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David Sears, *Such Men As These: The Story of the Navy Pilots Who Flew the Deadly Skies over Korea*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2010. Pp. xi, 395. ISBN 978-0-306-82010-6.

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Such Men As These is as much a story about James Michener's inspiration for his novel *The Bridges at Toko-ri*¹ as it is about pilots fighting in Korea. Historian and retired US Navy officer David Sears makes extensive use of material Michener gathered in researching the war to illuminate the real men behind the fictional characters. Speaking from Korea to an American audience tired of the war, Michener lamented, "even those of us who know better forget that today, in the barren wastes of Korea, American men are dying with a heroism never surpassed in our history" (7).

Sears supplements Michener's work with his own interviews of family members and scrutiny of official documents. His book consists of three main parts subdivided into sixteen thematic chapters. Besides the text, there are twenty pages of photographs, as well as notes, a glossary, acknowledgments, two appendices, and a very necessary index. All in all, too much information on too many characters makes it rather difficult for the reader to perceive a coherent, unified account of the experiences of individual pilots.

The author has, however, done a service to both students and veterans of the Korean War by privileging the perspective of its participants. Although the war has received increased attention in recent years,² most of it has concentrated on the ground war. Sears's account poignantly proves that pilots faced missions as perilous as those of any infantryman. The narrative, which establishes context through biographical flashbacks and technical descriptions, places readers in the cockpit, feeling the sensations and stress of aerial combat. Drawing very effectively on his own experience in naval aviation, Sears is clearly at his best in explaining what happened in enough detail to spark the reader's imagination. (This is in stark contrast to his broad generalizations about the strategic and operational aspects of the war.) Retelling the events that led to Ensign Jesse Brown's death, Sears writes:

Wingman Tom Hudner had pulled alongside and was calling into his mic: "Okay, Jesse, I'll walk you through the check-off list." Doing this would allow Brown to focus his mind on the landing. "Lock your harness," Hudner began—especially important in order to keep Brown's head from spearing into the cockpit gun sight when he hit the ground. "Open your canopy and lock it," a time saver for exiting the cockpit quickly. Opening the canopy required using a hand crank mounted on the right side of the canopy; once it rolled all the way back, a latch mechanism held it in place. (109)

Brown, the first African-American Navy pilot, is one of the more memorable figures in the book. Sears exposes the barriers he had to overcome, from gaining admission to college to succeeding in his flight training program and serving in a segregated and prejudiced military. Once assigned to a ship, the aircraft carrier USS *Leyte*, however, Brown found allies, including the ship's commander, Capt. Thomas Sisson, whose "unwavering insistence on Brown's rightful place in the structure and community of *Leyte* broke the apparent mold. Sisson made it clear that Brown would suffer no outward indignities in the actions or words of *Leyte*'s officers and petty officers" (107). This example of a commander shaping the ethical and operational environment of an organization in a positive way is particularly relevant to today's military as it undergoes controversial social changes. Team bonding was so strong that Lt. Thomas J. Hudner Jr., Brown's wingman,

1. NY: Random House, 1953.

2. E.g., two volumes of Allan R. Millett's magisterial trilogy on the war have appeared in the past decade: *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence: U Pr. of Kansas, 2005), and *The War for Korea, 1950-1951: They Came from the North* (2010), with review at *MiWSR* 2011-030. See also the same author's *The Korean War: The Essential Bibliography* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2007).

crashed his own plane in a failed attempt to rescue Brown from his fatal crash, an act that earned him the Medal of Honor.³

Another moving topic, discussed in the second half of the book, is the plight of pilots who became POWs. One of them had to decide between ejecting from his damaged plane over enemy territory or into the icy waters of the Sea of Japan, where a rescue helicopter would attempt to pick him up. Men captured in enemy territory suffered from injuries, diseases, and prolonged mistreatment. Captured pilot Harry Ettinger's experience was typical:

After a preliminary round of questioning in one of the camp buildings, Ettinger was marched outside and told to begin digging. Even if he'd been handed a shovel, Ettinger knew there was no way he could pierce the frozen ground.... As Ettinger stood near the shallow depression he had just created, one of the guards ceremoniously cocked a pistol and put the barrel to Ettinger's head. There was angry shouting, and, for Ettinger, an agonizing, breath-stopping pause at eternity's doorstep before the guard finally pulled the trigger and the hammer clicked sharply on an empty chamber. (217)

Chinese interrogators bent on obtaining "confessions" about US germ warfare inflicted some of the harshest physical and mental abuse suffered by POWs in the Korean War.⁴

David Sears's appealing narrative history does have its drawbacks. Though the book is long, its presentation of the broader context of the war is too facile and its discussion of air-ground coordination inadequate. On the other hand, students and veterans alike of the war will appreciate the lively firsthand accounts of aerial combat and the tactical discussions of, for example, mountain and bridge bombing techniques. And, too, present-day military personnel will find in *Such Men As These* much that is instructive regarding wartime leadership and the resilience and courage of men fighting a war to which the American public paid little attention.

3. The eighty-eight-year-old Hudner returned to North Korea in 2013, in an attempt to recover Brown's remains; see Jane Perlez, "Six Decades Later, a Second Rescue Attempt," *NY Times* (30 July 2013) A4 - www.nytimes.com/rd/1411.htm.

4. See Raymond B. Lech, *Tortured into Fake Confession: The Dishonoring of Korean War Prisoner Col. Frank H. Schwable, USMC* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), and, more generally, William Clark Latham Jr., *Cold Days in Hell: American POWs in Korea* (College Station: Texas A&M U Pr, 2013).