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**In Hostile Skies: An American B-24 Pilot in World War II** by James M. Davis. Edited by David L. Snead. University of North Texas Press (<http://www.unt.edu/untpress>), P.O. Box 311336, Denton, Texas 76203-1336, 2006, 256 pages, \$27.95 (hardcover), ISBN 1574412094; 2007, 256 pages, \$14.95 (softcover), ISBN 1574412396.

Day after day, "ordinary" men performed extraordinarily heroic deeds and faced certain death as members of Eighth Air Force's bomber crews over Nazi-occupied Europe. One of these men, James "Jim" Davis, from Texas, recounts his experiences in the book *In Hostile Skies: An American B-24 Pilot in World War II*, edited by David Snead.

Lieutenant Davis recounts his wartime experiences, from his early years on a ranch in central Texas during the Depression, including his first exposure to airplanes; through his training and quest to become a pilot; to his combat experiences. Ultimately, he would fly 24 combat sorties before his unit, the 489th Bomb Group, returned to the United States for conversion to the B-29.

Financially unable to go to college and pursue his dream of becoming an Army Air Forces (AAF) pilot, Davis had to pass an aviation-cadet training exam to begin his flying career. Doing so on his second attempt, he was accepted into a program that condensed the first two years of college into roughly two months. After initial pilot training, Davis took a series of advanced courses, culminating in deployment to the European theater and combat operations.

The book includes several themes, the first of which addresses the great risks faced by Eighth Air Force aircrews, not only in combat but also in training. Repeatedly, Lieutenant Davis tells stories of how aircrew members met violent deaths as a result of training accidents or action in combat, the latter often the result of a direct hit that

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left only an orange burst of flame and a cloud of debris where a bomber once flew. A second theme covers the physically demanding nature of flying a bomber in combat day after day and the toll it takes on the aircrew. The mystery of war, which makes us ponder why some men live and some die, comprises the third and final theme.

Among the library and bookstore shelves filled with autobiographies of World War II aircrew members, *In Hostile Skies* stands out as a true gem. Davis's writing style brings readers into the cockpit of his B-24 and holds them there until it safely lands back in England after another harrowing mission. More than just an "I was there" story, the book provides a clear understanding of the day-to-day stresses, hopes, and lives of B-24 pilots. Moreover, its detailed description of bomber-pilot training offers a valuable look into an area of AAF history often glossed over. Even in training, the risks were real, and Airmen lost their lives.

Intent on preserving Lieutenant Davis's original text, David Snead provides subtle editing support throughout in the form of documentation and minor clarifications that facilitate the reader's understanding. He thus increases the value of the text by verifying its accuracy while maintaining the original flow of this engaging, easy-to-read book.

Humble in its approach, *In Hostile Skies* is a superb selection for anyone who wants an in-depth look at experiences of the pilots and aircrew members aboard Eighth Air Force's B-24 bombers during World War II.

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**Risk and Exploration: Earth, Sea, and the Stars**, NASA SP-2005-4701, edited by Steven J. Dick and Keith L. Cowing. National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Office of External Relations, NASA History Division (<http://www.nasa.gov>), Washington, DC, 2004, 304 pages, \$44.00 (hardcover). Available free from <http://history.nasa.gov/SP-4701/riskandexploration.pdf>.

After the loss of the shuttle *Columbia*, NASA found itself on the defensive as critics began to claim that the potential benefits of space exploration did not justify the danger involved. As part of NASA's response, in September 2004 during the NASA Administrator's Symposium at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, it brought together some of the most famous ocean explorers, mountaineers, cavers, astronauts, and scientists to

talk about the risks and rewards of exploring frontiers. Among the speakers were *Apollo 13* commander James Lovell, ocean researcher Sylvia Earle, movie director James Cameron, and many other astronauts and scientists. This book records the transcribed proceedings of that conference.

