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"Crossing the Line: A Bluejacket's World War II Odyssey" and "Goodnight Officially: The Pacific War Letters of a Destroyer Sailor"

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compilation of interviews and written histories, and it includes many photographs provided by the air group photographer. This approach is both the strength and weakness of the book. On one hand, it is a very personal recollection of the triumphs, tragedies, and moments of humor and sheer terror shared by the men of CAG 12. On the other, portions of the narrative are disjointed, particularly in the early chapters, where the authors switch back and forth between air group training, stage-setting events in the Pacific theater, and historical background material. There is also a minor problem with technical errors, such as repeated references to the "Army Air Corps"—the Army's air arm was formally renamed the Army Air Forces on 20 June 1941.

Minor confusion and technical glitches aside, *Thunderbirds* is an excellent work. This is the carrier war in the Pacific as fought by the men at the tip of the spear. The sources of its personal material range from the leaders to the air crews and from support personnel to the flight deck crews, both officer and enlisted. The authors cover adequately all aspects of air group operations in the offense and defense, including fighter, fighter-bomber, torpedo, and scout bomber activities. They have also included excellent coverage of the ship's company of the *Randolph* and its role in the carrier war.

Bruce and Leonard describe the melding of individuals, aircraft, and warship into a cohesive fighting unit. A recurring theme is the importance of leadership, commitment, teamwork, training, and, above all else, communication up and down the chain of

command. From their initial workups, the CAG 12 and CV 15 team moved across the Pacific in support of theater operations in the fight against a determined enemy who had resorted to kamikaze attacks. The group's last operations were over Japan. CAG 12 returned to the United States and was dissolved in July 1945—one month short of final victory.

Bruce and Leonard have succeeded in their effort to preserve the memory of air wing crews. *Thunderbirds* is good reading and a good source on the personnel who carried out national security policy in 1945.

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Kernan, Alvin. *Crossing the Line: A Bluejacket's World War II Odyssey*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994. 192pp. \$21.95

McBride, William M., ed. *Goodnight Officially: The Pacific War Letters of a Destroyer Sailor*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994. 307pp. \$24.95

It is striking how different apparently similar books can be. The two under review are both accounts not of the Second World War itself but of the experience of that war by an enlisted—but essentially civilian—narrator. Both authors served at sea in the Pacific theater and are remarkably articulate. The differences, however, become immediately apparent: Alvin Kernan was an "airedale," an ordnanceman turned torpedo-bomber aircrewman, while Orville Raines, whose letters are reproduced in *Goodnight Officially*, was

a destroyer sailor, Yeoman Second Class. A deeper difference can be found in their styles; Kernan became an academic in his postwar career, while Raines, a prewar newspaperman, brought his writing ability to sea with him, where he died.

Alvin (now Dr.) Kernan, formerly of Yale and Princeton and now of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, set down his reminiscences fifty years after the fact, originally for his children. He joined the Navy not at Pearl Harbor but the year before, and not to fight the Japanese but to escape Wyoming. He served the entire war, through major battles, frequent air combat, and the sinking of the USS *Hornet* (CV 8), all without a scratch. He witnessed events of military note: early underway replenishments; pioneering nighttime radar-controlled fighter interceptions (the first?) and carrier landings; the death of the famous Edward H. ("Butch") O'Hare; the failures of American torpedoes; and the Doolittle Raid (an enthusiastic gambler, Kernan had money down that less than half the B-25s would get safely off the deck.) He recalls some intriguing oddities, among them that the "old Navy" paid its men in \$2 bills; that all the interior paint of his ships was removed (Seaman Kernan had to chip paint off two successive fleet aircraft carriers); and that the cryptanalytic breakthrough prior to Midway was widely known in the fleet's messdecks. Kernan heard "Bull" Halsey's voice "thundering away" in the flag spaces of the *Enterprise* and befriended Petty Officer "Dick" Boone, later of television's "Have Gun, Will Travel." Rather surprising at first

is the amount of time Kernan found himself at organizational loose ends: at one point, training in the Chicago area, he took factory jobs to earn extra money.

The fundamental theme of *Crossing the Line*, evoked either directly or through narration, is emotion (to which critic and wartime Royal Navy air controller Lawrence Stone probably refers in the foreword: "Yes, this is *exactly* how it was.") Kernan's feelings were mixed—largely positive about the Navy as a whole, wry concerning its weaponry, affectionate toward fleet carriers; negative about officers, respectful toward the enemy, and contemptuous of the small escort carriers.

Two affective aspects of wartime life arise especially: constant fear born of the unceasing, almost banal, presence of death; and the sense that in combat every man on board is *fighting*, even those only standing and waiting (in Kernan's first battle, with a runaway bomb on a dolly)—but determinedly not running.

These concerns are direct echoes of *Goodnight Officially*, the second book under review. Its editor, William McBride, a professor of history at James Madison University, was for three years a U.S. naval officer on board a ship which, it turned out, was named for the gunnery officer of Orville Raines's USS *Howorth* (DD 592). Research into the career of that officer (who died in the same kamikaze attack off Okinawa that killed Raines) led McBride to Raines's many and lengthy letters, all 1944–1945. He found these letters to be (perhaps owing to their writer's journalism background, access to a typewriter, and

general quarters station on the bridge) lively and clear, informed and informative, unselfconscious, and revealing in many ways.

Through them and McBride's commentary we follow *Howorth* through workups, convoy duty, the Leyte campaign, Lingayen Gulf, Iwo Jima, and finally to Okinawa. More precisely, as with Kernan, we trace Raines's state of mind, his attitudes towards his ship, his shipmates, his officers, the Navy (all rather bleaker than Kernan's), the Marines ashore, the Japanese, combat and fear, the war, and—most especially—his wife in Texas (whom he wished good night "officially" every evening, Dallas time). The editor has excised the "most personal" material (much that stands is personal enough), but he has not tidied up what remains: "I only wish I were in close enough to see their bodies and parts of bodies go sky high when our shells hit."

Though both books are made accessible to general readers, they are best approached with prior familiarity with the events; Kernan, as he emphasizes, was not writing history, and certainly Raines was not. *Crossing the Line*, to be sure, could have used one more copyediting "pass." (Did *Nassau* have a ship's store or not? How could Kernan

have heard his squadron-mate shouting from "high above" through a port-hole—which had all been welded shut—to him in the water as the carrier "went tearing by"?). Perhaps the author, who emerges as quite a willful man, would not have it. Editor McBride, on the other hand, is over-prominent in *Goodnight Officially*, rather at the expense of Raines; he is quick to make elaborate social-scientific generalizations, offer magisterial (mostly dismissive) assessments of strategy, and indulge an acknowledged peevishness about Navy life. He even (as we learn obliquely) acted as an advocate at the Navy Department for *Howorth* survivors. Both books, however, are attractively produced, having in Kernan's case remarkable photographs and in McBride's helpful maps; both are engaging and enjoyable; and they are useful, certainly for readers grounded in the history. Such books cannot of themselves give a complete grasp of the events, but they do contribute uniquely to a fuller, even empathetic, understanding of them.

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