive bombing is apparent and figures in several anecdotes, the subtitle is more pertinent. The book is about learning how to fly and how to be an effective carrier aviator. His discussion of his induction into the navy in 1935 as an aviation cadet should be especially familiar to the flyers of later generations, and also Pensacola, the locale for much of his

training. However, what will be unfamiliar to post-World War II naval aviators is the "elimination training" procedure.

As naval aviation began its dramatic expansion during the mid-1930s, the Bureau of Aeronautics decided it was more efficient to eliminate the marginal students at several bases around the country before sending them on to Pensacola. This was a sound idea and was an early test of the dispersal of naval air training which would be needed in the 1940s to provide flyers for the coming war. Naval aviators of that time were required to be proficient in *all* types of naval aircraft. By the time Winston was designated a naval aviator, he had flown most of the training, fighter, torpedo, and patrol and observation aircraft, including seaplanes. Except for their reliable engines, the trainers and early fighters (F4B-1 and F4B-2) were only marginally more advanced than their World War I predecessors. Although the F4B-4 wings were still fabric covered (though their structure and the fuselage, radio, and oxygen equipment were all metal), those that Winston flew during his first fleet squadron were, as the author notes, "a whole lot different...." The F3F-2 brought retractable landing gear, the thousand-horsepower engines, and enclosed cockpits.

Winston writes in *Fighting Squadron* about World War II and his transition to the fighter that he would fly in combat, the Grumman F6F Hellcat.

Compared to the aircraft just discussed, the F6F was an enormous advancement in power, speed, and size.

Winston's path to a fleet fighter squadron was not an easy one. After spending the first two years of World War II as a lieutenant serving as aviation assistant to the director of public relations, Winston was almost "too old" to fly fighters. But he talked his way into training for the F6F, and because of accelerated wartime advancement he was made the commanding officer of Fighter Squadron Thirty-One (VF-31). Embarked in the *Cabot*, a light aircraft carrier, Winston and VF-31 participated in many of the significant actions of the latter part of the Pacific war, from the Marshall Islands through Truk and the Marianas "Turkey Shoot."

Collectively both books are a brief history of the evolution of naval aircraft. However, there may be some who will be baffled by the "old" aircraft designations such as F3F-1. *Dive Bomber* contains at the end of the book a useful, though condensed, description of this nomenclature system, along with a concise glossary of aeronautical terms and maneuvers. The drawings of naval aircraft, ships, and scenes of the period provide an excellent supplement to the text.

These books are the best kind—personal and informative. Reading them is much the same as having a friendly conversation with a fascinating predecessor. Throughout both books Captain Winston's love of flying is evident. I, for one, hope that

the Naval Institute Press will complete this trilogy and publish *Aces Wild*, which describes Captain Winston's "year of 'inactive' duty as a test pilot in Finland, Belgium, and France during the German Blitzkrieg...."

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Sledge, E.B. *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1990. 326pp. \$24.95

Ross, Bill D. *Peleliu, Tragic Triumph: The Untold Story of the Pacific War's Forgotten Battle*. New York: Random House, 1991. 381pp. \$22

These two books complement each other. Eugene Sledge describes his experiences as a private first class mortar man in K Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines at Peleliu and Okinawa. Bill Ross presents the big picture of the Peleliu campaign, from regiment, battalion, and company to the marine rifleman. In fact, Ross relies on Sledge's personal account of the campaign to lend authenticity to his book.

Eugene B. Sledge, a professor at the University of Montevallo in Alabama, originally drafted the outline of his story in 1946, using his notes written immediately after the fighting. The author states "It is not a history and it is not my story alone. I have attempted rather to be the spokesman for my comrades." In this he succeeds very well. Bill Ross served as a Marine combat correspondent at Iwo Jima

and in northern China just after the war. He landed with the first wave of assaulting Marines at Inchon, representing the Associated Press. His book is dedicated to the Marine combat correspondents and photographers killed in action in World War II—fifteen men who ranked from captain to corporal.

Sledge joined "K/3/5" as a replacement at Pavuvu, in the Solomon Islands, just before the Peleliu campaign. He was proud to be a member of the 5th Marine Regiment, the most famous Marine unit. He was assigned to the mortar section—which probably saved his life, since so many of the men in the rifle platoons were killed in action. His comments about the other Marines are usually warm and complimentary: he respects his noncommissioned officers and admires his officers, especially Captain Andrew A. Haldane, commanding officer of K Company, who was killed in action at Peleliu and to whom Sledge dedicates his book.

However, when Sledge speaks of Okinawa his tone changes. He is unhappy with the green replacements (many of whom were draftees), and he is critical of the new officers, whom he describes as incompetent (in that they showed poor judgment and lacked the necessary leadership). His assessment of the deterioration in the quality of Marine replacements is correct, particularly for the end of the Okinawa campaign.

Sledge's description of the stupefying heat on the coral ridges of Peleliu and the rains and mud of Okinawa