



Defence units, where he first began flying Camels against German night bombers.

Tragically, Armstrong was killed in a flying accident two days after the Armistice, during one of his frequent and outstanding aerobatic displays. Although the casualty report attributed the tragedy to an “error in judgment”, the author has undertaken a lengthy investigation into the circumstances, and presents her findings and conclusions in a convincing manner. The only thing that goes a bit too far is the two-page imaginative script of Armstrong’s thinking during that tragic last flight; an indulgence that might have been better omitted.

An impressive gallery of black-and-white and colour images, many from Armstrong’s own album, and some dramatic paintings by Lynn Williams, round off this impressive work.

PHILIP JARRETT

Chinese Air Power in the 20th Century: Rise of the Red Dragon

By Andreas Rupprecht; Harpia Publishing, Meynertgasse 8/8, 1090 Vienna, Austria; 8½ x 11in (216mm x 280mm); softback; 253 pages, illustrated; €38.95 excl p&p. ISBN 978-1-950394-00-5

IF, LIKE THIS reviewer, your knowledge and understanding of the history and development of Chinese military aviation during the 20th Century is somewhat sketchy to say the least, this comprehensive tome from Harpia will be a very welcome addition to your bookshelf.

Written by Andreas Rupprecht, whose previous series of books for Harpia over the last decade on Chinese airpower has set the standard for coverage of the subject, this substantial softback, subtitled “Rise of the Red Dragon”, tackles the often mind-bendingly complex evolution of Chinese combat aviation

(transports are not covered here) with aplomb.

The task of trying to make sense of such a sprawling and intricately layered political and geographical history is made all the harder for Western readers by the sheer difficulty of trying to differentiate between the various characters, all of whom have names that are something of a struggle to retain for those of us more accustomed to “Smith”. This aspect is not helped by the sometimes garbled English, which, given the sheer complexity of the subject, could have used another edit, but the author does well to set the story of aviation in China alongside the nation’s notoriously tangled political history.

Illustrated with numerous extremely rare photographs (some of which are used disappointingly small in the early chapters — some are literally thumbnails — presumably finding images of high enough resolution was something of a challenge), the book is divided into six chapters. These run chronologically from the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 through to the final section detailing the nation’s aviation modernisation period from 1976 to the present. There are also three good appendices, including a history of the final seven regional air forces, an explanation of China’s air divisions, and details of the People’s Liberation Army Air Force’s serial number system — all invaluable and hard-to-find stuff. There are also numerous helpful maps by James Lawrence and a useful index.

The small niggles above notwithstanding, this is a valuable and important piece of work, and if you buy one book on this little-covered (for good reason) but fascinating subject, make it this one.

NICK STROUD

Fire-step to Fokker Fodder: From the Trenches to the Red Baron — the First World War Diaries of William “Jack” Lidsey

By Andrew White; Fighting High Publishing, available via

The Aviation Historian[®]

The modern journal of classic aeroplanes and the history of flying



MOUNTAIN TIGER

The Northrop F-5 in Swiss Air Force service

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