



ARMCHAIR AVIATION

We take a look at what's available for the aviation history enthusiast in the world of books and other literature, from hot-off-the-press publications to reissued classics

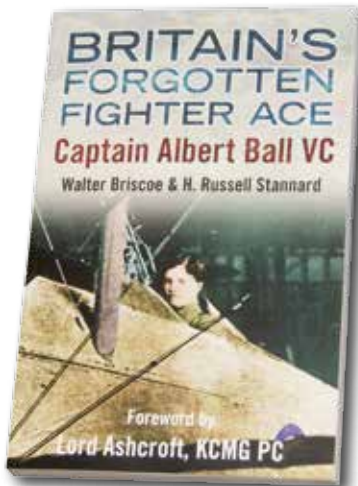
Britain's Forgotten Fighter Ace: Captain Albert Ball VC

By Walter Briscoe and H. Russell Stannard; Amberley Publishing, The Hill, Stroud, Glos GL5 4EP; 6in x 9in (155mm x 230mm); softback; 224 pages, illustrated; £14.99. ISBN 978-1-44562-236-1

THIS BOOK WAS first published in 1918 under the title *Captain Ball VC of the Royal Flying Corps* and has now been republished to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of World War One.

Albert Ball was born into a life of privilege, his father being the Lord Mayor of the City of Nottingham, and he enjoyed many of the advantages of his status, including attending public school. By the time he was 15 years of age, he was an excellent shot with the revolver, and had developed a keen interest in mechanics. At the age of 17, he acquired an interest in an engineering factory in Nottingham. His passion for mechanics was to stand him in good stead when he learned to fly, and later when he was engaged in aerial combat over France in the somewhat unreliable machines of the time. His marksmanship proved very useful when he flew fighter aircraft, and on one occasion he brought down an enemy machine by using his Service revolver to shoot an enemy pilot through the head in order to bring the combat to an end.

Led by a strong sense of duty, Ball signed on as an ordinary soldier as soon as war was declared in 1914, and was almost immediately promoted Sergeant. He also applied for a commission, and showed a further ability in turning round the canteen finances so that for the first time in many years a profit was made. In June 1915, he began to learn to fly in his own time, having to rise very early in the morning to fit in the lessons before his normal duties.



Once he had passed, he became ever more eager to put his new-found knowledge to use in France. His first posting was in flying observation missions, and he records in one letter that he found them "grand sport". This was a comment he made on many occasions, even when describing conflict with the enemy, who took war much more seriously, and were extremely puzzled by the apparently carefree attitude of their British opponents, including Ball, of whom it was said that in everything he did, he was "half schoolboy and half

soldier, but wholly loveable". His colleagues testified that he never grew up, and in a letter to his mother, he stated that "I went as a boy and I shall return as a boy".

Ball's letters to his family are full of his joy of flying, which was clearly lacking in any lust to kill. At no time did he glory in the death of an opponent. On one occasion, he pointedly wrote "I do get tired of always living to kill". He was a modest person, who did not seek publicity, and when the French started publicising his exploits after he had scored a number of kills when flying single-seaters, he found the attention difficult to cope with. When the English press took notice of his victories, his fame increased, culminating in his being granted the Freedom of the City of Nottingham. At the ceremony he was only able to speak two modest sentences about his experiences. When met by two young admirers who told him they were quite willing to die for their country, he showed his true feelings by responding wisely "You're no use! We want fellows who are anxious to live for their country, not to die..."

Those same letters give a revealing insight into the life of a fighter squadron on the Western Front, especially the camaraderie between the

pilots. Frequently Ball thanks his mother or sister for the gift of a cake, or similar delicacy, which had been shared out among and enjoyed by the members of the squadron. He was not someone to remain idle at any time, particularly hating periods of bad weather, which prevented flying. During such times, in addition to using his mechanical knowledge to improve his aircraft, he grew vegetables in a small garden. That produce was also shared with his fellow pilots. Ball was a very popular member of the squadron because of his care for his comrades, and when he was killed his loss was keenly felt by them all.

In correspondence with his family, Ball was quite open about his flying and combat experience, but took care to avoid alarming them by mentioning the possibility of death. As a flyer, he was fearless but not reckless, and tried to protect his family from the harsh realities of a pilot's life. Only once did he mention the possibility of death, and rapidly apologised to his father for any alarm he may have caused.

The letters from Ball to home were, naturally, written in the style and language of the time, being peppered with such words as "spiffing", "ripping" and "beastly". Such quaint language gives a true "period" flavour to the text, and fills out the character of its subject.

