



Black Aces High: The Story of a Modern Fighter Squadron at War

Robert K. Wilcox

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A riveting account of a modern fighter squadron at war and the exploits, triumphs, and traumas of its pilots.

The Black Aces. Their courage, ferocity, and instincts made them legendary in military aviation. Flying F-14 Tomcats, they played as much a part in recent US operations in Kosovo as did any air squadron in the theater, air force or navy, and probably more. Because of its superior performance, sophisticated equipment and the two-man crews who took it upon themselves to do something extra, the Tomcat and its aviators distinguished themselves over and over.

Forced to locate Serb fighters operating covertly in a mountainous land much like Afghanistan, with almost no help from ground spotters, VF-41 pilots and backseaters spearheaded new methods for the navy to pinpoint, identify, and destroy enemy troops and weapons. These were tasks that fighter crews had seldom had to do before. The Aces had to break rules and frequently go in harms way in order to be successful. And they performed so well that for the first time in aviation history, a fighter squadron - theirs - was awarded The Wade McClusky Trophy, the navy's premier bombing honor. The award, named for a World War II dive bomber pilot and post-WorldWar II admiral, had been won previously only by bombing squadrons.

Robert Wilcox spent two weeks with The Black Aces aboard the aircraft carrier, USS Roosevelt and here provides a long-awaited, never-before-seen glimpse into the world of a modern navy fighter squadron. Wilcox takes readers into the cockpits as the pilots go out and attack targets while avoiding anti-aircraft weaponry. He takes us into the war room as they plan their strikes and into their cabins as they contemplate the danger they are facing. And the reader can't help but worry for these men as they head off into battle, can't help sitting on the edge of the seat as they try to land at night, in a rainstorm, with waves crashing against the ship, and can't help ducking with them as they dodge missile attacks. And in the end, it is impossible not to feel for these aviators as they question their own courage, or to cheer for them when they finally return safely.

Black Aces High is a story of fear and courage, mishap and success, fighting spirit and military innovation. It's a human story that goes behind the smiling, sunglasses-wearing facade of aviators flashing a "V", the sterile, slow motion target video that has become a staple of Pentagon briefings, and the rock 'n' roll cowboy image of fighter crews seen in the movies. Instead, it is a story that shows who these aviators really are and what they do beyond what we know, a story which probably will be repeated again and again as our carriers continue to be deployed in the new, 21 century war our nation is fighting.

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