

BOOK *Reviews*

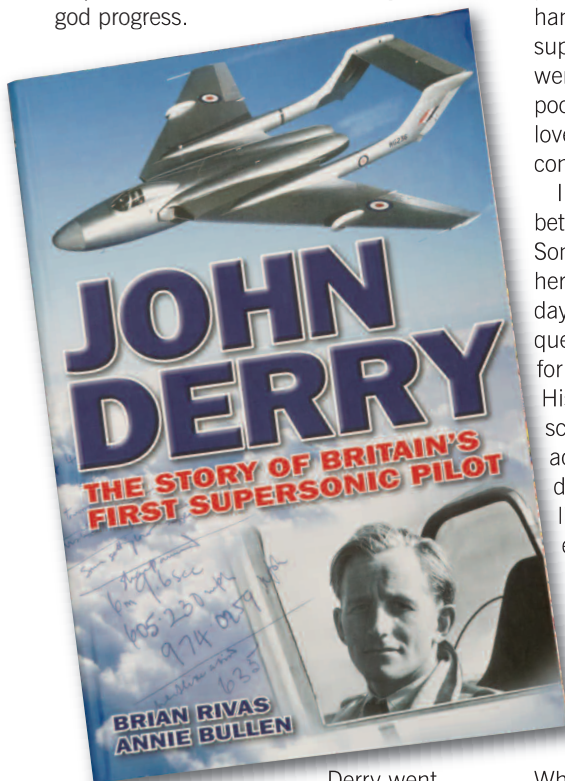
John Derry

The story of Britain's first supersonic pilot

Haynes publishing, £9.99

250 pages, three sections of b&w plates

The name of John Derry lives on in the Derry Turn and in the memory of that appalling Farnborough DH 110 fireball that claimed his life in 1952, together with those of his observer Tony Richards and 29 spectators. This book was first published in 1982 and seems to have been out of print for a while; Haynes have updated and reissued it, and I'm very glad they did. I had expected the usual steely-eyed-pilot stuff, full of derring-do and good old fashioned stiff upper lip fatalism; not a bit of it. Derry was very human, all too human perhaps. While all he ever wanted to do was fly, he also wanted to grow old and he didn't believe that being a de Havilland test pilot was a good way to do it. Towards the end of the war about 25 percent of Britain's test pilot population were killed every year – they were household names, heroic figures, and dispensable in the service of the great god progress.



Derry went supersonic in the DH 108, the aircraft which had killed Geoffrey de Havilland. Outwardly calm and dispassionate, he was privately hounded by his own demons. "It

shags you out, this business," he admitted. He slept badly and suffered from nightmares; his wife Eve was thrown out of bed as Derry dreamed of desperately trying to fight his way out of a burning aeroplane. He was thirty and looked fifty. The flight that killed him was to have been his last for de Havilland; he had made up his mind to leave the company, and not simply because he was putting his life on the line every day for less than an airline pilot's salary. He had resolved to join Gloster, which was ironic as their test pilot Bill Waterton was later to quit accusing the company of putting its profits before his life. Derry's worst nightmares came true when the DH 110 broke up at speed over the Farnborough crowd, and as the burned and mangled bodies of the spectators were dragged away, Neville Duke took off in the Hunter to strut his stuff, because the show had to go on. Next day the crowd at Farnborough was bigger than ever, 14,000 people. They were made of stern stuff in those days. – *Keith Hayley*

