

The F6F also saw extensive service during WW II with the British *Fleet Air Arm* in Europe and the Pacific, by the French Army in Indochina and by the French *Aeronavale* in postwar years. It was used also by South American countries Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay.

The book's first 60 pages, written by Corky Meyer, covers the development and testing of the *Hellcat*. He also described testing the F4U-1D in fall 1943 and provided a comparison to the *Hellcat*. In addition Meyer evaluated the Mitsubishi AM6-2 *Zero* in October 1944, and his comments about the aircraft and its combat ability are very interesting. The text goes on to cover the production variants of the F6F and as usual in the Naval Fighter series, examines the aircraft, its systems and armament — inside and out. The emphasis of the book is the excellent day-to-day WW II operational history of the F6F and the people who flew it. The text also contains a comprehensive list of the *Hellcat* aces and the aircraft's postwar allocation list.

Modelers will enjoy the book for its images of the various F6F paint schemes and markings, plus the comprehensive notes on interior and exterior colors, squadron and carrier ID markings and stencil information.

This book is generously illustrated with more than 650 black-and-white and five color photos with excellent captions, as well as detailed drawings and diagrams of the *Hellcat*. Many of the images are familiar, but there are some photos of the *Hellcat* this reviewer has not seen.

This is a superb and comprehensive book on the Grumman *Hellcat*. It is highly recommended reading for aviation historians and modelers.

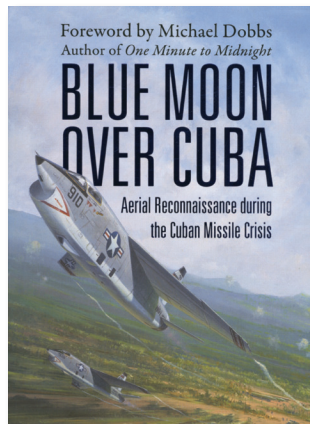
CDR Doug Siegfried, USN(Ret)

Blue Moon Over Cuba: Aerial Reconnaissance during the Cuban Missile Crisis; CAPT William B. Ecker, USN(Ret) and Kenneth V. Jack; Osprey Publishing, U.K., 2012; hardcover, 287 pages, illustrated. \$25.95

The 50th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis occurs 16–28 October 2012 — the closest our nation came to entering a nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union. Many books have been written about this crisis and the decisions made by the president and his advisors, but none have covered the details of the *Blue Moon* aerial reconnaissance missions and the men who flew them. The *Blue Moon* flights provided evidence that Soviet missiles and aircraft were in Cuba. This evidence helped shape President John F. Kennedy's actions and decisions and gave him the winning edge in the international propaganda war with the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, that led to the ultimate removal of the missiles from Cuba.

The core of this excellent book is an unfinished memoir of CAPT William B. Ecker, commanding officer of VFP-62. Ecker and his wingman flew the first low-level mission in Vought RF-8A *Crusaders* over Cuba 23 October 1962. The co-author, who was a member of the squadron during the crisis, has taken Ecker's story and expanded it into a much larger narrative that tells how the crisis evolved and ended. Included is excellent background material on our early 1950s U-2 flights over the Soviet Union, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Soviet military buildup in Cuba beginning in July to the discovery of Soviet missiles and aircraft in crates by high flying U-2s in October 1962. The story continues with military commanders ordering VFP-62 to NAS Key West.

Squadron personnel fought through governmental security to plan the missions; pilots flew the low-level missions and often out raced anti-aircraft artillery bursts (flak), and then returned to NAS Jacksonville to develop, interpret and deliver the images to the White House. Air Force McDonnell RF-101 *Voodoos* and Marine Corps VMCJ-2 RF-8As joined VFP-62 to complete 168 *Blue Moon* sorties from 23 October to 15 November. These flights verified that the Soviet missile sites had been dismantled. The story concludes with the Navy and Marine pilots being awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses during the aftermath of the crisis and the making of the Hollywood movie, "Thirteen Days."



The book provides a good brief on the Navy's history of aerial reconnaissance and detailed information on the RF-8A and its cameras. There were no digital cameras in those days. The pilots completed detailed preflight planning regarding the flight profile and ground track to take advantage of how the camera equipment operated. The Air Force was not so lucky, and their equipment proved unsatisfactory for high-speed, low-level photography until the Navy provided them some of their cameras. The first few missions the Air Force flew had to be reflown by VFP-62 since the RF-101's pictures were unsatisfactory. Yet the Air Force, at the end of the crisis, received the lion's share of the publicity.

The authors have done a great job of blending Ecker's story with the historical facts on the political side. It is a fair, straightforward, unbiased account of the events that happened from July through October 1962. Fortunately, President Kennedy showed great restraint during the crisis in the face of pressure from hawks in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his advisors. Had the Navy and Marine Corps not had a good low-level, high-speed, photo-reconnaissance capability, the evidence may not have been available to the decision makers, and the crisis may have turned out differently.

The photos in the books are superb, and their excellent captions add greatly to bringing the story of CAPT Ecker and his squadron to life. It shows how Navy and Marine Corps squadrons were prepared and how all hands performed to accomplish its mission.

This is a great book and highly recommended.

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F3D Skyknight in Action; Alan Carey; Squadron/Signal Publishing, Carrollton, TX, 2012; soft cover, illustrated, 80 pages. \$18.95

The Douglas F3D *Skyknight*, designed by Ed Heinemann in 1945, was not what you would call a pretty jet fighter — it was slow, straight wing, bulky in appearance and had no ejection seats. Its looks and unspectacular performance earned it the unkind nicknames of "Willy the Whale" and "Drut" yet the aircraft was the only Navy/Marine jet fighter to see action in Korea and Vietnam and many of its variants continued to fly into the late 1980s with Raytheon Corporation testing Army missile systems.

The F3D, designed as a carrier-based jet-powered night fighter, first flew in 1948 but suffered initially from the common problem of the time of underpowered and less than reliable jet engines. It also was not a great carrier aircraft and made only four at sea deployments with VC-4 from 1952–1953.

The *Skyknight* came into its own as a night fighter with VMF (N)-513 in Korea from mid-1952 to 1953, destroying six enemy aircraft in the night skies. As electronic warfare was coming into its own, many of the Marine F3Ds were modified in the mid-1950s with electronic countermeasure and electronic intelligence electronics. VMCJ-1, VMCJ-2 and VMCJ-3 used the aircraft to detect and combat enemy radar and fire control systems during the Cuban Missile Crises, in the Far East and in Vietnam from 1955 to 1969. The Navy and Marine Corps also used the aircraft for experimental purposes in testing missiles and ordnance and for training new radar operators and radar intercept officers.

This is one of the more interesting and well-researched *In Action* series books I have read. The author chronicled the development, covered the many variants and detailed the operational history of the aircraft in the Navy and Marine Corps. Especially interesting are the excellent sections on F3Ds and the men that flew it during the Korean and Vietnam wars. The book is packed with more than 196 B&W and color images and 10 line drawings. Many of the pictures are new to me.

The *Skyknight* was an interesting airplane that performed its best in combat. I enjoyed this book and highly recommend it.



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