

Book Reviews

Tom Cooper. *In the Claws of the Tomcat: US Navy F-14 Tomcat in Combat, 1987-2000*. Warwick, UK: Helion & Co., www.helion.co.uk, 2021. 80 pp., illustrations, maps, tables, bibliography, index. UK £16.95, US\$29.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-913118-75-4.

The role of naval aviation is to protect a nation's fleet. Whether by attacking enemy ships or in air-to-air combat against enemy aircraft, naval aircraft are a critical item in a nation's military inventory. In the late 1960s, Grumman Aircraft, the US Navy's (USN) premier supplier of naval aircraft since the 1930s, designed and built the F-14 Tomcat – a fighter aircraft that could fire the Phoenix missile at targets at ranges of up to 100 miles. In this book, Helion's *Middle East@War* No. 29, author Tom Cooper relates the combat career of this remarkable aircraft.

The F-14 was the largest and most well-armed fighter of its day. It was the leading edge of the USN from the 1970s to the end of its service in 2006. It was fast and maneuverable. Equipped with advanced avionics, it was the star of the movie, *Top Gun*, and had seen some aerial combat in 1981 and 1989

against Libyan Air Force fighters in the Mediterranean.

The area of the Tomcat's greatest combat use, however, was in the Persian Gulf in the period 1987-1991. Overshadowed by the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War, the "Tanker War" of 1987-88 saw extensive use of USN assets – protecting tanker ships from attacks by Iranian ships and aircraft. The Tomcat participated in one aerial combat during this time – the F-14 fired at Iranian aircraft but no victories were confirmed.

Two years later came the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which resulted in an international response to Iraqi aggression. At first called Operation Desert Shield, then Operation Desert Storm in the USA, a US-led military coalition of many nations formed in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf to oust Iraq from Kuwait. Inevitably, the USN and its carrier fleet took part, and with it, the F-14 Tomcat.

The F-14 saw substantial combat air patrol duty in 1990-91 but it has been thought that the F-14 saw little actual combat. As Cooper's book makes clear, this was not the case. USN Tomcats engaged opponents at often long ranges, participated in many aerial combats,

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and succeeded in shooting down at least one and perhaps more Iraqi fighters. Only one Tomcat was lost to enemy action.

Cooper's book is a valuable addition to the literature on the F-14. As an Austrian, Cooper had access to all sides – American, Iranian, and Iraqi – that used or confronted the F-14. Cooper starts by relating the design and development of the F-14, noting that the aircraft was originally intended to be powered by the TF-30 jet engine. That engine had numerous issues and it was not until the 1980s that a more reliable engine became available to the F-14s in service. Ironically, F-14 production was about to end in 1974 when the Shah of Iran—the then-ruler of Iran—ordered 80 F-14s for his air force. The Shah's decision to purchase those F-14s kept the production line open. A loan from the Shah to Grumman also kept Grumman in business and enabled the USN to purchase additional F-14s. (The Iranian F-14s are still in service with the Islamic Iranian Air Force. During the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, Iranian F-14s were very successful against their Iraqi opponents.) Cooper does not focus on the F-14 alone; he looks at the various aircraft opposing the F-14, primarily Iraqi Mirage fighters and the various Soviet fighters in the Iraqi Air Force inventory. Moreover, Cooper includes many photos of Iraqi personnel – controllers, pilots, and related equipment – which provides an overall picture of the forces opposing the F-14 in the air and ground.

The book is well-illustrated with many photographs of F-14s in action, Iraqi aircraft and ground equipment, maps showing the locations of Iraqi airfields, charts showing the various F-14 squadrons and the carriers on which they served, and a very useful colour centre section showing profiles

of F-14s, an Iranian F-4 Phantom, and Iraqi Mirage fighters and MiG fighters. These profiles will be helpful to modellers and historians. The endnotes contain useful information and the bibliography is extensive and will be a resource for historians.

In short, this is a very useful work for the aviation historian and naval aircraft enthusiast. While the F-14 was phased out of American service in 2006, it remains an iconic aircraft, one that served the USN well in wartime. This book is a fine tribute to that aircraft.

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Jon Diamond. *Images of War: MacArthur's Papua New Guinea Offensive, 1942–1943*. Barnsley, South Yorks: Pen and Sword Maritime, www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2020. 236 pp., illustrations, bibliography. UK £15.99, US \$22.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-52675-740-1. (E-book available.) Distributed by Casemate.

This is another quality book by medical doctor and historian, Jon Diamond, in his *Images of War Series*. Diamond has produced over a dozen books concerning Second World War campaigns and battles in this series, using photographs from several sources as well as from his own collection gathered from various locations over many years.

The Japanese had been invincible in the first six months of the war, seizing Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, the Netherlands East Indies, the Philippines, and portions of northern New Guinea. The Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942, where a combined US/Australian naval force turned back a Japanese invasion fleet bound for Port Moresby, was the first time that the Japanese advance had been stopped. While