Readers may select from over 25 speeches, along with transcripts of question-and-answer sessions. Throughout the book, one finds very interesting anecdotes and some compelling insights into risk during exploration activities that are instructive to today's air and space professional. James Lovell explains the danger of "risk [as] overkill" (p. 12) regarding his experiences on the lesser-known *Gemini 7* mission. Polar exploration expert Jack Stuster describes the difficulty of scheduling everything (allowing no flexibility) on exploration missions: it's impossible to meet all of the objectives, and attempting to do so will only irritate the crew. Other useful tidbits include an overview of the three phases of exploration operations, the supremacy of logistics to any endeavor, and a rationale for choosing mission members. Scattered among the pages are many such nuggets of wisdom from today's foremost explorers.

Less interesting are the myriad explanations for why the taxpayer should fund the government's exploration efforts. Platitudes such as a need to "look over the next hill" (p. 233) or "over the next horizon" (p. 102) abound. They also ring hollow after the first few readings, as people blessed to experience some of the most incredible adventures of all time (on the back of the taxpayer) lament that average folks will not fork over more money so that an astronaut who has flown in space can also fly to Mars, or an aquanaut can go another 1,000 feet deeper.

This is a fundamental flaw of both the symposium and the book. Often, risk is not the reason that exploration missions never get out of the planning stage: it is money. Exploration is expensive, and the exploration of the earth, sea, and stars conducted by most of the speakers in this book has no underlying relevance to the economic or material well-being of society. Mostly, they cite "science" as the reason for their actions, which to a lay reader seems a thin cover to ask for a blank check to have fun doing something a regular person has no chance of experiencing. With the notable exception of Dr. Harrison Schmitt, who lauds private exploration and the use of space resources; James Cameron, who funds his own endeavors; and some others, the contributors to this tome tend to suggest that society at large (through government) has a duty

to support a few self-chosen explorers' exploits—and is stupid if it doesn't. It's much easier to have this opinion if the person happens to be someone waiting for a spot on the next shuttle launch rather than a worker worrying about covering his or her mortgage after paying taxes.

That this collection is a transcript of a symposium offers both advantages and disadvantages to the reader. Selections are often only a few pages in length and can be read easily and quickly. Also, the speakers cover a great many different subjects that offer something worthwhile to almost any reader. Unfortunately, even though the book spans a wide breadth, the individual speeches do not contain significant depth. The 10- or 20-minute speeches, which comprise the bulk of the book, are necessarily limited in the detail that readers may desire.

Overall, *Risk and Exploration* is an appealing selection to anyone interested in exploration as well as the politics and risk involved—or, indeed, anyone who likes to read about the exploits of mountaineers, astronauts, and deep-sea explorers. However, the book is short on depth, and some of the speakers have a tendency to preach. The prospective reader must determine if it merits an expedition.

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**The War Managers**, 30th anniversary edition, by Douglas Kinnard. Naval Institute Press (<http://www.usni.org/naivalinstitute/press/index.asp>), 291 Wood Road, Annapolis, Maryland 21402-5034, 2007, 228 pages, \$19.95 (soft-cover), ISBN 9781591144373.

Even in the short time between the US withdrawal from Vietnam and the fall of the South to Northern forces, attempts to understand what went wrong had already begun. Among the more notable examinations of the way the war unfolded was Brig Gen Douglas Kinnard's 1974 survey of US general officers who served in Vietnam, the findings of which are the basis for *The War Managers*. Now reissued in paperback by the Naval Institute Press, the work deserves examination by all who would lead forces into war.

The author retired in 1970 as a brigadier general after a final tour as chief of staff to a major command in Vietnam. The work rests on a questionnaire he sent to all 173 generals active in the US effort there, 70 percent of whom responded. Not surprising in hindsight, the results are remarkably on target, given the nearness to the event. Most dismaying is the finding that the generals overwhelm-

ingly agree that they had little grasp of their purpose and that their troops had even less. The war was not so much mishandled—most of the questions about military aspects elicited reasonably favorable responses—as it was micromanaged and directionless. Even the caliber of the forces went unchallenged, an assessment that soon gave way to the hollow force and a long, expensive effort to rebuild a military capable of avoiding the catastrophic collapse that the late-war Army suffered.