Reach for the Skies

By Richard Branson

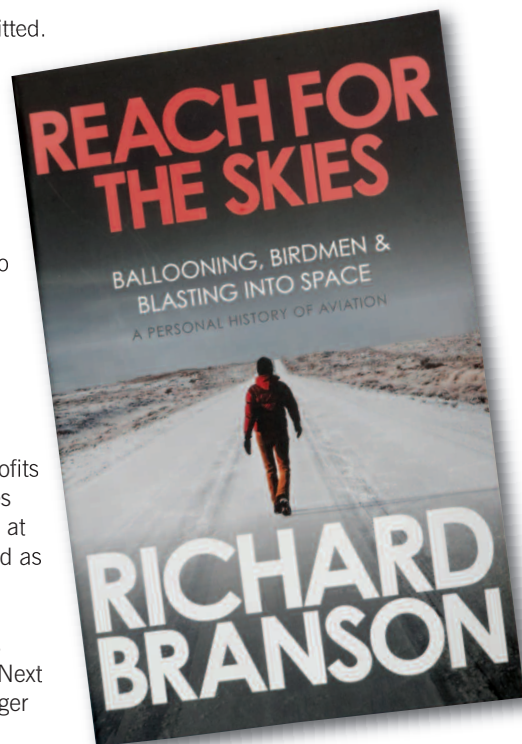
Ebury Publishing, £7.99

Colour plates, some b&w photos

The big question posed by this book is – why? Why does a man who's so loaded that if he dropped a thousand quid in the street he would lose money by stopping to pick it up take time off to crank out a left-handed potboiler about flying? Well, I suppose the answer is that if you and I were obscenely rich instead of obscenely poor, we'd do the same thing because we love it, and then there's the Virgin Books connection and all that.

I must say, if I had the dosh I'd insist on better quality than this rough paperback. Some of the black and white smudges in here would make you nostalgic for the days of Roneo. Anyway, there's no questioning the Great Beard's passion for aviation, nor his uncommon pluck. His hare-brained schemes and narrow scrapes need no introduction. He is accomplished at many forms of flying despite aviating without benefit of licence, an attitude which possible explains why he succeeds where I fail. The book is a history primer for those who know little or nothing about aviation, and as such it performs a service which only a public figure like Branson could carry off. From

Montgolfier to Rutan via Whittle, it takes the reader on a journey from Daedalus to the edge of space by a personal and idiosyncratic route which takes in many of Branson's DEATH DEFYING



ADVENTURES (it says here) and FEATS OF ENDURANCE AND SURVIVAL. You'd have to be a real anorak or a real novice to put this book at the top of your all-time greats list, but if it converts a single unbeliever it will all have been worthwhile. – *Pat Malone*

Leavesden Aerodrome From Halifaxes to Hogwarts

Grant Peerless and Richard Riding

Amberley Publishing, £16.99

190pp, many many b&w pictures

I love these books... two guys have sat down and written everything there is to know about Leavesden, which for the benefit of

