

Feature

"Pacific Fighters" Library Companion

by Chunx



Over the years I have found that one of the really intriguing aspects of high-quality flight simulations is their ability to add another dimension to my understanding of aviation history. Back in early 2000, when I loaded Empire's MiG Alley onto my PC, I discovered that games with the right mix of good physics/flight models, sensible AI and captivating campaigns could actually enhance my understanding of history and help to better "put me in the picture," allowing me in some respects to see the nature of the conflict in the same way those who actually fought it did, years before my birth.

As a naval flight officer, I have always been fascinated with the history of military aviation, but naval aviation's role in the Pacific Theater of World War II has always held special interest with me. As a result, over the years I have amassed a considerable library of naval aviation books, including a goodly amount of titles focusing on the Second World War. Like many of you, I am eagerly awaiting the release of Ubisoft's *Pacific Fighters* title, the first flight simulation focusing on my favorite theater of WW II air combat since Microsoft's pretty yet disappointing *Combat Flight Simulator 2* hit the shelves several years ago. With *Pacific Fighters* basis in the *IL-2 FB/AEP* engine, I think we can all expect to experience a more capable and enjoyable reproduction of WW II air combat in the Pacific with this title.

Now armed with the knowledge that history books and high quality flight simulations can have a synergistic effect on an aviation enthusiast's understanding of aviation history, I've taken the opportunity to gather together some brief descriptions of some of my favorite books from this exciting theater of operations. If you're as big a fan of aviation history as I am, I think you'll find the following titles will enhance your enjoyment of *Pacific Fighters* — And vice-versa.



Part I: The Battles

Carrier Warfare in the Pacific: An Oral History Collection

By E.T. Wooldridge
Smithsonian Institution Press

A series of vignettes by prominent figures in world of carrier warfare in the Pacific. Some great pieces by luminaries like Jimmy Thatch, who was Butch O' Hare's CO in VF-3 and who, using matchsticks on his kitchen table, invented the famous "Thatch Weave" two-plane tactic that helped level the very tilted playing field for the tubby F4F-3 Wildcat when fighting the A6M2 Zero. The majority of the tales contained here are told from the strategic level, but the information about carrier combat is excellent.



At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor and Miracle At Midway

By Gordon W. Prange
Penguin Books

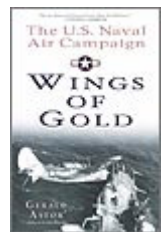
Gordon Prange was the penultimate naval historian of WW II. These are two of his books. There is so much detailed info available in these books, taken from both sides of the war (luckily the Japanese Admirals kept meticulous journals), that you almost feel as though you have gained a total understanding of the true nature of this conflict by reading these two outstanding books. Keep in mind that these are not easy reads, but the journey is more than worth the effort. These books are outstanding, and key to a deeper understanding of naval warfare.



Wings Of Gold: The U.S. Naval Air Campaign in World War II

By Gerald Astor
Ballantine Books (Presidio Press)