Chapters deal with war aims, conduct of the war, advisory and pacification efforts, composition of the American force, ending of the war, and the survey. Within these headings lie sections on strategy and tactics, rules of engagement, command and control, mobilization of the reserves, relations with the media, the Vietnamese military, and more. The work also contains a short section on the implications of this narrow study for a broader world. Appendices include the questionnaire, along with a breakout of results; a statistical analysis designed to determine whether the author confirmed his hypotheses; and a listing of all commanding generals between 1965 and 1972. The short preface to the new edition contains a sampling of reactions that the original volume generated.

Kinnard does not merely reproduce the survey findings although the work contains the complete questionnaire and tabulated results for each answer. He also provides a good political and military narrative of the war itself—an overview that holds up reasonably well in competition with works generated by the subsequent 30 years of additional research and analysis on the topic. Moreover, for a study of the failure in Vietnam, it has the virtue of being relatively short. Kinnard places the questionnaire answers squarely into context, fleshing out the percentages with pertinent remarks from the generals who chose to go beyond the simple multiple-choice answer.

As an interesting sidelight, Kinnard's profile of the generals is quite revealing. All of them belonged to the same generation, born between 1910 and 1926. Most, but not all, graduated from college—about half from the US Military Academy at West Point. Almost all were married, averaging 25 years in the service. And, naturally, they were all white, male, and predominantly Protestant. About half had qualified for airborne duty, 60 percent having infantry backgrounds. Service in Vietnam earned a promotion for each of them. Given the marked similarity of backgrounds, their divergences on the nature of the war are remarkable. More remarkable is how the homogeneity of the

1970s, nonreflective of the military of the era, has given way to diversity in the current officer corps, including the generals—diversity that matches that of the enlisted men and women.

Readers will find *The War Managers* accessible and easy to navigate—almost hard to put down. Granted, it is a snapshot of another time, but insofar as it dispels the myth that leaders are of one mind and voice, it is both timeless and timely. The 30th anniversary edition adds little to the original, but the new preface does offer a nice touch to an interesting book.

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**The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything but Learn from It** by David M. Toczek. Naval Institute Press (<http://www.usni.org/naulinstitutepress/index.asp>), 291 Wood Road, Annapolis, Maryland 21402-5034, 2007, 224 pages, \$19.95 (softcover), ISBN 1591148537.

Situated southwest of Saigon, the hamlet of Ap Bac in Tien Giang province is the site of a single-day encounter between a regiment of the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) (North Vietnam) and a division of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) (South Vietnam) and its American advisors on 2 January 1963. The battle ended in an allied defeat because of the PLAF's ability to counter the firepower of armored personnel carriers and helicopters fielded in the operation. The fact that political factors constrained the ARVN's leadership also contributed to the outcome.

First published in 2001, 38 years after the operation, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam* is surely the definitive account of the fight. US Army major David Toczek, a professor of history at the US Military Academy (West Point), provides the reader an operational, historical narrative and tactical analysis of the battle. Divided into five chapters, arranged chronologically, the book includes a foreword by Gen William B. Rosson, former deputy commander of US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. The first two chapters are notable, the author providing historical background of the US Military Assistance Advisory Group, Indochina; the Vietnamese National Army; and the PLAF. Here, Toczek describes both the organizational and historical development, as well as political factors influencing the two opposing forces, and details the operational aspects (air mobility) in the ARVN and the role of the advisory system. Moreover,

he thoroughly discusses the strategic and political framework from which the PLAF waged war.

Focusing on the battle itself, the third chapter addresses the preparations, strategic planning, cooperation, frustrations, shortcomings, and decision making under fire on both sides, followed in chapter four by an account of reactions to the battle's aftermath by the senior officers and advisory group involved. The penultimate chapter also considers the PLAF's notion of the battle as its victory as well as media articles and releases that followed.

