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Super Carrier: An inside Account of Life Aboard the World's Most Powerful Ship, the U.S.S. John F. Kennedy

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and fictitious, will leap into your mind as you travel the Mediterranean, Norwegian Sea, Baltic, Indian Ocean, and into the "dog-holes" of the Pacific.

Tales of the sea abound, and many of them take place on tramp steamers. One that might easily be representative of *Tramp* is Captain F.C. Hendry's short story titled "Easting Down." This example is no better than the likes of those posed by Joseph Conrad, Jan de Hartog, and Angus MacDonald, or the true tale of Captain Carlsen in the *Flying Enterprise*. However, it is an excellent slice of that which Krieger and photographer Judy Howard depict so beautifully in *Tramp*.

In this particular example, Captain Hartnell, his third mate, Mr. Birnie, and a rebellious—at least single-minded—deckhand named Kelly dare to replace the screw and tail shaft at sea on a 5,000-ton tramp. This old girl had the misfortune of losing those appurtenances in a daring passage from Cape Town to Port Pirie, South Australia, by way of the "Roaring Forties." The master's goal: beat out a competitor for a cargo of zinc concentrate. The decision to pursue a passage off the beaten track and the determination of the three heroes is demonstrative of the importance of cargo to the continued existence of a tramp. The excitement, adventure, and true seamanship which prevail in this story, I invite the reader to pursue. This narrative illustrates that which *Tramp* depicts so successfully and beautifully.

Tramp is a superb book, especially the photography by Judy Howard. The narrative is excellent, but tends to be more travelogue than maritime text on how the tramp business works. It is the photographs that carry the images of the beautiful lines of cruiser and counter sterns, plumb bows and, by today's standards, tiny holds serviced by relatively miniscule booms. Tramps are, at once, a business, a romance, and a way of life.

One criticism, which must be taken with a grain of salt, for this reviewer loves all ships—particularly the delightful selection made by this author and his photographer—is that although the book's title is *Tramp*, included are ships such as *S.T. Crapo* and *George A. Sloan*, which are not truly in the tramp trade.

That notwithstanding, this is a superior book which will be treasured and enjoyed by anyone who has ever wished for, or delighted in, ". . . a merry yarn from a laughing fellow rover, and quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over."

J.A. PESCHKA, JR.
Captain, U.S. Navy

Wilson, George C. *Super Carrier: An Inside Account of Life Aboard the World's Most Powerful Ship, the U.S.S. John F. Kennedy*. New York: Macmillan, 1986. 273pp. \$19.95

It is easy to be overwhelmed and captivated by the obvious on an aircraft carrier: its size, day and

night flight operations, and the flight deck ballet—the constant movement, the noise, the screaming, the lurching aircraft, the lights, and the brightly colored jerseys worn by the flight deck specialists. It is easy to see the obvious and fail to see or understand that the aircraft and the hundred or so men working the dangerous flight deck are but a small fraction of the world of the aircraft carrier. It is easy to miss that this is an all-male world, and that the 5,000 or so men of the crew do not go home to their families each night and often do not go home at all for 6 or more months at a time. It is easy to miss that, while they are gone, they are for all practical purposes in a black hole—unable to help or even communicate, save by letters with their wives, children, families and friends left ashore.

The military is often referred to as an instrument of a nation's foreign policy. If this be true, then the aircraft carrier is surely at the business end of that instrument, and the men who work so hard to keep her there, ready to respond, are more than the strength of the ship; indeed, they represent the very on-line strength of our Nation. *Super Carrier* is a story of such men, of a great ship, and of a 7-month-long cruise.

George Wilson is senior military correspondent for *The Washington Post*. On 27 September 1983, he, like thousands of sailors, kissed his wife good-bye on Pier 12 at the Norfolk Navy Base and went off on a 7-

month cruise in the U.S.S. *John F. Kennedy* (CV67). The cruise was to be typical, with a carefully laid out schedule that fell apart almost immediately. There was promise of wonderful, exotic ports to be visited (most were cancelled); a trip through the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean (it never happened); and the opportunity to watch one of the Navy's top carrier admirals operate his forces (with a lot of help from above). The men of *Kennedy* were young, most not yet 22, and a typical cross-section of America. Many were away from home for the first time, and virtually all were struggling with loves, worries, problems, and fears. All were routinely carrying out a work schedule that would have been beyond the comprehension of their landlocked compatriots.