When Ball was killed, probably in a dogfight against vastly superior numbers, there was a general air of disbelief and many clung to the hope that he had crash-landed and been taken prisoner; but such hopes were to be dashed. By the time of his death he had registered 42 confirmed victories, and was considered by many to be invincible. By then, he had been awarded no fewer than three Distinguished Service Orders, and various foreign honours. He was awarded the ultimate accolade in the form of a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Upon Ball qualifying as a pilot, his instructor had graded him as "average", but as his score of victories mounted, it was clear that he had grown immensely in experience and stature as a pilot. German airmen would frequently flee from him when they recognised his aircraft, which sported a red spinner over the propeller boss. Even Manfred von Richthofen acknowledged that he was "by far the best English flying man".

At the time of his death, Ball was only 20 years old, having not achieved adulthood, which at that time was at the age of 21. In one sense, he did die as a boy, but he was clearly a brave young man, whose maturity and other attributes are well illustrated by this book, which itself profits by the use of many of his own words in correspondence, and by being a contemporary account of his life and death. This reprint is well timed and most welcome as a valued contribution to the history of air combat in World War One.

FRED CROSSKEY

F9F Panther Units of the Korean War

By Warren Thompson; Osprey Publishing, Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 0PH; 7 1/4in x 9 3/4in (186mm x 248mm); softback; 96 pages, illustrated; £13.99 + p&p. ISBN 978-1-78200-350-2

PERHAPS OVERSHADOWED by its more glamorous USAF compatriot, the North American F-86 Sabre, the Grumman F9F Panther did yeoman work in the three-year Korean War. It actually flew the first American strike missions from the *USS Valley Forge* (CV-45) following North Korea's invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950, and fought throughout the bloody conflict from sea and land bases, delivering considerable amounts of ordnance on target in difficult weather conditions and against heavy Communist defenses.

There was nothing unique in Grumman's design, a businesslike, straight-winged, somewhat underpowered fighter which nevertheless offered Grumman's signature ruggedness, as well as a heavy punch of four nose-mounted 20mm cannon and a variety of underwing ordnance. It also flew hazardous reconnaissance missions, skimming over targets often at the risk of facing flak sites as well as equally dangerous MiG-15s flown by Russian, Chinese and North Korean pilots. Serving with squadrons of both the US Navy and US Marine Corps, the Panther was a true Grumman workhorse.

This book, No 103 in the *Osprey Combat Aircraft* series, features a spread of excellent



colour and monochrome photographs, complemented by the usual folio of colour profiles by artist Jim Laurier.

The text and captions are jammed with accounts and facts of the Panther's three-year war over the Korean peninsula, highlighting pilot experiences and action-packed missions over inhospitable terrain. Even in the supposedly warm summer months, the ocean and the land presented a variety of problems to Panther drivers who had to find their targets or bale out. Many Navy and Marine aviators were lost or captured to face harsh months of severe treatment, a harbinger of what the next generation of American aircrewmembers would face 15 years later and several hundred miles to the south in Vietnam.

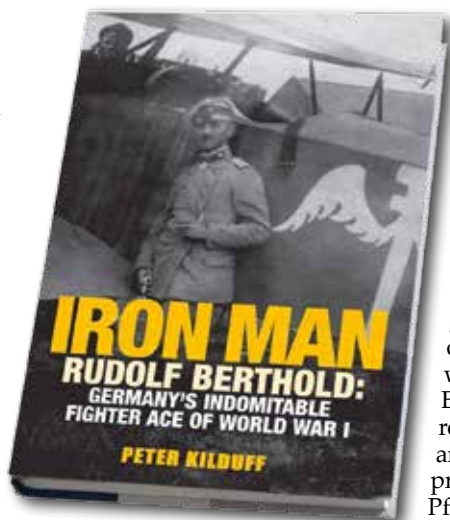
Whether detailing attacking enemy troop or truck convoys, or hassling with MiGs, the story is well told by an author who knows how to do it. Veteran author [and regular TAH contributor — Ed.] Warren Thompson has filled the void of major accounts of the F9F in typically fine style.

PETER B. MERSKY

Iron Man — Rudolf Berthold: Germany's Indomitable Fighter Ace of World War I

By Peter Kilduff; Grub Street, 4 Rainham Close, London SW11 6SS; 7in x 10in (178mm x 254mm); hardback; 192 pages; illustrated; £20. ISBN 978-1-90811-737-3

ALTHOUGH RUDOLF Berthold might be rather less familiar to many than other German First World War aces who persistently steal the limelight, his outstanding record places him in the front rank of combat pilots. Berthold fought throughout the conflict and survived, only to be murdered in a violent political confrontation in Berlin in 1937.