Rather than treating the battle as a small-scale encounter, the fifth chapter offers the author's conclusion about the defeat at Ap Bac, placing it in the larger context of the Vietnam conflict. He notes that the battle provided a window that could have changed America's policy or plan for the war.

This paperback edition from Naval Institute Press coincides with the 45th anniversary of the battle. Major Toczek highlights not only its outcome and effect on the conflict in general, but also the essence of the lessons learned that have relevance to contemporary issues concerning national-security decision making and counterinsurgency—factors of interest to currently serving officers and personnel, especially those deployed in counterinsurgency operations and advisory roles. Extraordinarily researched and well written, the book includes an extensive pictorial account of key persons during the period, notes for each chapter, appendices, a substantial bibliography, and an index.

*The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam* will make a valuable addition to the libraries of all officers; senior noncommissioned officers; ambassadors; diplomats; historians; professors; defense, air, and naval attachés; and enthusiasts of leadership and counterinsurgency warfare. It is a commendable contribution and significant addition to the literature of the Vietnam War.

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**Aircraft Carriers: A History of Carrier Aviation and Its Influence on World Events**, Vol. 2, 1946–2006, rev. ed., by Norman Polmar in collaboration with Minoru Genda et al. Potomac Books (<http://www.potomacbooksinc.com>), 22841 Quicksilver Drive, Dulles, Virginia 20166, 2008, 560 pages, \$39.96 (hardcover), ISBN 1574886657.

Few ships are as awe inspiring as the aircraft carrier. To say "it's big" does not do the carrier jus-

tice. The vast amount of military might contained in this one ship, let alone its size, is simply staggering. It is only appropriate that an author with a reputation as impressive as that of the aircraft carrier take on the task of revising and updating the previous edition of this book. After reading *Aircraft Carriers*, I can say that Norman Polmar was the right man for the job. An internationally known specialist in naval, aviation, and technical intelligence issues, with over 40 books to his credit and service as a consultant or adviser to three secretaries of the Navy and two chiefs of naval operations, Polmar comes well prepared for the task.

I found this book a very interesting coffee-table-sized historical reference with insightful analysis woven into the text. Like the ship, this soup-to-nuts compilation of aircraft carrier information is beyond "big." Polmar has clearly done his research and performs yeoman's work, bringing relevance to each phase of carrier operations he discusses. He ends most of the chapters with a summary that captures the major points in a few concise paragraphs.

The author's narrative begins just after World War II ends, when US leadership begins to debate the future of the aircraft carrier in light of atomic (and, later, nuclear) weapons, the jet age, and, eventually, space technology. Polmar describes this ongoing debate over relevancy through Korea and Vietnam, well into the Reagan presidency. Not surprisingly, each time a crisis flares up, the American leadership first asks, "Where are the carriers?"

Especially interesting are the chapters on foreign navies' carrier investments and ventures, including an entire section on the Falklands War, which summarizes very well the British experience with expeditionary war in the late twentieth century. Also insightful was the extended chapter on the Soviet Navy during the tenure of the Soviet Union.

The second volume of *Aircraft Carriers* is a magnificent piece of research. The chapters guide readers through naval history by putting the aircraft carrier into context with the crises of the times. As a historical text, this is a good read, with the tables and pictures providing color commentary that accompanies the text. The summaries offer a concise wrap-up of the chapters, leading the reader smoothly into the following chapter. In all, I highly recommend this book to Airmen—if for no other reason than to gain a professional awareness of our flying brethren in the Navy.

