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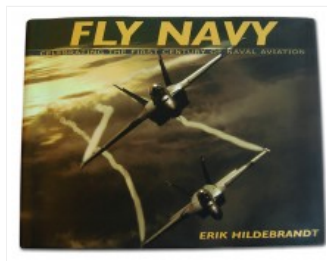
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Book Review: Fly Navy: Celebrating the First Century of Naval Aviation

By Erik Hildebrandt; Stillwater, Minnesota: Cleared Hot Media, Inc., 2011, 9.5-by-12 inches, 372 pages, \$65.00, leather-bound/signed edition, \$150.00, www.vulturesrow.com



Written by: [Jan Tegler](#) on August 9, 2011
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Erik Hildebrandt is one of the premier aviation photographers working today. With eight books, a wide array of magazine covers, article images and photography for major advertising campaigns to his credit, Hildebrandt has established himself as one of the go-to-guys for aviation images in both military and civilian realms.

His latest book, *Fly Navy: Celebrating the First Century of Naval Aviation* (Stillwater, Minnesota: Cleared Hot Media, Inc., 2011, 9.5-by-12 inches, 372 pages, \$65.00, leather-bound/signed edition, \$150.00), two years in the making, captures the width and breadth of naval aviation as the institution of naval flying turns 100.

In Hildebrandt's words, *Fly Navy* is a "visual anthology of contemporary naval aviation at its century mark, with respectful glances at the past and glimmers, too, of the future." That pretty neatly describes the overall content of the work. Publications commemorating the century of naval aviation are coming out almost weekly this year but none will better illustrate Navy flying today than this book. It's enjoyable and occasionally insightful even for those who know the subject well.

The opening chapter, "Wings on the Water" with historic photographs and text by Barrett Tillman, sums up the century of naval flight in just 13 pages. Then it's off to the races and literally every corner of naval aviation through a series of photo missions undertaken between 2008 and late 2010. Every community and aircraft/unmanned aircraft type in naval service is included in an effort so sprawling Hildebrandt couldn't manage it all himself.

He enlisted the services of well known fellow aviation photographer Ted Carlson to provide images of the Coast Guard and Marine Corps components of naval aviation. You get the feeling Hildebrandt would have preferred to document these communities himself but there just wasn't time.

Broken into 22 sections or chapters, the book moves from water survival and Navy flight training through the fighter, rotary wing, maritime patrol, airborne early warning, electronic attack, carrier onboard delivery, fleet logistics and UAV pipelines to special units (TOPGUN, adversary squadrons, test and evaluation squadrons, Blue Angels, etc.) and combat deployed forces.

There are four notable and interesting departures from the general theme in the form of sections which pay tribute to Grunt, the art of naval aviation, naval aviators in space and the

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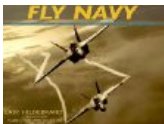
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families of naval aviators. Otherwise, the format is consistent. Hildebrandt serves up terrific images of 21st century naval aircraft and the men and women who fly them in a variety of settings, from CONUS to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Captions written by Hildebrandt describe the setting for each photo mission and list the pilots/crew involved. The photos are accompanied by text concerning each aircraft, unit or community penned by subject matter experts and naval aviators themselves. Given the scope of this ambitious project one would expect Hildebrandt must have some impressive connections inside the Navy and the defense industry. He does.

The book's acknowledgements page reads like a Who's Who of naval aviation today. The foreword is written by former CNAF, Vice Adm. Tom "Killer" Kilcline, and the Introduction by Northrop Grumman CEO & president, Wes Bush. Other notables include; Rear Adm. W.G. Sizemore II (Chief of Naval Air Training), Sergei Sikorsky (son of Sikorsky Aircraft founder Igor Sikorsky), David Grumman (son of Grumman founder Roy Grumman) Cmdr. Jim "Zuel" Kuehl (NSAWC Operations Officer), naval aviation artist Hank Caruso, space shuttle astronaut Capt. Robert "Hoot" Gibson a slew of retired senior officers recently departed from major commands, the recently relieved Blue Angel Boss Cmdr. Dave "Mongo" Koss and a slew of current naval aviators.

Hildebrandt's "Photographer's Notes" provide insight into and fun anecdotes from the photo missions, demonstrating his deep understanding of Navy flying and wide acquaintance in naval aviation. Apparently Hildebrandt even utilized his own ex-USAF O-2A Skymaster as a platform for photo chase on a couple of missions.



[Fly Navy](#)

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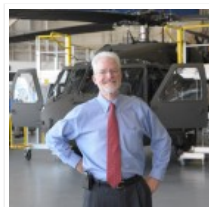
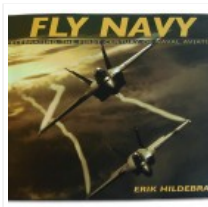
Though photographs predominate there's a good deal more text than one realizes. Most of it is very interesting although it is in this area where the book suffers a bit. The editing of the text is rather poor with everything from misplaced or missing words to poor grammar appearing in some sections. Some are simply not very well written.

Nevertheless, Hildebrandt is to be applauded for bringing such a massive enterprise together. He touches every facet of naval aviation in photos that bring it to life. Amazingly, the only group which denied him access for photo-making was the V-22 community. Carlson makes up for this with air-to-air images of Marine V-22s.

Overall *Fly Navy* is an impressive work, fun to read for naval aviation devotees and newbies alike, surely one of the most graphic illustrations of naval aviation at 100.

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