

Red Star Against the Swastika: The Story of a Soviet Pilot Over the Eastern Front

By Vasily B. Emelianenko. Greenhill Books/
Lionel Leventhal Limited, Park House, 1 Russell
Gardens, London NW11 9NN England;
272 pages; illustrated; \$34.95.

After my Dad was shot down in December 1944, it took six weeks for the Germans to get him to a permanent camp because transportation was so disrupted. One time, the troop truck they were riding in came to a stop at the sound of approaching aircraft. Everyone sprinted for the nearest ditch as a flight of Sturmoviks flew overhead and quickly disappeared over the near row of hills. It left no small impression.

Like any pilot, Dad was curious about the handling qualities of the heavily armored Ilyushin Il-2 Sturmovik. After all, this famous ground-attack aircraft was the most produced aircraft of WW II. Unfortunately, not much has been written about any Soviet wartime experiences, and it is only recently that Vasily B. Emelianenko published his fascinating book.

He writes well, at times showing a wonderful sense of humor. He flew 80 low-level, highly dangerous combat missions in his beloved "Ilyusha" with the 7th Guard Regiment, 230th Kuban Ground-Attack Division. His bravery resulted in some impressive awards, including Hero of the Soviet Union, their highest decoration. His remarkable story offers a brief glimpse into the intense fighting over the Eastern Front against the well-equipped German Luftwaffe. It concludes with a sobering list of 7th Guard Regiment pilot losses, an indication of the high price paid.

The book provides the Soviet perspective during the Great Patriotic War, but without the usual political posturing. Readers will ultimately agree that, "Kniga napisana otlichno (The book is excellent)."

Hangar Flying

By Lt. Col. Alfred J. D'Amario USAF,
(Ret.). AuthorHouse, 1663 Liberty
Drive, Suite 200, Bloomington, IN 47403;
272 pages; illustrated; \$25.99.

When people get together to talk about "committing aviation," as one good friend used to call it, it is usually an entertaining exercise for all involved. Popularly known as "hangar flying," it is a unique occupation that only those who have plied the skies can really appreciate.

Author Alfred D'Amario certainly qualifies, with

more than 5,000 hours in military aircraft during his 20-year career in the U.S. Air Force. The title of his new book says it all. Joe, as he prefers to be called, defines flying as "hours and hours of sheer boredom punctuated by moments of stark panic." There were ample opportunities to experience both. It also becomes readily obvious that he heard the calling—flying is all he ever really wanted to do.

His combat flying in the F-80 during the Korean Conflict is absorbing. Stories about Cold War flying in the sleek B-47 fascinate, while his close association with the B-52 Buff almost makes one jealous. But it is his anecdotes that provide the most interesting reading: How many people can say they shot at their own plane while in flight, or bailed out over Greenland? Do bad things really happen in threes? How about his love affair with the F-80 Triple Nickel? Every pilot has his version of that story, or his steadfast allegiance to one particular commanding officer.

This is a fascinating account of many of the close calls D'Amario had during his military career. Best of all, though, this one is really fun.

Testing Death: Hughes Aircraft Test Pilots and Cold War Weaponry

By George J. Marrett. Praeger Security Intl.,
88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881;
206 pages; illustrated; \$44.95.

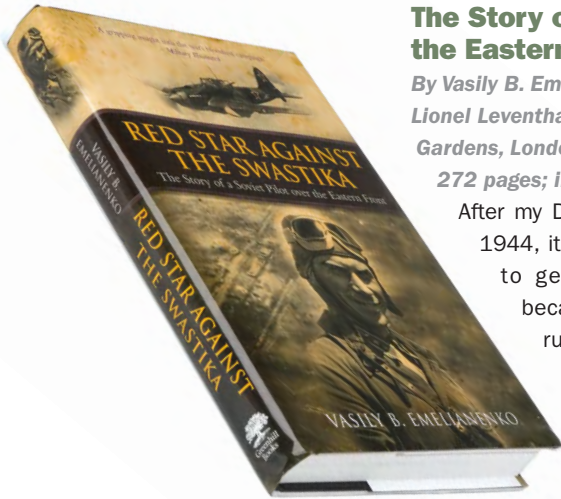
Contrails Over the Mojave: The Golden Age of Jet Flight Testing at Edwards Air Force Base

By George J. Marrett. Naval Institute Press, 291
Wood Road, Annapolis, MD 21402; 234 pages;
illustrated; \$29.95.