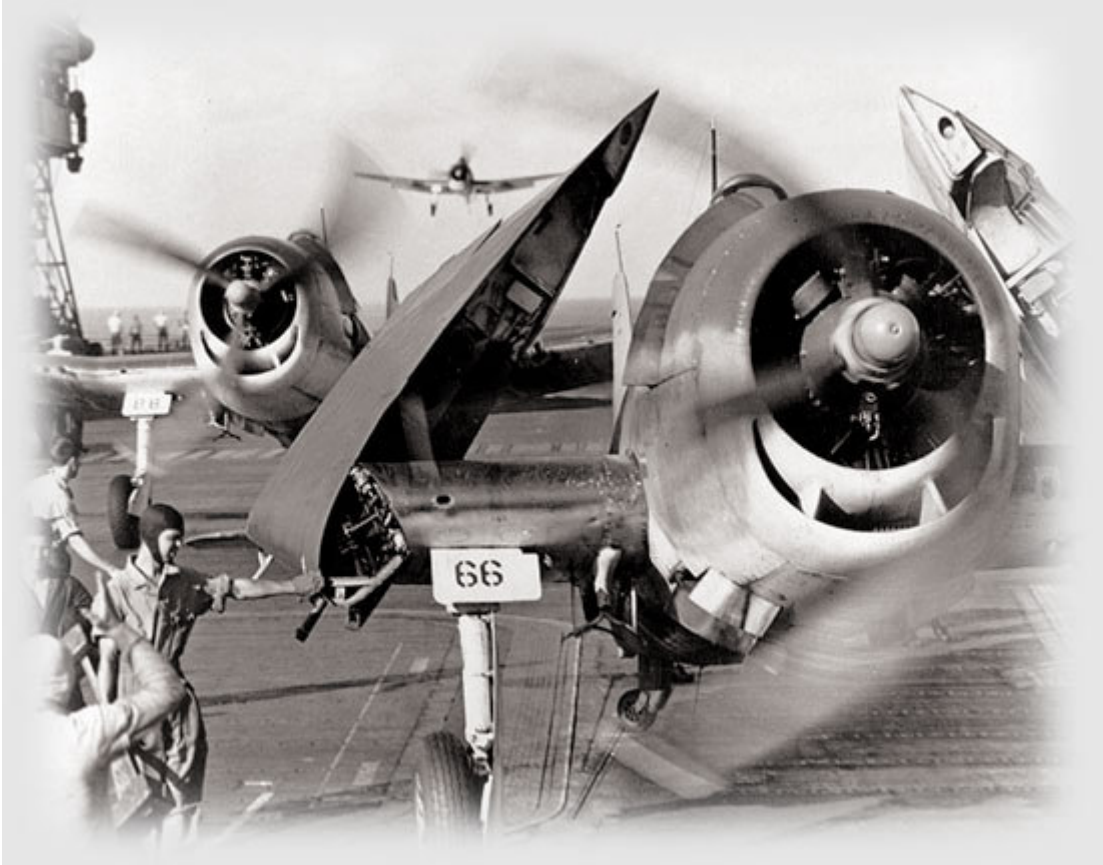
As the title suggests, Wings of Gold primarily focuses on the Pacific Theater of WW II, but it is so much more than a mere chronological trace of that war. The book starts with a brief review of the development of naval aviation from its humble origins, through lean years of the depression era and its ultimate rise to ascendancy as the primary striking arm of the Navy throughout World War II. While most books that attempt to tackle the entire chronology of WW II naval air combat in one volume have failed to capture the key details, drama and human aspects of the individual battles, Gerald Astor succeeds in this well paced, concise and exciting text. Although there are some typos and mis-identifications in the book that the editors should be rightly ashamed of (eg, referring repeatedly to the SBD Dauntless as the "SPD" or transposing the designations and names of aircraft types such as the F4F Wildcat/F6F Hellcat), Wings Of Gold still shines as a magnificent work.



What makes Astor's book so good are his extensive interviews, quotes and journal entries from naval aviators who lived and fought their way through the skies of the South Pacific and Philippine Sea. The author effectively weaves the big-picture tale of each battle with the comments of naval aviators like Jimmy Thatch, Jim Flatley, Tom Blackburn, David McCampbell, Noel Gaylor, Jim Ramage and Alex Viraciu, along with a host of lesser-known heroes. In effect, Astor uses his historical research to set the stage for each battle, then takes you along for the individual missions in the cockpits of these aviators' planes as they fly their Wildcats, Hellcats, Dauntlesses and Avengers against the best the Imperial Japanese Navy had to offer. If that weren't enough, there are also chapters dealing with Operation Torch, the U.S. invasion of North Africa, and carrier aviation's contribution to the war in the Atlantic.

If you only have time to read one book about naval aviation in World War II, this is the book I'd recommend. It's a concise, informative and exciting book, warts and all. I think it will greatly enhance your enjoyment of Pacific Fighters, and might also give the mission-builder folks some great ideas for

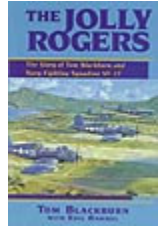
some historically accurate mini-campaigns or single missions.



Part II: The People

The Jolly Rogers: The Story of Tom Blackburn and Navy Fighting Squadron VF-17

By Tom Blackburn
Orion Books



The autobiography of Tom Blackburn, who commanded one of the Navy's only land-based fighter squadrons of WW II, VF-17 "Jolly Rogers." Pulled from carrier duty due to initial problems with the F4U-1 / -1A in the carrier landing environment (they had a tendency to bounce and flip over) Tom found a home for his squadron in the Solomon Islands in the summer of '43. During the next half year, the Jolly Rogers out shot all other units in the theater, racking up nearly 200 kills and making many aces within the squadron's ranks (they handily out-shot Boyington's Black Sheep, who were in theater at the same time). Tom's book is a study in leadership principles, wherein he emphasized teamwork in the air over individual performance. He also kept his squadron "bounced up" (practice carrier approaches and landings while ashore) so as to be ready to use a carrier if the opportunity arose. It did and the squadron was able to make a huge contribution to a particular set of strikes by flying a mission, landing on a nearby carrier to refuel and rearm, then flying another mission. A great read.

