

the hopes that they would compensate for the lack of sufficient aircrew manning effective aircraft.

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From Texas to Tinian and Tokyo Bay: The Memoirs of Captain J.R. Ritter, Seabee Commander during the Pacific War, 1942-1945. By Jonathan Templin Ritter, ed. Denton TX: U of North Texas Press, 1919. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xi, 176. \$24.95 ISBN: 978-1-57441-771-5

This is the story of one man's journey from civilian engineer to commander of a naval construction battalion in World War II. Capt. Rex Ritter, USNR (Ret.), wrote it from memory in the 1970s through 1990s. His grandson, Jonathan, discovered the typed manuscript after his grandfather's death in 1994. He made some stylistic changes and added an introduction, explanatory notes, and appendices; but, other than those, the text is what Ritter wrote of his experiences in the Navy from 1941-1946. An excellent historian and writer, young Ritter is the author of *Stillwell and Mountbatten in Burma*, reviewed in APH in the Summer 2017 issue.

A Texan, Ritter was a civil engineer who had been in the Merchant Marine for a while, worked for the Houston Parks Department and several oil companies, and was a nearly 39-year-old Assistant District Engineer responsible for 1000 miles of Texas highways when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He applied for a commission in the Navy's Civil Engineer Corps and reported to Norfolk VA in April 1942, a month after the Seabees had been created. This group was comprised of experienced construction personnel who were part of the Navy, uniformed, trained, and subject to international military conventions, unlike civilian workers.

Following introductory military training, Ritter was assigned to the 4th Seabees and soon was on his way to the Aleutian Islands. He well chronicles the duties and the harsh conditions encountered throughout his service on a number of "garden spots" in the island chain. By March 1943, he was the executive officer of the 6th Seabee Regiment. Three months later, after the Battle of Attu, he was sent to Camp Peary in Virginia.

Assigned as the skipper of the new 107th Battalion, his job was to get the unit formed, trained, and ready to head overseas. After several stateside moves (and getting married in San Francisco in November 1943), he took his battalion to Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands. After service there, the battalion moved to Tinian Island in the Marianas. There, the 107th joined eleven other Seabee battalions in transforming the relatively small island into the world's largest and busiest airfield complex. When the

war ended, Ritter got to participate in the great flyover of Tokyo Bay after the treaty ceremony aboard the *USS Missouri*.

The 107th was deactivated a month later, and Ritter left for the CONUS. to be separated. He worked for the San Francisco Housing Authority until retiring.

This is a wonderful look into the formation of, and life within, the fabled Seabees. They and the Army Corps of Engineers performed remarkable feats in all theaters of war and were, to a large extent, responsible for U.S. successes during World War II. My only complaint with the book revolves around Ritter's recollections regarding the atomic bomb activity on the island. Much of what he says is wrong. For example, he states that the Seabees opened up a cave on the island where the bombs could be assembled. Actually, the Seabees built three dedicated, air-conditioned buildings on the NW shore of the island to do that job. His battalion was not involved with this aspect of the Tinian work.

Other than that section, the book provides a look, from a man who was there, at an important aspect of the war effort—one that has received far too little coverage. It is well worth reading.

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Chinese Airpower in the 20th Century: Rise of the Red Dragon. By Andreas Rupprecht. -Vienna, Austria: Harpia Publishing, 2019. Maps. Tables. Diagrams. Illustrations. Photographs. Notes. Appendices. Glossary. Index. Pp. 253. \$59.95 paperback. ISBN: 978-1-9503940-0-5

With this latest volume on Chinese military airpower, Andreas Rupprecht has solidified his standing as one of the world's leading experts on the topic. In the past decade, he has written at least seven books that cover all aspects of military aviation in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Rise of the Red Dragon examines the turbulent history of what was to become the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) from the end of the Manchu Dynasty in 1911 through current times (yes, the book does cover a bit more than the title implies). Much of the genesis of the PLAAF took place during the equally turbulent history of the country until China unified in 1949. There were actually a number of air forces in existence under control of the "central" government or some of the more powerful of the various warlords. And establishment of a real aeronautical industry was really out of the question, given the turmoil in the country overall.