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**Astronautics: A Historical Perspective of Mankind's Efforts to Conquer the Cosmos**, Book 1, **Dawn of the Space Age**; Book 2, **To the Moon and Towards the Future** by Ted Spitzmiller. Apogee Books / Collectors Guide Publishing (<http://www.apogeebooks.com>), 1440 Graham's Lane, Unit no. 2, Burlington, Ontario L7S 1W3, Canada, 2006, 232 pages, \$24.95 (softcover), ISBN 9781-894959-63-6; 2007, 336 pages, \$25.95 (softcover), ISBN 978-1-894959-66-7.

The tally for publications in Apogee Books' Space Series now amounts to several dozen, including Ted Spitzmiller's two-volume set titled *Astronautics*. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite, Spitzmiller has attempted to synthesize a concise, encyclopedic history of rocketry and spaceflight. In 39 chapters, each one designed to give readers "a relatively complete understanding of a special interest area without the need to ferret information from multiple chapters" (p. 9), he chronicles humankind's exploration of space from Copernicus in the early sixteenth century to exotic new forms of spacecraft propulsion for interplanetary voyages in the twenty-first century. The chapters in book 1 cover individual pioneers, early rocket societies, Peenemünde and the V-2, rocket planes, planning for an Earth satellite, military spy satellites, harnessing liquid hydrogen, piloted spaceflight, planetary exploration, and more. Chapters in book 2 include the race to the moon, the space shuttle, space stations, expendable booster development, the search for extraterrestrial life, deep-space missions, and competitive partnering in space.

Spitzmiller eschews primary documentation, except for a few memoirs, and relies almost exclusively on biographies, histories, and Web sites as source material. He characterizes his sources as typically sacrificing scope and presenting an overwhelming level of technical detail. Consequently, he seeks in *Astronautics* "to simplify and clarify technology, politics, and events to make them easier to comprehend" (p. 9). His goal is commendable and, grammatically and stylistically, he achieves it. The word picture he paints of Russia's Sputnik launch will grip most readers, and his telling of the *Apollo 13* saga will captivate them.

Unfortunately, in an attempt to significantly broaden the scope of his narrative, Spitzmiller too often sacrifices scientific, technical, and historical accuracy or completeness. The most surprising example of scientific inaccuracy in *Astronautics* is

his apparent misunderstanding of Newton's third law of motion: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. He explains that "the action-reaction of the exhaust gases was pushing against the inside of the rocket motor to provide the propulsive force" (p. 19). Toward the end of book 2, Spitzmiller perpetuates this inaccuracy when he says that "expanding combustion" in a ramjet engine "'pushes' (Newton's third law) against the 'wall' of incoming air to provide thrust" (p. 472) and, again, that a spacecraft powered by a mass driver would have "to have a significant quantity of some material to react against" (p. 473).

Historical accuracy also suffers in these volumes. Spitzmiller describes the Guggenheim Aeronautical Laboratory's successful solid-propellant jet-assisted takeoff (JATO) experimentation under Air Corps contract in 1941, explaining that "it would be two more years before a liquid-propellant rocket engine, constructed by the Aerojet General Corporation, was tested in a Consolidated Aircraft Co. flying boat on San Diego Bay" (p. 33). He never mentions that the liquid-propellant JATO units resulted from US Navy experimentation led by Robert C. Truax and Robert H. Goddard. Similarly, he acknowledges the contribution of the Army Air Forces and Project RAND in early 1946, which studied the feasibility of an Earth-circling spaceship, without once mentioning the manned spacecraft proposal by US Navy lieutenant Robert Haviland and Cdr Harvey Hall in August 1945 or the Navy's subsequent establishment in October 1945 of a Committee for Evaluating the Feasibility of Space Rocketry. As for the history of military communication satellites, Spitzmiller credits the US Army Signal Corps, explaining that "*Courier* was a prototype for a more advanced military satellite communications project known as *Advent* which placed much larger satellites in geosynchronous orbits several years later" (p. 155). Apparently, he does not understand that the Army's *Advent* program failed and, consequently, that the Air Force launched the world's first dedicated military communication satellite—operationally known as the Initial Defense Satellite Communications System—in 1968. Other misstatements, incomplete explanations, or oversights occur throughout *Astronautics*.

