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David Alan Johnson. *Yanks in the RAF: The Story of Maverick Pilots and American Volunteers Who Joined Britain's Fight in WWII.* Amherst: Prometheus, 2015. 281 pp. \$25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-63388-022-1.



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David Alan Johnson, in *Yanks in the RAF*, introduces an original concept beyond the military impact of the American volunteer pilots who joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) prior to US involvement in World War II. He approaches the Eagle Squadrons from a social perspective, attempting to tie the arrival of the first American fighter pilots to changes in British society and the US/British relationship.

Yanks in the RAF accurately describes the historical backdrop of American isolationism and the resulting impact of the Neutrality Acts on the British and American populace. The story of the 245 pilots, 7 of whom fought in the Battle of Britain, begins with the recruiting efforts of Colonel Charles Sweeney and Clayton Knight. Johnson is able to overlay the personal experiences of these recruits, such as original Eagles Andy Mamedoff, Red Tobin, and Shorty Keough, with this environment as the focus of WWII shifts to Britain. Eventually, the American volunteers were grouped to form the Eagle Squadrons, numbers 71, 121, and 133 of the RAF. The inexperienced pilots suffered through difficult seasoning experiences in combat against the Luftwaffe, eventually becoming successful frontline fighter squadrons for the RAF prior to transitioning to the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) in September of 1942.

In telling their story, Johnson captures the rebellious attitude and sometimes outlandish behavior of the American pilots. They were generally considered cocky, arrogant, and undisciplined âcowboysâ who were practically impossible to control on the ground and sometimes in the air. As Johnson explains, 71 squadron âcould make more noise, day or night, than thirty Englishmen or ten Australiansâ (p. 61). Although not drastically different than their allied counterparts, the personality of the Eagle pilots in contrast to British society is an essential theme of the narrative.

The authorâs approach to linking the impact of the Eagle Squadrons on British culture is to weave individual perspectives and anecdotes throughout the historical story line. By doing so, Johnson brings depth and color to the Eagle pilots from prewar experiences through combat. He primarily captures the RAF and British viewpoint through the lens of RAF leadership. In doing so, he attempts to consistently reinforce the cultural perception and realities of the Eagle Squadrons. Some individual accounts in the book provide strong first-person support of Johnsonâs social methodology, such as Robert Raymondâs description of his impressions after transferring to the USAAF from the RAF of enlisted officer interactions and âAmerican get-up-and-goâ (p. 203). Addition-

ally, Johnson effectively uses opinion polls to illustrate common positions on both sides of the Atlantic.

Despite this, however, Johnson falls short of effectively proving his point on several fronts. First, the cause and effect relationship on British culture and class standing remains unproven. The preface clearly outlines that the American volunteer pilots began pushing life in Britain from a class-bound society toward meritocracy (p. 11). However, Johnson provides no discussion or evidence demonstrating how and why British society changed after WWII, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions. For an American audience unfamiliar with British history this is a particularly serious flaw. Adding an afterword or additional chapter that clearly ties together the themes and threads of the book would have avoided the abrupt ending and greatly enhanced the overall reading experience.

Johnson also relies heavily on repetitive, unsupported generalizations throughout the work to describe British and American cultural perspectives and thoughts. For example, he states that it was impossible for them [RAF officers] to understand how anybody who held the king's commission could mix with the working class without offering citation or support (p. 122). Johnson also references President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as

saying the British were always sly and foxy and advised that it was prudent to be the same with them without providing supporting evidence (p. 48). Lastly, throughout the book he draws conclusions about the attitudes of Air Marshall Sir Sholto Douglas with little to no evidence. This approach is particularly problematic in *Yanks in the RAF* because Johnson is attempting to capture the nexus of culture and history; to do so it is essential to accurately depict and prove key opinions and motivations. These hanging statements detract significantly from the point he is trying to make.

Yanks in the RAF is an entertaining read, particularly for an airpower or WWII enthusiast. The story of the Eagle Squadrons is compelling and significant, and Johnson attempts to view this well-traveled history with a new perspective. Although he introduces an intriguing idea, his unsupported statements and disconnected logic ultimately leaves the reader unsatisfied. This book does, however, provide a solid introduction to the American volunteer pilots in the RAF. For a more serious or in-depth perspective, readers should turn to Philip D. Caine's *American Pilots in the RAF: The WWII Eagle Squadrons* (1998) or *The RAF Eagle Squadrons: American Pilots Who Flew for the Royal Air Force* (2008), which provide a more comprehensive study of the topic.

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