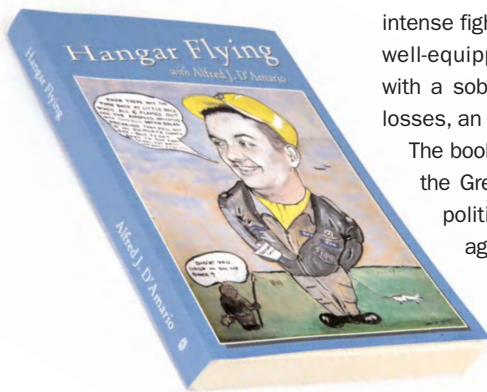
It might be one thing to talk about one's experiences but quite another to write about them well. With his consistently fine efforts, author George Marrett certainly qualifies as one of the best aviation writers today. He can take a highly technical subject and make it easy for the uninformed to understand and enjoy. Consider his latest two books.

Although written out of sequence chronologically, Marrett's "Testing Death" came out first (2006). Having just returned from Vietnam in 1969, he took a civilian test pilot job with the Hughes Aircraft Company. In those days, Hughes-built radar and missiles were an essential feature of nearly every fighter in the U.S. inventory.

His career at Hughes was highlighted by the sheer multitude of varied experiences throughout his 20 years there. It was an exciting time as Marrett was involved in the testing of sophisticated radar and missiles for use with aircraft such as the F-15 Eagle, F-16 Viper, F/A-18 Hornet and even the B-2 Spirit. During that time, he got to fly such great



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fighters as the F-14 Tomcat, which “was by far the best all-around fighter I ever flew.”

In addition to the hardware, Marrett relates stories of company espionage and deadly crashes. The former was surely unfortunate for all involved and perhaps even a surprise to some. Crashes most certainly were not. As those who’ve been around flying know, friends and colleagues will be lost; yet as Marrett reveals, that knowledge does not make the reality any easier.

Though there is great flying here, this book focuses more on those fascinating details about modern weaponry and systems. For test-flying stories regarding dream aircraft themselves, read Marrett’s new “Contrails Over the Mojave” (2008). In this book, you follow Marrett’s completion of test pilot school and entry into that elite group of pilots with the “right stuff.” His exceptional ability as a test pilot and writer make this book essential for anyone interested in flight testing at Edwards AFB during what was referred to as the “Golden Years.”

At Edwards, Marrett got the opportunity to

fly the F-4, F-5, F-104, F-111A, T-33 and T-38, to name just a few. Although he did not fly it, his pointed observations concerning the futuristic (even now), enormous but ultimately trouble-prone XB-70 are most interesting, and all while trying to earn his next “silver whistle.” But the book is also about those people with strong personalities who gravitate toward such a specialized vocation. His colleagues included future astronauts Bill Anders, Fred Haise and Joe Engle. Diversions from such regimented work included the “Sand Sailor” and the humorous eye patch episode. In those days, a “boys will be boys” attitude prevailed.

Here is an insider’s look at the flight testing of America’s greatest fighter planes of the 1960s and a view shared from the top of the pilot’s pyramid. Fans of Marrett’s work will want to read “Contrails, Cheating Death” (about his Skyraider days in Southeast Asia), and then “Testing Death,” in that order, to get an overall view of his fascinating career in aviation. It is a remarkable journey by any standard. ■

