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Over the Beach

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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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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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