Only six weeks after the outbreak of the First World War Berthold's bravery and tenacity resulted in him becoming the first airman in the 2nd Army area to be awarded an Iron Cross. At the time he was an aircraft observer/commander; he gained his pilot's qualification on January 18, 1915, and was soon flying the Fokker Eindecker. He was the tenth recipient of the *Pour le Mérite*, and by the war's end, having progressed to the Albatros D III, Pfalz D III and then the Fokker D VII, he had 44 aerial combat

been shot down or forced to land on six occasions and surviving the resulting crashes every time. When his right arm was shattered by a bullet he taught himself to fly left-handed and returned to combat.

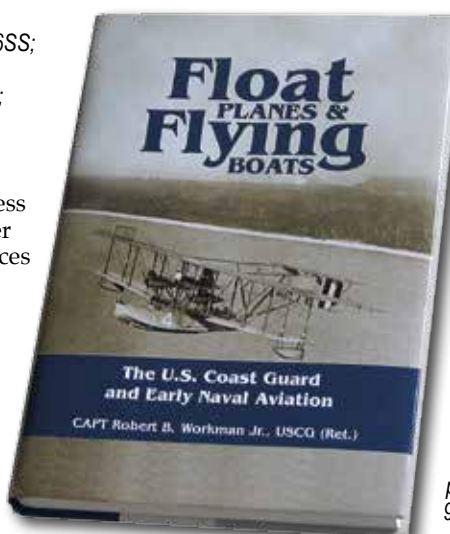
This very complete account of Berthold's life concentrates on his First World War experiences, and the author has gathered a good collection of relevant images that are well reproduced throughout the text. The text itself incorporates quotations from Berthold's personal war diary and from fellow pilots, as well as from source material from numerous archives and accounts, including German records of the period.

Useful appendices comprise a list of Berthold's victories and daily victory and casualty lists of *Jagdgeschwader 2* units. Detailed endnotes, a good bibliography and an index round off the book. As a small bonus, colour side elevations of three of his aircraft, bearing his winged sword emblem, appear on the back of the dust jacket.

PHILIP JARRETT

Float Planes and Flying Boats: The US Coast Guard and Early Naval Aviation

By Capt Robert B. Workman Jr, USCG (Ret); Naval Institute Press, available in the UK via www.amazon.co.uk; 7in x 10in (178mm x 254mm); hardback; 352 pages, illustrated; £29.95. ISBN 978-1-61251-107-8



ALTHOUGH 2015 sees the centenary of the US Coast Guard (USCG) taking its first practical steps into the establishment of an air arm, the stalwart organisation has often appeared to have been somewhat overlooked. There have been very few major books on USCG aviation, with only Arthur Percy's *US Coast Guard Aircraft Since 1916* for Airlife (Naval Institute Press in the USA) in 1991 immediately coming to mind. As I have always noted, a book written by someone who was, himself, deeply involved with the aircraft or mission he writes about is usually — although not always — much better than a book by an outsider or “armchair historian”. This Naval Institute Press tome is a fine illustration of that equation.

Written by a Coast Guard Academy graduate and retired USCG captain aviator who keeps his mind, heart and memories alive by creating highly detailed models for museums, this medium-format book presents more than just the traditional history of a service and the aircraft and people who flew in that service. Rather, he seems to recreate the world in which they all flourished, interacting with the US Navy and Marine Corps, which were also trying to establish their own air arms.

Helped by a fine collection of photographs, illustrations and reproductions of letters and correspondence, Capt Workman tells the story of the USCG and its struggles and triumphs during the seminal years connecting World War One and the beginning of the Second World War. He devotes a lot of space to telling the story of the first transatlantic flight by Navy Curtiss NC flying-boats in May 1919, certainly one of the most important events in early naval aviation.

Coast Guard aviator No 1, Elmer F. Stone, played an important role as pilot and navigator of the NC-4, the first aircraft to fly the Atlantic. Details of Stone's life and career permeate the narrative, including his premature death and the internal fighting within the defence department regarding Coast Guard aviation and its people.

The author notes that while Stone made Commander, his friends and supporters expected him to achieve flag rank. He never did, however, and it took a dedicated

friend's superb efforts to expunge Stone's final record of various false, politically motivated notes and reports that coloured the intrepid pioneer's achievements. The book carries a list of useful appendices, including a detailed chronology of USCG aviation and technology inspired by the NC transatlantic flight.

