

## **Book Review – Another Great Day at Sea** **Life aboard the USS George H.W. Bush** by Geoff Dyer

Review by Chris Hope, Master CFI



Like many pilots, I am a sucker for books about flying airplanes off of boats. The idea of strapping into a jet fighter and accelerating to 150 knots within a couple hundred feet is fascinating. And the concept of trying to put the plane down on a moving runway at the proper spot – Talk about spot landings!

So I came across an excerpt of this book in a recent edition of *Air & Space Smithsonian Magazine* recently and immediately decided that it needed a home on my flying-books shelf. Turns out that that was a great idea.

Surprising the thought might be to pilots, especially to Navy fighter pilots, they are not the only folks on board. Yes, all Navy pilots believe that the mission of the ship is to launch and recover the planes that they fly. But as the Navy is currently proving, it is possible to launch and recover aircraft from a carrier without a pilot inside of the plane.

No, the mission of the ship is to put ordinance on the target. According to Jim, an ordinance technician, *“If a plane’s not carrying ordinance, it’s a dang pleasure craft for a bunch of fancy, overpaid video guys putting on an airshow. It’s just another unscheduled airline. You can fly fast and track somebody, but when you catch them, what are you going to do?”* *“Blow the living @## out of them?”*, the author replies. *“Only if you have ordinance,”* Jim responds.

And so the book goes. Author Geoff Dyer is English, very tall, and not military at all. So how does he find himself on our country’s newest aircraft carrier? He received a grant from an “Artist in Residence” program, allowing him to look for some interesting place to go and write. And although his previous body of work included four novels, He says:

*Asked nine months earlier, if there was ‘somewhere unusual and interesting’ I’d like to be writer-residence I didn’t hesitate: “Sir, an American aircraft carrier, sir!” It had to be American; circumstantially, because these days we – the British- don’t even have a carrier; personally, because of the accents, the audible symptoms of the top-to-bottom toff-to-prol hierarchy that is so clearly in the British military.*

So he was delivered to “the boat” via the COD, the Carrier-On-Board delivery aircraft, the aircraft that serves as the bus between land and sea. And he experiences his first

carrier landing. From that moment on he is meeting members of the crew and forming and recording his experiences. And seeing these experiences through his eyes is definitely not the same as seeing them through my own. He observes a maintenance technician -

*A brown-shirted woman on the wing, cross-legged as if at a festival of future archeology, concentrating closely on the all-important part she was unscrewing. Having taken the component out of the wing she was now coating it with some kind of grease, glue, anti-freeze, lube or whatever. I apologize for the discrepancy between the precision of the task and the imprecision of my description of that task. I have never liked anything that involves engines, oil or fiddly intricate work*

There is a definite joy in reading Geoff's description of his experiences and his meetings with so many different crew members. He is new to this entire "military thing," which allows us readers to enjoy his discoveries through fresh eyes. Whether he is talking to first-enlistees or to admirals, he finds their story captivating and worth relating. I think you will as well. I certainly did.



*Chris loves to read, write, and fly, but not necessarily in that order*

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