

# BOOK Reviews

## Airborne

by Neil Williams

Illustrated by Lynn Williams  
Crecy Publishing £10.95

Books that still move me as they did when I first read them include *Tom Sawyer*, *Cider with Rosie* and *1984*. Aviation titles in this category include *Fate is the Hunter* and *The Right Stuff*. One other is the subject of this review, *Airborne* by Neil Williams.

The hardback version of this book was originally published in 1977 but has long been out of print. Now Crecy publishing, in conjunction with Neil's brother Lynn and the Neil Williams estate, has re-released the book in paperback format. Three new chapters and lots of photos from Neil's collection have been added. The original was illustrated exclusively by Lynn Williams' (Neil's brother) beautiful line drawings, so it's good to see that most of these have been included in this new edition.

Neil was an RAF pilot, trained in Canada, and was latterly a graduate of the ETPS at Farnborough. He turned his hands to flying a wide variety of aircraft ranging from the Shuttleworth Collection's aircraft, WWII warbirds (single and multi engine) to fast jets. He was a gifted aerobatic pilot, and was British Aerobatic Champion no fewer than 13 times.

But Neil also had the gift of words and writes beautifully and evocatively of his experiences in flying this wide spectrum of aircraft types. He describes flying a particular type, or recounts some aviation escapade in each chapter. When put together as here, it records the career of a very gifted pilot and writer.

Most dramatic is Neil's account of the day when failure of the main spar of the Zlin Trener he was flying caused the starboard wing to fail in an upward direction.

He tells this story in a wonderful

understated laconic style. For example, at one point he writes "dihedral was by now noticeably increasing..." He goes on to describe the whole eight minute (the limit of the Zlin's inverted fuel system) flight, during which time he had to fight down panic, and plan his actions. He decided that he would remain inverted and roll erect at the last moment before setting the aircraft down on the grass at Hullavington.

But he was back flying later that day, performing aerobatics to express his joy and thanks at surviving what could have been a fatal accident. Zlin later sent him a telegram that said "Sorry, congratulations, thanks". For this action, Neil was awarded

the Queen's Commendation for Valuable Services in the Air. Many younger people express disbelief when they hear of this incident. Buy this book and read about it at first hand.

Sadly Neil, his wife and two other crew members lost their lives in 1977 when a CASA 2 111 (a Spanish built Heinkel 111) that Neil was ferrying from Spain to the UK hit a cloud covered mountain.

I cannot recommend this book too highly. It represents excellent value for money, and if you

are anything like me it will evoke a smile, awe and a huge amount of respect for one of the UK's most gifted but sadly missed pilots. – Chris Royle

## Red Arrows in Camera

By Keith Wilson

Haynes, £25

A worthy addition to the canon of Red Arrows literature, Keith Wilson's compilation presents a close-up view of every aspect of the team's operations and is graced with some truly memorable photographs. Author Wilson is himself an excellent photographer who has flown with the Red Arrows (and has often provided photographs for this magazine) and furnishes many great pictures of the Arrows, and I'm sure he won't mind me saying that the highlights of the book are some extraordinary shots by E.J.



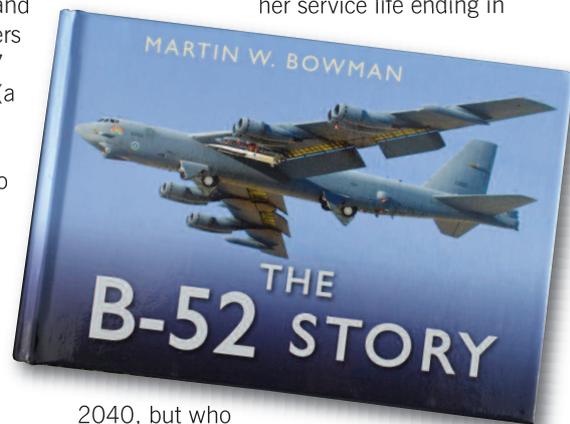
Van Koningsveld, who was clearly given open access to the team and flew with Red 10 on several occasions to capture images from breathtaking attitudes. The text is clear and informative, the topics covered are comprehensive and the book is well worth the money. The Arrows have suffered more than their share of tragedies in recent times and this unashamed encomium is timely. A share of the purchase price goes to the RAF Benevolent Fund. – Pat Malone

## The B52 Story

Martin Bowman

The History Press

I've always had a special interest in the B-52 as we're exactly the same age – she flew for the first time three days before I was born, and the way things are going she'll long outlast me; this book postulates her service life ending in



2040, but who knows, there may be life extensions after that. She could even be the first aircraft to spend a century in service.

The 'Aluminum Overcast' was designed for Cold War duty – a one-way trip to Russia, Slim Pickens style – and the original plan was to raze 70 Soviet cities with 133 atomic bombs in a single strike. For almost ten years a force of armed B-52s was kept airborne around the clock in case the Russians should strike America's airfields first. And of course the B-52 figured prominently in the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, when it looked likely that the world was going to end at teatime – tell that to t'young folk today...

B-52s later popped up in Vietnam, in

Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Serbia... a force of seven aircraft left Barksdale AFB in Louisiana, bombed Iraq and got home in over 35 hours – compare that with Black Buck's 15 hour round trip.