PETER B. MERSKY

Haute Voltige: Histoire Mondiale de l'Acrobatie Aérienne 1909-1939

By Alain Pelletier; Éditions Techniques pour l'Automobile et l'Industrie, Antony Parc 2, 10 Place du Général-de-Gaulle, 92160 Antony, France; 11¼ x 10in (297 x 250mm); hardback; 192 pages, illustrated; €48. ISBN 978-2-7268-9768-3

THIS FRENCH-LANGUAGE book (the main title means “acrobatics” or “high-wire act”) is a well-illustrated record and celebration of world aerobatics' first three decades which reflects the verve of its subject while providing plenty of solid information.

The first of its eight chapters covers the pre-World War One birth of the discipline, featuring early stars such as Adolphe Pégoud and Lincoln Beachey. Next comes the honing of aerobatics in Great War combat — with the invention of manoeuvres such as the Immelmann turn — followed by the barnstormers of the 1920s and the parallel rise of national and international competitive meetings.

Other chapters cover the emergence of German pilots from the restrictions of Versailles; other prominent pilots; and aerobatics in Russia and the USA respectively. Throughout the book the main narrative is interspersed with biographies and aircraft profiles, the latter accompanied by small but cleanly-executed three-views.

More than 350 photographs (some of them a bit sootily reproduced), plus appendices including data tables and a chronology, complete a very welcome addition to the library.

MICK OAKEY

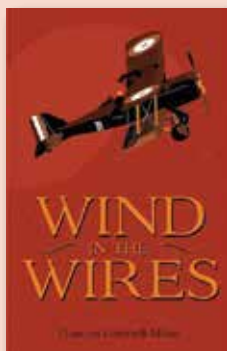


BOOKS IN BRIEF

A quick round-up of what else is currently available for the aviation history enthusiast

WIND IN THE WIRES
Duncan Grinnell-Milne
Grub Street; ISBN 978-1-90980-801-0; RRP £16

AN ATTRACTIVE REISSUE of Capt Duncan Grinnell-Milne's classic memoir of flying training and combat during World War One, first published in 1933. After learning to fly at Shoreham, the author was posted in 1915 to No 16 Sqn in France, where he was shot down and became a prisoner of war. Managing to escape, he returned to Blighty and flew S.E.5as over the front with No 56 Sqn. Along with Cecil Lewis's *Sagittarius Rising* and Arthur Gould Lee's *Open Cockpit* (the latter also available from Grub Street), this is a tome every Great War aviation enthusiast should have on the bookshelf.



FIREBALL: CAROLE LOMBARD AND THE MYSTERY OF FLIGHT 3
Robert Matzen

GoodKnight Books; ISBN 978-0-98850-251-2; RRP £17.22 (via Amazon UK)

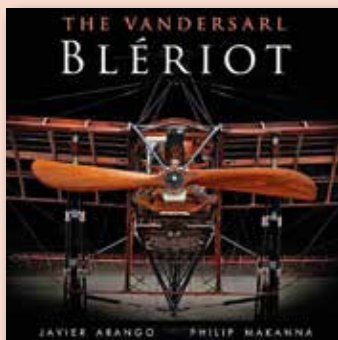
ROBERT MATZEN'S extraordinarily detailed investigation into the TWA DC-3 crash that killed Hollywood film star Carole Lombard in January 1942 — as covered in our inaugural issue — is not strictly a pure aviation book, covering as it does the life of the feisty actress and others aboard, but it is eminently readable and vastly entertaining. The photographs are well-reproduced and the whole package has quality at its heart — the investigation into the crash is forensic in its detail.



THE VANDERSARL BLÉRIOT
Javier Arango and Philip Makanna

www.ghosts.com; ISBN 0-916997-47-2; RRP US\$30 (+ US\$30 postage outside USA)

PHOTOGRAPHIC artist Philip Makanna — aka The Ghost — and WW1 aircraft restoration specialist Javier Arango, of the California-based Aeroplane Collection, join forces to pay tribute to Frank and Jules VanDersarl and the Blériot monoplane they built from scratch during 1909–11, and which, incredibly, Arango and his team have returned to the skies. As usual, this is a high-quality product from The Ghost, jam-packed with stunning photographs, both vintage and new.



ARAB MiGs — Volume 4: Attrition War, 1967–1973
Tom Cooper and David Nicolle

Harpia Publishing; ISBN 978-0-98545-541-5; RRP €35.95 + p&p

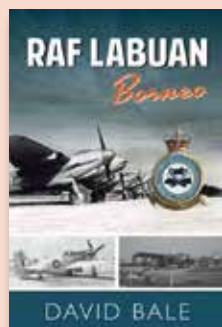
THE FOURTH volume of this invaluable series on the use of air power in the conflict between the Arab nations and Israel during the Cold War covers the period between the Six-Day War of 1967 and 1973's Yom Kippur War. The latter is covered in detail in Volume 5, which is also available, and will be reviewed in depth in a forthcoming *TAH*.