Mr. Wilson's great talent as an experienced observer and chronicler of people and events, sharpened by 7 months of total involvement, gives this book a realism that can perhaps be fully appreciated only by carrier men and the loved (and sometimes not-so-loved) ones they have left behind. Despite the fact that early in the cruise he moved out of ship's company spaces and threw his lot in with the more glamorous air wing, the author has captured the overall essence of life aboard a carrier: from the loneliness of the young sailor in a 250-man berthing space, to the aggressiveness of the fighter and attack aircrews; from the surefooted, often cocky competence of the

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“Yellow Shirts” responsible for the movement and safety of aircraft, to the pilot concerned with the thought of “one night-landing too many”; from the awesome responsibilities of the captain of the ship and the admiral, to the frustrations they both felt when they had to dump carefully laid action plans and execute ones they knew to be dangerously flawed.

The narrative that covers the preparation for, and the execution of, the 4 December 1983 air strike against terrorist targets in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon is excellent and should be required reading for all action officers in the operational chain of command from the White House to the on-scene commander. The loss of life and equipment, the agony of a POW, the selection of poor targets, inadequate time to plan properly and brief the aircrew being sent into an extremely dangerous environment, the insistence from “on high” on a time and target that was tactically stupid—Mr. Wilson lays it all out very clearly. No one can argue that better training and better weapons are needed—we always need better training and weapons—but the overarching failure on 4 December 1983 was the failure in the structure and function of the chain of command.

In his epilogue, Mr. Wilson makes several suggestions for improving life aboard ship for the deployed sailor. Some, like bringing television into the ship’s entertainment system, have merit. Opening up telephonic communications between the crew

and the telephone system in the United States also deserves study, though there are both security and morale implications. On the other hand, the workload for the crew while a ship is at sea is unlikely to diminish. It is up to the commanding officer to deal with the attendant morale problems—indeed, morale of the crew is the commander’s principal responsibility—through rope yarns (stand-down periods), liberty policy, and other means at his disposal. Wilson also properly questions the vulnerability of the aircraft carrier to attack by the Soviets in the year 2000. It is a question that applies equally to all our military installations, both at home and abroad. Since the close of World War II and through Korea, Vietnam, and numerous Third World crises responses, not one aircraft carrier has been lost or even damaged by enemy action. In the same period we have left or otherwise lost the use of land bases in Malta, France, Thailand, Libya, Morocco, Lebanon and other countries, and U.S.-built bases in Vietnam are now in the hands of our enemies along with billions of dollars in equipment we had to leave behind. Mr. Wilson is correct, we need to continue to address the vulnerability issues, but we also need to keep these issues in perspective.

Mr. Wilson earned the justification to write this book about the aircraft carrier and its crew and their families. That he wrote with such insight makes this an important book for the military reader as well as the general public. That he

wrote with such compassion properly underscores the many sacrifices that the Navy and Marine Corps families must endure, and to those men and their families, he provides some much needed recognition and hopefully some understanding.

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Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy

Grant, Zalin. *Over the Beach*. New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1986, 311pp. \$18.95

This is a true story of the air war over Vietnam. Zalin Grant has produced a highly readable and accurate, if not flattering, account of what it was like to fly from the decks of an aircraft carrier into combat over Hanoi and Haiphong. The principals in his story are the Navy pilots of Fighter Squadron 162, and what a mixed bag they are. The personality conflicts within the squadron rival the best of "Dynasty," "Dallas" and "Falcon Crest" put together.

For the most part, the story covers the period from mid-1966 to early 1968 and the two cruises of the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Oriskany*. It was the period of the most intense aerial combat over Vietnam. Together with the disastrous ship-board fire that killed 44 men, it was anything but glamour and glory. During the second cruise the *Oriskany* air wing—Air Wing 16—lost over half of the original complement of aircraft. (This reviewer was there, as

operations officer of light attack Squadron 164.)

Throughout the narrative the author weaves in personal and political controversy from firsthand interviews with squadron pilots, a POW and a Navy widow, to the heavy infighting between top Navy brass and Secretary of Defense McNamara. Grant's harsh light of truth spares no one. Yet the story remains, fundamentally, one of fighting pilots in combat.

Despite the personal rivalries and human frailties that abound in this story, there is one virtue that pervades—courage. It is the lion-hearted courage of the warrior in battle, it is the courage of commitment to duty by men of character, courage so commonplace that it has become not understated, but simply not stated at all. It is expected. While individual flying skills and personalities vary and become the gist of this tale, it remains fundamentally a story of brave men doing their duty.

Grant is an author who knows his Vietnam. His credentials include Army service in Vietnam and 5 years as a journalist "in-country." He also knows his Navy pilots. They may have been the boys of "Top Gun" when flying was fun and games, but in combat they are the men of war, flying difficult and dangerous missions.

Over the Beach is a story of real men in combat. Grant tells it the way it was.

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