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Flight of the Intruder

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136 Naval War College Review

Coonts, Stephen. *Flight of the Intruder*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986. 368pp. \$15.95

I did not want to read this book, let alone review it. Most firsthand accounts of the Vietnam War appear to be either self-serving testaments or written just to make a buck. I don't think anyone who flew over North Vietnam during either of the two air wars believes that anyone else can adequately describe the experience. Besides, from the moment the book was published, everyone who is anyone in the literary world has given it rave reviews—what if I didn't like it? But, since I was asked to review *Flight of the Intruder*, I did read it and I am better for it. It's a good book.

Every air wing had a Jake Grafton. Everyone in the air wing imagined that he was a Jake Grafton. Tiger Cole is appropriately professional and cool. Those of us who preferred just one engine and one seat are glad he was not in the cockpit when we screwed up, but we missed him on those nights when there were just too many things to do at once. The XO took a hit from the author. Since XOs usually become COs, I wonder if Coonts had a score to settle. But the characters are real, and names can be attached to all of them. Bonds were made that will last forever and there were some people who could not stand each other. That's the way it was. It's a good book.

The guilt and frustration of the war that Coonts speaks of marked us all. The guilt seemed to come from the fact that even though good people

were lost, for what at the time seemed nothing, the flying was great. The frustration was felt everytime you launched with enough destructive power to cause the adversary to quit, or at least listen to reason, but you knew that you would hang if you dared to use it properly. How many, who kept two bombs "for themselves," will cringe when they read about Jake's maverick run on the party headquarters? It's a good book.

The real value of this book is reliving the flying. The realism is extraordinary. Coonts' recollection of detail after years away from the cockpit is uncanny. Either he took notes at the time or he spent a lot of nights in bed, awake, recalling what it was like. His description of the mechanics of combat flying should be read and reread by the next generation of carrier aviators. Our sister services will understand that even though the flying over the beach was about the same, we always had to find and land on that deck—not runway—deck. Coonts covered all the missions worth mentioning in 300-plus pages. Single plane night raids, Alpha Strikes, Iron Hand, working with an FAC, tanker missions, they're all there. A combat tour consisting of two cruises, totaling over a year at sea and hundreds of flying hours, would give you just about enough stories to fill a 300-page book. But there were long periods of routine combat missions flown by the rest of the air wing that Jake does not seem to have been aware of. The chapter on Grafton and Cole's ejection and rescue in

Indian country gives the Air Force rescue crews the credit they richly deserve, but after spending an evening engrossed in the flying, it seemed a bit contrived. But, the book claims to be a novel. Whatever, it's a good book.

The scenes of liberty will bring back memories, some never to be relived. For God's sake, they've paved the streets of Olongapo. Somehow the smell could not be captured in print, nor the gastric distress that lingered when you dined in town. I hope the gut-wrenching emotion of this book is not lost on the casual reader, or overplayed in the inevitable movie. My thanks to Stephen Coonts for giving us *Flight of the Intruder*. It's a damn good book.

DON A. GERRISH, JR.
Captain, U.S. Navy

Ferrell, Henry C. *Claude A. Swanson of Virginia: A Political Biography*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985. 294pp. \$28

This is a detailed, thoroughly researched, and quite unexciting study of the long political career of Franklin Roosevelt's first Secretary of the Navy. Appointed Navy Secretary in 1933 at the age of 71, Swanson served until his death in July 1939. Ferrell properly emphasizes Swanson's career before his appointment when the Virginian was, successively, Congressman (1893-1905), Governor (1906-1910) and then four-term Senator. In the Senate, Swanson built a reputation as an

astute politician and as an expert in the field of naval affairs. As Navy Secretary, Swanson concentrated on building political support in Congress for Navy expansion. Ferrell disputes the claims of Swanson's critics that, as Senator, the Virginian was a spokesman for a party "machine" which catered to corporate interests and that, as Navy Secretary, Swanson was too feeble to have a major impact on Navy affairs. Characteristic of Swanson's approach to politics was his observation that "No sane man would slap a tiger in the face when his other hand is in the tiger's mouth." This pragmatism was the hallmark of all of Swanson's public life.

THOMAS HONE
Arlington, Virginia

Muirhead, John. *Those Who Fall*. New York: Random House, 1986. 285pp. \$18.95

John Muirhead's memoir of piloting B-17s out of Italy in 1944 ranks with and adds a new dimension to Murray Peden's *A Thousand Shall Fall* and Beirne Lay's *Twelve O'Clock High*. Flying and eventually leading missions into Germany, Italy and Romania, Muirhead evokes an extraordinarily vivid sense of the exhilaration and fear of tight formation flying and combat with rapacious Me-109s. The reader is struck by the courage of these very young men as they fought weather, equipment malfunction, flak, and fighters on the way to such infamous targets as