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PBY/The Catalina Flying Boat

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Boyington, and the TV program of the mid-70s—which depicted all the Black-Sheep as drunken, brawling, fugitives from courts-martial.

What slander.

For Boyington, F. Scott Fitzgerald may have said it best: “Show me a hero and I’ll write you a tragedy.” But a hero Boyington was. Boyington combined his great physical, intellectual—and yes, you have to say it—moral strengths and abilities to provide that single most valuable commodity in wartime: combat leadership. He molded the finest of America’s young men into the most lethal and successful fighter squadron. And did it in record time.

Forty years after the fact, Colonel Walton, the former squadron intelligence-officer-mission-briefer-note-taker-letter-writer-then-police-officer-and-now-retired-State-Department-diplomat, looked up and interviewed the thirty-four survivors of the original VMF-214 Black Sheep. Lawyers. Fishermen. Executives. Doctors. Tycoons. Golfers. Airline pilots. Engineers. Citrus growers. And Pappy.

How odd to read their reminiscences of those twelve weeks, for many the greatest experiences of their lives: the camaraderie, the feeling of family, the intense excitement, the unspeakable high of going in against odds and winning, the singing, and the intense care and leadership of Pappy. Pappy always seemed to know the Japanese mind, always set his pilots up in the best tactical position to handle the tremendous odds, aggressive and opti-

mistic, the first to take off and the last to land. He led from the front.

What a great book, Frank!

Except for one thing. The title. I guess I’d call it, “Once an Eagle Always an Eagle.”

M. ALLINDER

Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps

Creed, Roscoe. *PBY/The Catalina Flying Boat*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1985. 352pp. \$21.95

Messimer, Dwight R. *In the Hands of Fate: The Story of Patrol Wing Ten, 8 December 1941—11 May 1941*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1985. 352pp. \$19.95

Judging from these two offerings, the Naval Institute Press was determined to make 1985 a banner year for PBY buffs. If so, they succeeded—in spades. Both represent prodigious research by their authors, and when you add in the twin gold mines of the bibliographies they included, there’s no reason left for a serious Catalina researcher even to bother thumbing through the library card index for more.

For those who flew the venerable bird, or simply want to recall her worldwide exploits, there’ll be fascination, action and satisfaction aplenty. Yet, as my eyeballs bored through these twin kaleidoscopes of Catalina operations, they tended to glaze over from dervishes of excruciating detail; particularly from Messimer’s narrative of Patrol Wing Ten. One was left with the feeling

that the official Wing history and duty logs, the squadrons' duty logs and the aircrews' mission debriefs had been laid out on a large table and snipped with scissors; then, pastepot in hand, blended back together in chronological order. For a serious researcher or history buff of Wing Ten's early World War II dogged retreat from the Philippines down to western Australia, then battling leap-frog fashion back up the South Pacific island chain, full comprehension would require a large chart on the bulkhead with an inexhaustible supply of multicolored pins and string. With a color for each PBY, each aircrew, each seaplane tender, each U.S. Navy and Japanese surface battle group, each Wing Ten staff splinter group, each obscure island harbor and base—that's the level of detail Messimer provides to sort out here. Otherwise, taken cold turkey from the pages alone, the reader's circuits (anyway this reader's) go into overload.

Yet Wing Ten's incredible story comes through: The shock and mass confusion following the Japanese December 1941 attack—the outrageous pitting of precious few obsolescent-from-day-one seaplanes against swarms of deadly fighters—of pleas back to CONUS for parts and replacements met by dead silence—of desperate mechanics performing miracles with bailing wire and glue, rebuilding bombed-out hulks—of patching leaking hulls with mattresses, rivet holes with navigators' pencils—of 14-hour patrol crew turnarounds, time and

again launching for 14 more with no rest—of spectacular rescue and evacuation flights—all against overwhelming odds; of valor, endurance and sheer guts unparalleled. It is, in microcosm, the archetypical story of how the U.S. Navy wrenched victory from the jaws of defeat in the Southwest Pacific in World War II.

Befitting his broader objective, Creed's history of the aircraft brackets more time and global geography to record the deeds (and some misdeeds) of the venerable old girl. Similar to, but predating Ed Heine-mann's Douglas hatchery of Navy birds, Mac Short's Lockheed Neptune, etc., the PBY was hatched in the early thirties as the latest of a distinguished seaplane lineage from the inspired drawing board of Consolidated Aircraft's Mac Laddon. Then, on fleet patrol from 1935 until World War II, the Catalina wrote what would become *The Book* for U.S. Navy patrol aviation. For the first time, squadrons capable of overseeing vast and distant reaches of the world's oceans could be launched on short notice. Indeed they routinely were, setting new aeronautical records for distance, endurance and massed flight with nearly every deployment.

For this reader, Creed's exposition of PBY worldwide World War II operations is well-documented, professionally organized and makes for a tad easier slogging than Messimer's Patrol Wing Ten history. Of particular interest are his World War II descriptions of the bare-bones beginnings of airborne ASW capability

beyond simple visual or radar search and holddown: localization techniques using sonobuoys, searchlights, and even a successful MAD barrier across the Gibraltar Strait.

With equally thorough documentation, Creed wraps up other navies' PBY operations, and concludes with stories of her postwar exploits as explorer, firefighter, air/sea rescuer and even luxury air yacht.

This reviewer wants to commend Messimer and Creed for the monumental tasks both have accomplished so well with these fine histories. After three years' immersion in the similar task of writing a history of the P2(V) Neptune (and nothing yet in print), I have more than a passing sympathy for the size of the job. Doing the research is fun, but later when you dig out from under the huge pile of miscellany, what now do you include in the book? What do you leave out? Or for that matter, for whom are you writing? Hoary bearded naval historians? World War II buffs? Airplane nuts? The chaps who flew her? Lollipops for recruiters' bait? Nobody said it would be easy—and it isn't.

STEPHEN P. REINERTSEN
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Ziegler, Philip. *Mountbatten*. New York: Knopf, 1985. 784pp. \$24.95

Philip Ziegler's official and authorized study of Mountbatten is a brilliant biography. Beautifully written, Ziegler quickly engrosses the reader with a fascinating life. It is a mar-

velous portrait which demonstrates all the strengths and attractions of biography as an art form. "Most people," Ziegler believes, "will feel this biography provides a generally favourable portrait of its subject, but it is far from hagiography."

There can be no doubt of that. On Mountbatten's command of H.M.S. *Kelly*, Ziegler comments, "if a destroyer could leave skid-marks, *Kelly* would have disfigured every sea in which she sailed. Mountbatten was impetuous. He pushed his ship fast for little reason except his love of speed . . . Above all, he lacked that mysterious quality of 'sea sense,' the ability to ensure that one's ship is in the right place at the right time. Mountbatten was as good a captain as most and better than many of his contemporaries, but among all his peers who have expressed an opinion the unanimous feeling is that, by the highest standard, he was no better than second rate."

No great captain, yet he was a legendary leader! He became one of the three Supreme Allied Commanders in World War II, and a quarter of a million Americans served under him. He was the last Viceroy of British India, and the first Governor-General of an independent India. First Sea Lord at the time of the Suez crisis, he went on to lead the battle for a massive reorganization of Britain's defense bureaucracy as Chief of the Defence Staff. Finally, he was advisor, matchmaker and honored guest among the royal families of Britain, Sweden, Greece and Spain. Mountbatten's family tree,