This is one of those pocket-sized hardcover books – Bowman has several out, on the Hunter, Lightning and so on. The first third covers a specific segment of its Vietnam history, and while there's a lot of interesting stuff

in the remainder there's not enough to my mind about what it was like to fly. Other than saying its pilots found it less sprightly than the B-47 Canberra (understandably) the book is more about what it did than what it was. – *Pat Malone*

## Quicklook at Flying

By Paul Smiddy

Available from [www.quicklookbooks.com](http://www.quicklookbooks.com)  
Glossy paperback, 92 pp  
Quicklook Books, £7.99

'Know the basics in 90 minutes,' the sub-heading to this book says, and that's not far from the truth. A complete novice, or an EASA rulemaker, would be able to grasp the rudiments of the amorphous and complicated aviation business in the time it takes to leaf through these pages. I've never seen a book that attempts to cover every aspect of the industry in this way; there's a bit of potted history, from 1709 to the present, a succinct chapter on how aircraft fly, including helicopters, gliders, gyros... then there's an explanation of civil and military aviation, manufacturing, the airline industry, the air traffic control system

– a pretty ambitious canvas. Then we move into flying an aircraft, from ab initio to an airline job. There's useful stuff here – the author warns of the pitfalls and doesn't gild the lily.

A couple of niggles... the author starts the 'your first flight' section with the intimation that you're absolutely going to lose your breakfast, which in my experience as an instructor is absolutely not the case. And he subdivides general aviation into 'business aviation' and 'light aviation' which to my mind is a dangerous game – light aviation, the author says, includes pleasure flying and pilot training... well, I have a light aircraft and I fly for business, and the growing trend of splitting 'business aviation' off from 'general aviation', apart from being hopelessly inexact, is going to hurt us one day.

But all in all, a worthy effort. The language is simple and direct, jargon is absent and there are mercifully few acronyms. – *Pat Malone*



## Out of the Blue

'The sometimes scary and often funny world of flying in the Royal Air Force - as told by some of those who were there'

Compiled and edited by Ian Cowie, Dim Jones and Chris Long

Published by Halldale Media Group. Only obtainable online from <http://halldale.com/shop/out-blue>  
Softback 246 pages  
147mm x 210mm  
Price £7.99 All proceeds go jointly to Help for Heroes and the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund

This book is a gem!

There are 90 stories here, many told for the first time, written by retired and serving RAF personnel. Many of the accounts are set in the tense Cold War period, but all are told with humour and in many cases with masterly understatement. This is a

book that one could pick up and read a story or two, but you can't, because every one is so good you don't want to put it down.

For example, you'll find first hand accounts from the pilot of the Hunter that was flown through Tower Bridge in April 1968 in protest at both defence budget cuts and the RAF's 50th anniversary seemingly being ignored by politicians at Westminster.

And what about a few unintended circuits in a runaway Lightning... the story's here, told by the engineer who was at the controls. Those of you who were at Duxford recently would have seen this very Lightning (XM135) in the

Airspace hangar.

And why did a Hunter end up in Tintagel High Street? A small blob of grease was the reason it seems... but read on and enjoy!

Buy it! The money goes to two very deserving charities and it will make a perfect Christmas stocking filler. – *Chris Royle*

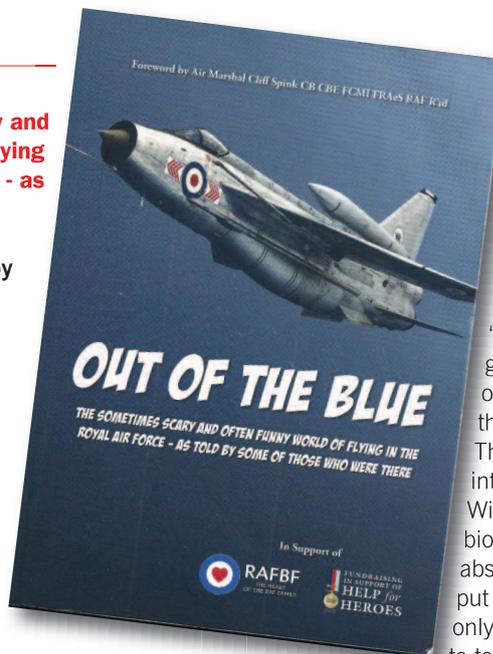
## From Seafire to DC-10

A lifetime of flight

By Ronald Williams

Pen & Sword, £19.99

I must confess my heart quails when I get a book like this; some hoary old aviator with a bar-emptying fund of there-I-was



stories commits his memoirs to paper, usually at the instigation of his grandchildren – my advice is, 'Don't do it, grandad! Think of all the trees that will die...' Then I got stuck into Ronald Williams' biography and I absolutely couldn't put it down. Not only has he a story to tell, but glory be,

he can write! More than that, he puts in all the good stuff, the mistakes he got away with, the mistakes he didn't get away with... whether it be dragging the tail of his inverted Seafire through a wheatfield at 480 kt, losing his captain's stripe after ditching a Twin Pin or getting kicked out of Cathay for being "untrainable" on the Convaair 880, he adopts the warts-and-all approach. While his failures make the better stories, he was clearly an above average pilot with a good head on his shoulders and put in ten years in the left seat of BCal 707s before winding up as a Captain on DC-10s. Williams' zest for life shines through the text; the lifestyle enjoyed by airline captains of the sixties and seventies may be a distant memory but he lived it to the full. The book's got a few of the usual Pen-and-Swordisms – proof-reader's suggestions left in the text and so forth – and Williams goes off on a bit of a rant now and then, but all in all it's a worthy effort and a good investment for the bookshelf. – *Pat Malone* ■