RAF LABUAN: BORNEO
David Bale

Book Guild Publishing; ISBN 978-1-90971-604-9; RRP £8.99

LABUAN ISLAND, off the north-west coast of mainland Borneo, has always played a key strategic role in the area, especially after the invading Japanese built the first airstrip there during World War Two. Liberated by the Australians in June 1945, the airfield at Labuan went on to become an important staging post for civil and military operations. The author, who served at RAF Labuan himself, has done a fine job of creating the definitive history of this little-covered — but historically significant — outpost.



CIVIL AVIATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND
Guy Warner and Ernie Cromie

Ulster Aviation Society; ISBN 978-1-78073-048-6; RRP £10.99 (UK)

ANOTHER well-researched and lovingly-put-together book on Northern Ireland's rich aviation heritage, this time on its civil activities, by the ever dependable Guy Warner and Ernie Cromie.



Lost & Found

PHILIP JARRETT explores lesser-known corners of aviation history, discovering unknown images and rediscovering long-lost details of aircraft, people and events. Here he asks **TAH** readers for help with two intriguing postcards from British aviation's very early days

I RECENTLY ACQUIRED the two postcards seen here in close succession. The earliest was posted from Cosham in Hampshire on November 30, 1906, to one Lance Corporal W. Gallagher of the Royal Engineers in the Stanhope Lines at Aldershot. The naïve sketch depicts an "Aerocar" "Invented by Captain F. Haynes MM", and is clearly based upon a triple Hargrave boxkite-type of structure with a loose sort of parachute device above and a car for the "aeronaut" and engine below. The engine drives a two-bladed pusher propeller, in front of which there is a rudder with a handle to operate it.

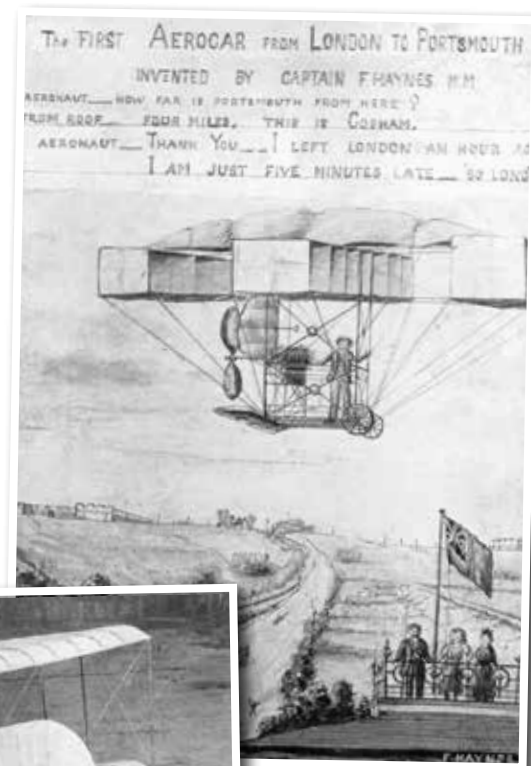
An elevator is attached to the rear of the car floor and twin wheels are affixed at the front. The contraption is said to be "the first Aerocar from London to Portsmouth", and the aeronaut is asking the people on a roof beneath: "How far is it to Portsmouth from here?", to which they reply: "Four miles. This is Cosham". The aeronaut says: "Thank you! I left London an hour ago. I am just five minutes late — so long!"

A search for Captain Haynes has so far yielded nothing, and he does not appear to have patented his flying machine, so I know no more at present. Was it a serious project, or just an amusing subject for a comic postcard?

The second postcard depicts a large model aeroplane that I would date at about 1909–10. The photograph bears the imprint of a professional photographer named Fairbairn, and

the dealer from whom I bought it said the name was common in north-east England.

It seems to show a crude non-flying model of a Cody-type biplane with twin pusher propellers driven by belt drives from a six-cylinder vee engine, horizontal surfaces fore and aft, and a large and distinctive "droplet-shaped" fin. The wings have excessively deeply arched aerofoil sections. Was this a model of a proposed full-size machine, and who built it?



ABOVE Captain Haynes's boxkite Aerocar, as depicted on a recently-acquired 1906 postcard. LEFT The anonymous model aeroplane on another addition to the postcard collection; who was its creator?

