

# Reviews & Previews

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## Portrait of the Artist

A new book shows why Gil Cohen excels at painting airplanes, and the pilots who fly them.



### *Gil Cohen: Aviation Artist*

by Gil Cohen. Boston Mills Press, 2009. 144 pp., \$49.95.

**PHILADELPHIA-BORN GIL COHEN** launched his career as a 10-year-old sketch artist on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, New Jersey. He went on to spend four years at an art school, then earned a journeyman's reputation producing cover illustrations for everything from men's adventure magazines and paperback thrillers to Harlequin romance novels. As the title of the book suggests, however, the role that has always been closest to Cohen's heart is that of aviation artist.



All artists of this genre pride themselves on accurate depictions of flying machines in action, and Cohen is no exception. What sets him apart from other masters, however, is his focus on the human element. Not content to simply depict Hurricanes and Spitfires in the air, the artist gives us "Gentlemen, As You Were," catching Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding in conversation with young fighter pilots at a Royal Air Force base. And rather than showing massed bomber formations, Cohen provides an intimate view of a Lancaster crew over Germany at night as seen from the wireless operator's station ("We Guide to Strike").

**In "Return to the Bump/Biggin Hill, Summer 1940," a British fighter pilot is debriefed after a mission.**

At his best, Cohen brings history to life. In "The Wrights at Huffman Prairie," Wilbur and Orville look up from their work on the world's first practical airplane as sister Katharine arrives with a picnic basket. The sun is shining on the prairie grass. Purple coneflowers dot the foreground. It is as though we are there.

Cohen is a master illustrator. This is a volume that will find a place on my bookshelf, rather than migrating to the nearest used bookshop.

■ ■ ■ TOM CROUCH OVERSEES THE NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION OF AVIATION AND SPACE ART.

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>>> Excerpt <<<

# The Private Amelia

*Amelia Earhart: The Thrill of It*

by Susan Wels. Running Press, 2009. 208 pp., \$35.

**IN THE LATEST OF MANY BIOGRAPHIES OF AMELIA EARHART**, Susan Wels illuminates the aviator's personal life by drawing from the diaries of Dorothy Putnam, the first wife of Earhart's manager and eventual husband, George Palmer Putnam. On June 17 and 18, 1928, Earhart became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic. She was only a passenger, but the flight catapulted her to worldwide fame.

G.P., as Earhart referred to Putnam, insisted she write a book to capitalize on her celebrity. For six weeks, Earhart moved into the sprawling Rye, New York home of Putnam and Dorothy, where she wrote the manuscript for *20 hrs. 40 min.: Our Flight in the Friendship*. The following excerpt is from a chapter entitled "The Hero Business."

It was "all very hectic and upsetting," Dorothy complained, with large crowds for meals and reporters hovering about, but it was "all in the game," she acknowledged, and she and Amelia, on the surface at least, remained great companions. When Amelia wasn't writing her book or answering the piles of fan letters that poured in—about two hundred a day—she and Dorothy liked to go driving or shopping, and they went swimming together most afternoons. Dorothy adored airplanes, and



Amelia took her up in her new little Avian Moth, which had been crated and shipped back to the United States, flying the "small silver darned needle" of a plane in the bracing ocean air off Long Island Sound.

As the days passed, however, there were undercurrents of tension. Dorothy was irked by G.P.'s constant attention to Amelia; they were hardly ever apart—working together in the house, canoeing and swimming together for hours, and planning the next stage in Amelia's career. Dorothy and G.P. had only a shell of a marriage—she was madly in love with a man nineteen years younger, and "utterly indifferent" to her husband—but G.P. and Amelia were inseparable under her own roof, and she found it galling.

Amelia, for her part, was torn between her friendship with Dorothy and her growing attachment and attraction to G.P. When she completed the first draft of her *Friendship* account, entitled *20 Hrs. 40 Min.*, she told Dorothy that she wanted to dedicate the book to her. Dorothy was instantly skeptical about Amelia's motives. "Does she really want to?" she wondered in her diary. "Or was it a sop to me because she had monopolized George all summer?" Dorothy wasn't the only one who noticed the growing closeness between G.P. and Amelia. Rumors of a romance were starting to spread, and by August 21, as Dorothy watched them together from afar, she realized that they had suddenly become a couple.



**Top to bottom: Amelia Earhart became George Putnam's obsession; in Honolulu before a solo flight to California; pilot of an autogyro in 1931.**

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## Reviews & Previews

### Flying From the Black Hole: The B-52 Navigator-Bombardiers of Vietnam

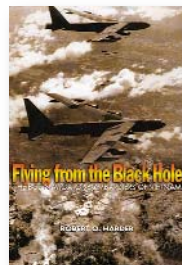
by Robert O. Harder. Naval Institute Press, 2009. 336 pp., \$34.95.

**THE WHITE-HOT BLAST** of a surface-to-air missile's fragmentation warhead marks the climax of Robert O. Harder's tribute to Vietnam-era B-52 combat crews. The author flew 145 combat missions in the "Black Hole" of the title: the deafening, cramped workplace of the two men responsible for putting a B-52's bombs precisely on target. In this dark hell of screaming turbines and teeth-jarring turbulence, the navigator and radar navigator (bombardier) guided their crew to the bomb release point. Their tools: a late-1950s radar set and an electromechanical, analog bombing computer, complete with knobs, pulleys, and vacuum tubes.

Like a B-52 on takeoff roll, *Black Hole* takes a while to build momentum: It lingers too long on the history of aerial navigation and bombing, the origins of the Strategic Air Command, and navigator training curricula. But Harder uses the buildup to the 1972 Linebacker II bombing campaign to craft a larger portrait of the SAC crew experience, from cold war alerts to hot bombing runs over Vietnam.

During Linebacker II, the Air Force lost 15 B-52s, and 33 Stratofortress crewmen were killed or declared missing. But Harder shows that crews overcame SAC's initial by-the-book tactics and Hanoi's defenses to win the climactic air battle over North Vietnam. I learned more about the discipline and tactics of B-52 crews over Hanoi from this book than I did from flying the B-52 a decade later.

■ ■ ■ TOM JONES IS A FORMER B-52D AIRCRAFT COMMANDER AND NASA ASTRONAUT.



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