These volumes might disappoint readers, even those with only a basic knowledge of space history, because blatant errors in spelling mar the narrative from beginning to end. From "mils" instead of "miles" (p. 37) to "essentailly" instead of "essentially" (p. 408), the errors detract from the quality of Spitz-

Miller's presentation. Furthermore, seeing "Maxime Faggot" instead of "Maxime Faget" (p. 335), "Neal Armstrong" instead of "Neil Armstrong" (p. 348), "Robinson Caruso" instead of "Robinson Crusoe" (p. 476), and "Caiden, Martin" instead of "Caidin, Martin" (p. 481, bibliography) might prompt readers to question how much attention the author, or his copy editor, paid to factual details.

As much as one might try to focus on positive attributes and overlook shortfalls in *Astronautics*, obstacles ranging from typographical errors to substantive inaccuracies tend to obscure the brilliance of Spitzmiller's narrative style. Perhaps a reprinted version—with errors corrected, inaccuracies clarified, and oversights covered—might render these volumes worthy of consideration for classroom use or a prominent place on collectors' bookshelves.

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**Stabilization and Reconstruction Staffing: Developing U.S. Civilian Personnel Capabilities** by Terrence K. Kelly, Ellen E. Tunstall, Thomas S. Szayna, and Deanna Weber Prine. RAND Corporation (<http://www.rand.org/publications/index.html>), 1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, California 90407-2138, 2008, 130 pages, \$29.00 (softcover), ISBN 0833041371. Available free from [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG580.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG580.pdf).

How should the US government handle civilian staffing for reconstruction operations? The authors seek to answer this question in light of US involvement in contingency operations in the recent past, utilizing the example of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq. Two of the book's authors, who served as members of the CPA, draw on personal experience in their assessments and recommendations. In light of their experience and research, the authors do not believe that the US government's current human-resources infrastructure enables effective civilian staffing.

Composing this work as part of a RAND Corporation research project, the authors seek to analyze how civilian staffing has occurred in the past as well as develop a road map for more effective staffing in future stability, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) operations. They contend that the methods used for civilian staffing proved less than effective and did not

create a so-called A-Team in Iraq, a team comprised of first-rate talent and experience.

The authors see a variety of problems at the root of the failure to field such a team. One fundamental issue lies in the stereotypically slow speed of the federal government to hire civilian employees, both from within its ranks (internal applicants) and from outside the federal pool (external applicants). However, institutional inertia vis-à-vis civilian hiring does not act as the sole villain. They cite a number of other interrelated problems, including differences in compensation from agency to agency, home agencies blocking deployments of their employees to support their own operations, unwillingness or reluctance (on the part of both the employee and the home agency) to have employees deploy for extended periods of time, and the difficulty of finding employees to fill particular niche positions demanding expertise as well as a suitable background in language and culture.

There lies a way ahead. The authors see several possibilities for better results in future operations, while acknowledging the frustration of trying to slice through the proverbial red tape. One suggestion with possible merit concerns creation of a by-name civilian reserve—a pool of employees sortable by skills and expertise. Administered within the US State Department, since it would likely serve as the lead agency for SSTR operations, the list would stand as a ready supply of willing participants to fill needed vacancies. The authors also surmise that centralizing the administration of deployed civilians within one agency could generate more enthusiasm for deployment insofar as it could possibly create equities in compensation and reduce cross-agency idiosyncrasies. Finally, promoting deployment as a positive career step could likely attract more and better talent. Although the authors don't see any one step as a magic bullet, they predict that institutional change could foster improvement.

Overall, *Stabilization and Reconstruction Staffing* has fairly narrow utility. It serves neither as a primer on civilian staffing in any sense of the word nor as any kind of assessment of operations in the global war on terror, from either a military or civil standpoint. Readers will find this work useful if they are interested in research within the civil service. Though readable, it is brief and written from a fairly technical human-resources perspective.

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