Fateful Rendezvous: The Life of Butch O'Hare

By Steve Ewing and John B. Lundstrom
Naval Institute Press
Telephone: 800.233.8674
<http://www.nip.org>



This biography traces the life and death of Edward "Butch" O'Hare, the Navy's first WW II ace-in-a-day and the namesake for O'Hare International Airport in Chicago. Butch was a dynamic character and is well portrayed in the book. Flying Wildcats in early '42, Butch shot down four attacking Betty bombers and damaged a fifth (he was given credit for five kills at the time) on one sortie in the South Pacific. Since the US was still clearly on the losing end of this new war, Butch became an instant hero and was whisked out of theater to sell war bonds in the states. With meritorious promotion in hand and given command of a Hellcat squadron, Butch eventually made it back to combat in '44, this time pioneering innovative new night fighter tactics for carrier defense. It was the implementation of these tactics that cost Butch his life in a mysterious accident. The book is a little ponderously written in parts, and is composed in a syntax that feels reminiscent of the period in question. But the story is fascinating and a definitely worth the time.

The Black Sheep: The Definitive Account of Marine Fighting Squadron 214 in WW II

By Bruce Gamble
Presidio Press (available at Barnes & Noble, Borders and Amazon)



No, this is not "Baa Baa Black Sheep" by Greg Boyington. Bruce Gamble is an ex-Naval Flight Officer (NFO) who has painstakingly researched all available wartime documentation and after-action reports from VFMF-214 and interviews with surviving pilots, flight surgeons and intel officers. Originally named the "Swashbucklers," VMF-214 was a modestly successful F4U-1 unit until a shameless Greg "Gramps" Boyington (Pappy is a "media-ism") virtually stole the squadron while the Swashbucklers were on leave in Sydney. For those familiar with the TV series (who isn't), most of the premise of that show is false and so noted by Gamble in the book. What emerges is a story of a man (Boyington) who is truly a "break glass in case of war" kind of guy — superb wartime leader, but borderline criminal by any peacetime definition. This book is absolutely spellbinding, and the combat descriptions are very detailed from the resources available to the author. All of the myths about Boyington (mostly spread by himself) are debunked in this superb book. A must read for Corsair fans (like me).

The Black Sheep One: The Life Of Gregory “Pappy” Boyington

By Bruce Gamble
Presidio

If you've ever read Greg Boyington's autobiography "Baa Baa Black Sheep" or watched the TV series "Black Sheep Squadron" and thought you knew who Boyington was and what his life was really like — forget it. You don't know anything — yet.



Leveraging his research of VMF-214 in WW II, author Bruce Gamble expanded his search for information specifically on the life and times of Greg Boyington the man. What emerges in this book is a utterly fascinating human interest story of a true "Break Glass In Case Of War" individual, a wild character who in peacetime was a borderline criminal and outright liar but under the pressures of world war became an inspired leader and deadly warrior in the skies over the South Pacific. Gamble starts the tale with the stories of Boyington's grandparents and parents. Boyington's life is then covered in delightful detail, including his childhood, his pre-war military service and family life, his actions in WW II both as an aviator and POW, as well as his post-war years and his time as technical advisor to the TV series. The book concludes with his death and the tale with Boyington's children. Gamble's extensive research and exciting text paint a more robust picture of Greg Boyington than we've ever seen before, and in the process we find that most of what we thought we knew about this WW II hero was incorrect. What emerges is a story in contrasts about a larger-than-life character whose strengths and weaknesses were as over-the-top and divergent as any fictional movie character. This is one fascinating book about a truly human war hero, and I highly recommend it.

Jungle Ace: Col. Gerald R. Johnson, the USAAF's Top Fighter Leader of the Pacific War

By John R. Bruning
Brassey's Inc.

