**Bowen Weisheit’s Book**

Navy Ensign C. Markland Kelly made history in an inauspicious manner, by failing to safely ditch his Wildcat fighter when he ran out of fuel during the Battle of Midway. According to witnesses, the young pilot defied convention by gliding downwind onto the water instead of upwind, preserving some lift. The result was more of a crash than a ditching, and it cost Kelly his life.

How did he thereby make history? Had Kelly followed the example of other VF-8 pilots who safely ditched and were rescued, his close friend Bowen Weisheit would have had little reason 40 years later to investigate the track of the USS *Hornet* air group at Midway. That investigation led to the stunning realization that Kelly and VF-8 went into the water very far from the location reported in the official record, revealing that something was quite wrong with the Navy’s account of the HAG during the battle.

Weisheit compiled his findings into a book, *The Last Flight of Ensign C. Markland Kelly, Junior, USNR,* which ultimately turned a fundamental piece of the battle’s history on its head. You probably know that story well, but on the chance that someone out there is new to this subject, check our review of the *Kelly* book here....

<http://www.midway42.org/Books/Update_Books2.aspx> (scroll down to #6)

....then, review the book’s impact upon the accepted history of the Battle of Midway here....

<http://www.midway42.org/Features/00-Weisheit-Transcripts-Intro.pdf>

All of that understandably generated huge interest in Weisheit’s book, especially after it became a key feature on the Roundtable. The demand for copies exceeded the author’s expectations, exhausting his inventory before he could get around to a second printing. Since the book had been privately published by Weisheit himself, his passing in 2009 effectively ended the book’s availability. Today you will be hard pressed to find a copy for sale, and any that turn up can be prohibitively expensive. (One of our members recently spotted it on eBay for $150.)

So, for those who have told us they’d like a copy of the book, there’s bad news and good news. The bad part you know: you’re not likely to find one any time soon, or ever.

The good news? This may come as a surprise, but the book itself is overrated. If you don’t have it, you’re not missing much, given that the heart of Weisheit’s thesis is fully covered in the above links plus numerous works by top tier historians like Lundstrom, Cressman, Parshall-Tully, Symonds, Toll, and others. Weisheit made his point (the “flight to nowhere”) via his veteran interviews and his well-crafted chart showing the actual tracks of the HAG’s four squadrons on the morning of 4 June 1942. Those comprise relatively few pages in his book; the rest is largely irrelevant, arguable, or simply wrong.

The book’s problems are covered in depth in our online review, above. Too much print is devoted to Kelly’s college days and the *Hornet’s* history after Midway, and multiple pages are wasted on Weisheit’s fixation with an alleged fault in the YE homing transmitter—disproven by numerous HAG pilots who found it consistently reliable.

So, if you’ve been searching in vain for the book, relax. Be satisfied with the facts of the Flight to Nowhere as related by those eminent authors (Lundstrom, et al) who have Weisheit’s thesis fully covered in their own works. Owning the book itself won’t tell you anything that hasn’t been told as well or better elsewhere, especially here.

--Ron Russell