The Aviation Enthusiast Book Club (a closed Facebook group)
posted by Todd Shugart on 13 January 2021

BOOK REVIEW #2 2021

Title: Modern USMC Air Power (Aircraft and Units of the Flying Leathernecks)

Author: Joe Copalman

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The United States Marine Corps has a long tradition of using airpower to directly support their ground elements in a way that is unique to the Corps. Joe Copalman has compiled the most comprehensive and up to date source on USMC airpower since the 1990s. This book focuses on the first two decades of this century and as Joe puts it, "My goal is to present an authoritative historical, technological, organisational, and personal overview of USMC aviation in the first two decades of the 21st century without being exhaustive." Well it is anything but exhaustive!

After a brief introduction and a useful abbreviation guide, Joe begins with a short history of Marine Corps Aviation to set the scene and bring the reader up to date with the why and how the Marines have utilised aviation from airlift, reconnaissance, strike, air refuelling, infil/exfil, and most importantly to the dogface on the ground, that of close air support. The second chapter sets out to explain the organisation and structure of Marine Aviation. The ORBAT, lists of units, basing locations, fleet responsibilities by geographic location are all listed here and in a very easy to understand format. The next chapter takes you on a tour of the training pipeline for all USMC aviators with each phase explained in detail with accompanying relative photos. The next several chapters cover each type of Marine Aviation unit by their role. Heavy Helicopters, Light Attack, Medium Lift, Marine Attack, Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare, Marine Fighter Attack, Marine Fighter Training, Marine Aerial Refueler Transport, Marine Operational Support Airlift, Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, Marine Helicopter and Marine Operational Test and Evaluation, the Future, and lastly there is a well illustrated appendix entitled Patches of USMC Flying Units. The book finishes with a bibliography and an index.

The level of detail and the easy to read format is phenomenal. Joe combines technical detail with first person accounts that connect the development and employment of Marine aviation assets in a way that not only informs the reader but also makes it quite an enjoyable read. The selection of photos and graphics throughout the book complement the text well and the fact that many of the photos are from Joe himself shows the dedication that the author has to the subject. Some of the standout chapters are the Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare and the Marine Air Refueler Transport sections. The chronicles of the EA-6B Prowler in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya are well written and interspersed with first hand accounts. Joe then tackles the USMC decision to retire the Prowler and the future of Tactical Electronic Warfare with dispersed capabilities across several platforms. As for the KC-130J Hercules air refuelling and transport section, Joe once again describes the last 20 years of constant deployment around the world carrying out a somewhat unglamorous mission of passing fuel not only in the air but on the ground with aviation delivered ground refuelling (ADGR). This is only one of the many missions described here. Airlift missions and airdrop missions are covered in good detail with a special emphasis on the new Joint Precision Air Drop System (JPADS) using GPS guided parachutes. The awesome capability of HARVEST HAWK is also explained where the KC-130J can shoot targets with either a Hellfire missile or a Griffin missile. And lastly he also describes the tragic loss of YANKY 72, a USMC Reserve KC-130T that went down due to faulty propellor maintenance at a USAF depot. These are just two of the many well researched chapters in the book.

Honestly this is the book for anyone with an interest in USMC Aviation. It's well organised, superbly illustrated, and gets the right mixture of technical and personal accounts to provide the reader with the best go to reference for anything related to USMC Air Power employment over the last twenty years along with future programs and improved technology. It's published to the very high Harpia standard and comes in a soft back format with glossy pages and and an easy to read font. I found zero errors in editing or in the information itself. I highly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in USMC Aviation and it should be on the shelves of all professional military education institutions and quite possibly most Western unit intelligence sections.