John Bruning's "Jungle Ace," ranks without a doubt as one of the best biographies that I have ever read. The author spent several years painstakingly researching this book, and it shows in the incredible level of detail contained in these pages. Reading more like a fiction piece than a biography, the book highlights John's ability to tell a story with just the right word selection to paint a vivid, movie-like picture in the reader's mind. "Jungle Ace" follows the life of P-38 fighter ace Jerry Johnson from schoolboy to aviation candidate to grisly combat conditions, all in amazing clarity that will immerse you into the story, as if you were standing side by side with Johnson himself. As tense and taughtly written as a best-selling fiction novel, author Bruning has created a story that even non-aviation history buffs will enjoy thoroughly...

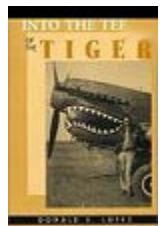


For those readers looking to see just how demanding, unforgiving and gruesome air combat in the steaming jungles of the South Pacific islands could be, this is the book for you. "Jungle Ace" is a rich, vivid and thoroughly honest chronicle of a young Oregon man who helped save the world. A rewarding read that goes beyond the military history genre.

Into The Teeth of The Tiger

By Donald Lopez
Smithsonian Institution Press

Now the deputy director of aeronautics at the Air and Space Museum, Don Lopez was once a fighter pilot in the CBI (China/Burma/India) theater during WW II. Flying by-then outdated P-40 fighters in 1943/44, the author takes us through his flight training and eventual combat experiences in the skies of China. An interesting read.



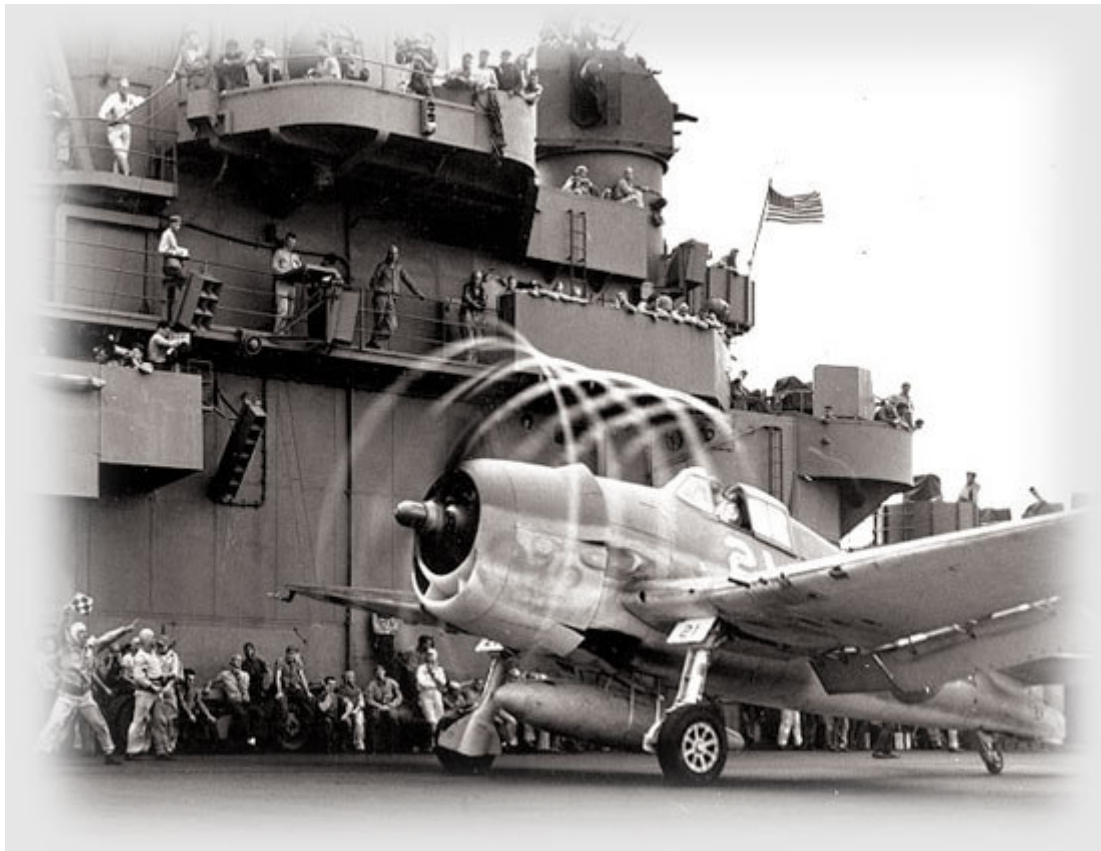
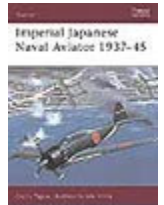
US Naval Aviator, 1941-45