Once the mainland was unified under the control of Mao, formation of the PLAAF began in earnest. Rupprecht traces creation of the various military region air forces and air divisions. He does this in four chronologically organized

chapters: founding period, Jan. 1949-Dec. 1953; overall development, Jan. 1954-Apr. 1966; Cultural Revolution, May 1966-Oct. 1976; and modernization, Oct. 1976 to the present. While it would be silly to say that one period was more important than the others, I found the 1949-1953 period fascinating, considering all that was going on. The Chinese had to build a modern air force almost from scratch. They founded an aviation industry where none had existed previously. They conducted their first air campaign in Tibet, created an airborne capability, fought the Korean War, and undertook a massive expansion while working with the USSR. All of this was accomplished in a relative short period of time.

After the chronological chapters, Rupprecht devotes nearly a third of the book to three appendices that cover brief histories of the final seven military region air forces and the many air divisions. The last appendix examines the evolution of the PLAAF serial number system. That may not sound important; but, given the paucity of information that comes out of the PRC government, codes may be the only clues to military structure, numbers of assets available, etc.

I can never say enough good things about the quality of Harpia's products. This book—as with all of their other products—is first-rate. They may be a bit pricey, but the reader gets what he pays for: glossy white paper, hi-res photos (both B&W and color), photo captions well removed from regular text, other-information boxes highlighted in different colors, a pleasing layout, and quality editing. But best of all—given the almost encyclopedic nature of the book—is a well-done and useful index. Aircraft types (and sub-variants) are lumped together, as are people, units, places, and the like. If a reader wants to find information on something specific, he can easily do so.

All of Rupprecht's China books are must-haves for anyone who wants to better understand the evolving military powerhouse of Asia.

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Modern Chinese Warplanes: Chinese Air Force – Aircraft and Units and **Modern Chinese Warplanes: Chinese Naval Aviation – Aircraft and Units** and **Modern Chinese Warplanes: Chinese Army Aviation**. By Andreas Rupprecht. Houston TX: Harpia Publishing, 2018, 2018, 2019 (respectively). Maps. Tables. Diagrams. Glossary. Photographs. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 237, 94, and 93. \$59.95, \$29.95, and \$29.95, paperback. ISBN: 978-09973092-6-3, 978-09973092-5-6, and 978-0-9973092-8-7

Andreas Rupprecht is a German national who says, in his Twitter account, that he is a “China military aviation

researcher, book author and China news reporter.” From all accounts, he has no inside track for classified information on the Chinese but relies on open sources. However, he does acknowledge Chinese sources that remain unnamed who provide him with materials and translations. That being said, these three books show that he is an excellent researcher who gleans as much as possible from whatever sources are available and analyses and arranges the data into meaningful information.

These three books are being reviewed as one; because, in essence, they are merely three separately bound parts of one large book on the state of military aviation in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The three books are encyclopedic in nature; one shouldn't expect to sit down and read them through cover-to-cover. Rather, they are probably the best possible sources for information regarding all facets of the subject matter.

Each begins with a background and history of the subject service. If these do nothing else, they show how far military aviation has moved in the PRC in a relatively short time, particularly in the naval sector. The history is followed with a chapter on aircraft markings and serial number system. The latter is important in that it provides clues to units of assignment and, therefore, organization of the service. The next chapter covers the aircraft, helicopters, and UAVs used by the particular branch. These are done, generally, in narrative form. In other words, the section isn't just a collection of relatively dry tables of data. Further, pretty much all systems—fighters, bombers, transports, trainers, et al.—are covered. In the next chapter Rupprecht discusses the various weapons and stores employed by the service branch. Each volume then covers the aviation training syllabus employed. In the big chapter on the particular service's order of battle (as of the publication date), the reader finds out how the service is organized and, through this, missions and strategies. The final chapter(s) covers other organizations such as the Marine Corps (under the navy), People's Liberation Army Air Force Airborne Corps (under the air force), and paramilitary groups such as the Coast Guard and several law-enforcement-oriented organizations.

All of the text is backed up with hundreds of photos. Because Harpia publications are all printed on glossy paper, these photos are very high-resolution. Also, throughout the books are many excellent maps that show unit locations, ranges of various weapon systems, and the like. Of particular note are inclusion of potential adversaries' bases (U.S., Japanese, etc.); this helps a reader understand why the forces are deployed as they are. Tables of data and organization charts are plentiful and clearly laid out. The bibliography is, of course, relatively short, given the dearth of information provided by the government and the various services. But the index is very detailed, so finding pictures or information on any weapon system or organization is easy.

Given the nature of military equipment and organiza-

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