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Typhoon and Tempest: The Canadian Story [Review]

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Typhoon and Tempest at War The Canadian Story

Hugh A. Halliday, *Typhoon and Tempest: The Canadian Story*, Toronto: CANAV Books, 1992, 208 pages, \$37.50.

T*yphoon and Tempest: The Canadian Story* is a great tribute to the Canadians who flew and serviced these magnificent aircraft during the Second World War. As well, it offers a detailed look at the formation and operations of No. 143 Wing (RCAF), a component of Second Tactical Air Force, in the battles from Normandy to the defeat of Germany.

First and foremost, this book recounts the trials and tribula-

tions of the pilots of Nos. 438, 439 and 440 Squadrons. From their introduction to the Typhoon, through operations in Northwest Europe to deactivation, Hugh Halliday draws on substantial research to chronicle the achievements and failures of Canadian Typhoon and Tempest pilots. The day-to-day activities of the Typhoon squadrons are related in substantial detail. Not only are accounts of air combat and air support missions told, but Halliday goes a long way towards humanizing war by putting life into the faceless pilots by relating short anecdotes about their past exploits, families, and other interesting tidbits. This approach does have its drawbacks, however, as at times the reader becomes overwhelmed by the amount of detail and inured to the many casualties.

The intensity and dedication of the pilots comes shining through in this book. In one instance, a Typhoon pilot strafing a gun position pressed his attack so far that he returned with a dented and bloodstained wing sustained when a German soldier was slow to duck [p. 19]. The danger of flying close support missions is also made readily apparent, partly from the detailed recounting of the many

fatalities, but also from the narrative:

Nevertheless, important targets would surely have strong defences, and even a stray bullet from a heavy machine gun could inflict fatal damage. Ground attack missions were something between a lottery and Russian roulette! Approaching a target or going into a dive was a gamble every time. When a pilot heard a "ping" or felt the shudder of a strike there was always the fear of the hit being in a vital place [p.52].

One of the strengths of the book is the research that has gone into it. Halliday has relied heavily on the Operational Record Books of the Canadian squadrons involved. These are quoted at length and provide the backbone of the book. In addition, the ORBs have been supplemented by primary research in Canada and the U.K. along with interviews of surviving Typhoon and Tempest pilots. Though the book is not footnoted, it is possible in most cases to derive the source of the information from the context of the paragraph. There are cases, however, where it is not possible to discern the source or tell whether the information came from contemporary sources (ie. ORBs or pilot's log-books) or from interviews conducted well after the war. An outstanding feature of this book is the 300 illustrations it contains. Photographs, paintings, and drawings of the aircraft, men, airfields and other points of interest contribute almost as much as the text in telling the Canadian Typhoon and Tempest story

in the Second World War. At a time when the number of illustrations in books are being cut back to save costs, the publisher, CANAV Books, should be commended for bucking this trend.

Towards the end of the book, Halliday includes an chapter entitled "Typhoon Results." In it, he discusses the findings made by Operational Research teams concerning the effectiveness of tactical aviation in general and Typhoons in particular during the campaign in Northwest Europe. The author summarizes these results by stating:

From many of these documents [Operational Research reports] emerged sobering conclusions. The effectiveness of tactical air forces was admitted, but it was also clear that aircraft had been less decisive than had been claimed during the actual fighting [p. 135].

This book does an excellent job recounting the day-to-day operations of Canadian Typhoon pilots, but it does not give those operations much context. The inclusion of the "Typhoon Results" chapter is an attempt to redress this. Unfortunately, it creates as many questions for the reader as it answers. The claims made by Operation Research do not complement the popular image of the Typhoon and close support operations, and many, especially ex-pilots, will find this disturbing. Nonetheless, these conclusions are entirely supported by the evidence available today. As well, the evidence discussed refers primarily to the effectiveness of attacks by rocket-firing Typhoons

on close support targets - tanks, armoured fighting vehicles, gun positions, etc. The focus of the book, however, is directed towards the experiences of the bomb-toting Canadian Typhoon squadrons. Though an interesting side-bar, this chapter does not contribute to a better understanding of "The Canadian Story."

Halliday has written an interesting, engaging and informative account of Canadian Typhoon and Tempest pilots in the Second World War. This book shines a light on a group of pilots who often get lost in the glare surrounding the more glamorous Spitfire pilots with their aerial victories and the bomber crews who endured endless hours of horror on their nightly forays against Germany. In reading this book, the reader will come away with a sense of the contribution made by these unsung heroes. Hugh Halliday set himself a lofty goal in writing this book. *Typhoon and Tempest: The Canadian Story* does not disappoint.

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