By Robert Hargis
Osprey Warrior #52

Imperial Japanese Naval Aviator, 1937-45

By Osamu Tagaya
Osprey Warrior #55

The Osprey Warrior series' focus is to tell you what it was like to train to become, and operate as, naval aviators for the US and Japanese Navies, respectively, during WW II. The focus is on entrance requirements, training regimens, living accommodations and aircraft capabilities during the conflict. These are also fascinating reads, and can help you to better understand what it was like to be in these two warfighting organizations during combat.



Part III: The Planes

Hellcat: The F6F in WW II and Corsair: The F4U in WW II and Korea

By Barrett Tillam
Naval Institute Press
(800) 233-8674
<http://www.nip.org>

Barrett is a noted naval aviation historian (and a good friend of mine). Barrett has researched and written books on a variety of naval aircraft from the Wildcat to the Crusader, and all of them offer the



reader a good deal of insight into the driving forces behind the design and development of the aircraft in question. His combat chapters focus mainly on the big-picture, although the occasional detailed combat encounter is presented. Both of these are good books to familiarize one with the history of a particular aircraft type.

Osprey Aerospace

(available at Amazon and Barnes & Noble)

Corsair Aces of WW II

By Mark Styling
Osprey Aircraft of the Aces #8



Hellcat Aces of WW II

By Barrett Tillman
Osprey Aircraft of the Aces #10

Imperial Japanese Navy Aces of WW II

By Henry Sakaida
Osprey Aircraft of the Aces #22



Japanese Army Air Force Aces of WW II

By Henry Sakaida
Osprey Aircraft of the Aces #13

Brief stories on each of the aces who flew their respective aircraft type. Lots of B&W photos and pages of color plates depicting the markings of the aces' aircraft, uniforms, etc. These are but a few of the great titles in this Osprey series (there are also books on the Wildcat, Dauntless, Avenger, Warhawk, Lightning, etc). Each book will be a great reference for skimmers.

Fork-Tailed Devil: The P-38 Lightning

By Martin Caidin
Balantine Books

Martin Caidin does a superb job of chronicling the history of the P-38, and his combat descriptions are very well done. Several chapters are devoted to epic battles fought by Lightning pilots that never received their due since many unit's combat records were lost or destroyed in combat. Included is Tommy McGuire's rules for combat survival (McGuire was our 2nd highest scoring ace of all time with 38 kills). The main focus of the book is on the Mediterranean and Pacific theaters of operations, and two great stories come to mind. One is a chapter on an Italian air force pilot who was able to obtain a Lightning after it crash-landed and was repaired by the Axis. He was able to use this plane to shoot down unsuspecting bombers straggling home with damage until Army intelligence devised a plan to shoot him down. The other is of a P-38 that returned late to its field, long after the tanks should have run dry. After making a respectable landing, ground crews discovered that the pilot had been dead for hours. No one could explain how the plane got home or how it had landed so cleanly. This is a great book whether you like P-38s or not.





Part IV: Coffee Table Books

The Skull & Cross Bones Squadron: VF-17 in WW II

By Lee Cook
Schiffer Military History

If you love the Corsair and/or VF-17, this book is a "must have" for your library. Filled with detailed



narrative and TONS of personal photos, this book is a great companion to any treatment of the Solomons Islands campaign. The majority of the photos are never-before-published shots from the pilots' own personal cameras, and graphically depict the life of land-based fighter pilots in the Solomons. This is a great book.

Photo Legend

Historic images used in the "Pacific Fighters" Library Companion are a courtesy of **The Naval Historical Center**. The Center's purpose is to provide information and news about the Naval Historical Center and naval history to the general public.



F6F-3 "Hellcat" takes off from USS Lexington, during Gilberts operation, 1943.



A SBD Dauntless gunner, 1943.



SB2C-3 aircraft over USS Hornet, January 1945.



F6F-3 fighters landing on USS Enterprise after strikes on Truk, February 1944.



LCdr. Paul Buie briefs pilots of VF-16 aboard USS Lexington, November-December 1943.



F6F-3 ready to take off from the USS Yorktown, November 1943.

TBM "Avenger" is catapulted from USS Makin Island.



FM-2 fighters from USS White Plains during Marianas operation, 1944.