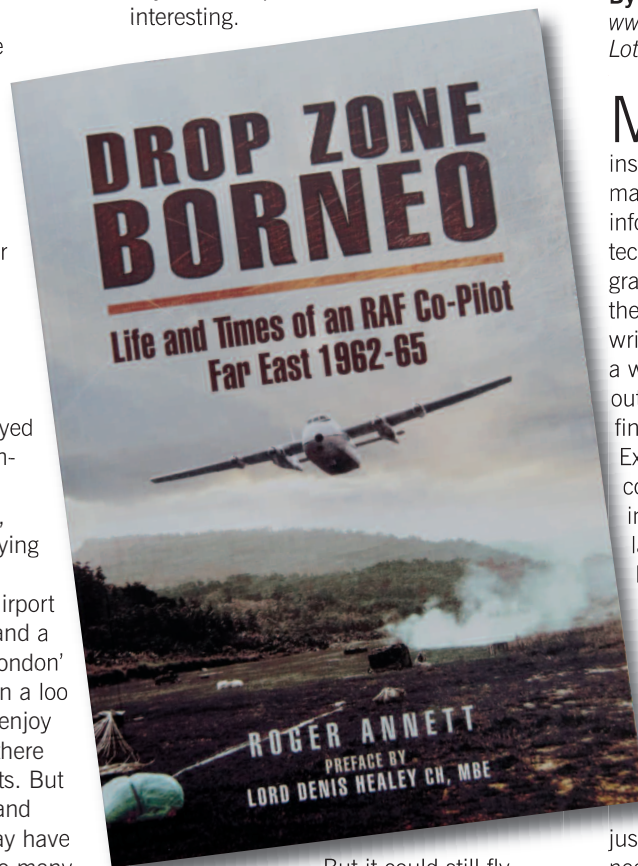


younger readers was a very good aerodrome until 1994. It's not like they've done it for the money – even mass-selling books are so unremunerative that they represent a labour of love, and I can't imagine Harry Potter-style queues of people wanting to lap up the history of a Home Counties airfield. But it is a fascinating history; Leavesden crammed a lot into its 54 years of life. Born at the outbreak of war, it was used by de Havilland to produce Handley Page Halifaxes, Armstrong Whitworth Albermarles and Vickers Wellingtons under contract. DH later manufactured their own Mosquitos there, and after the war its engine division began building Goblins at Leavesden. Several other turbines followed, including the Gnome for the Wessex helicopter. Years of forced, cack-handed amalgamations decimated the industry and DH was not spared – Leavesden, which had once employed 4,800 people in the highest of high-tech industries, was run down and placed in the hands of Rolls-Royce, which bankrupted itself in 1971 trying to swallow Bristol. DH had tried to develop Leavesden as a business airport and it was equipped with lighting and a VOR. The 'Executive Terminal for London' never amounted to much more than a loo and a vending machine, but it did enjoy 35,000 movements in 1973 and there were some cursory scheduled flights. But the rest is all film studios, decline and demise. If you're a GA pilot you may have a personal tie to Leavesden; with so many pictures here there's almost bound to be a registration you'll have in your log book. I notice I last flew there in 1988 – "big tarmac runway, had to backtrack the entire length, fee £3, nice café," my notes say. For more information, buy this book. – *Pat Malone*

Drop Zone Borneo
Life and times of an
RAF co-pilot, Far East 1962 – 65
Pen & Sword, £12.99
140 pp, section of b&w plates

This is interesting – a whole war I'd forgotten about, as I suspect had most who were alive at the time. The preface is by Denis Healey, whom I always granted a great deal of latitude when he was being a prat as Chancellor of the Exchequer because he'd been a beachmaster at Anzio and had seen a lot in his life. He was Defence Secretary when we had this 'confrontation' with Indonesia over Borneo, and he describes it in his memoirs as 'the most successful use of armed force in the 20th century'. Leaving aside the 'he would, wouldn't he,' argument, Roger Annett's account indicates that it was in

fact a fairly good show, where the people who had to do the job were mostly left to get on with it, and did it well. Annett's mount was an Armstrong Whitworth Argosy, a bit of an old dog because the Army had insisted on strengthening for heavy cargoes which added five tons to the plane, which never then carried the heavy cargoes it was strengthened for. On a hot day in the tropics it could be interesting.



But it could still fly; Annett records an incident where the dinghy hatches burst open on take-off and one of the inflated dinghies wrapped itself around the tailplane. The Argosy, at 97,000 lbs all up including squaddies, cargo and frightened aircrew, performs a negative-G outside loop and starts porpoising across the sky while the dinghy beats the elevators to death. Skill and luck save the day; on landing they find the accelerometer has recorded plus 6 and minus 5 G. Even without emergencies it was dodgy business, dropping supplies into jungle clearings below an uncooperative cloudbase in driving rain and tropical turbulence amid invisible and poorly-mapped mountains, but there was tedium, too; Annett tells of a time when the captain asked the navigator to explain some recent en-route heading changes, to be told they'd just flown around the navigator's coffee cup, which he couldn't be bothered to move off the chart. Not only is this a good

read, but it's an important contribution to our historical knowledge; I know of no other books on this, Britain's last military campaign in Asia. – *Pat Malone*

Ultimate Pilots Operating Handbook
Robinson R44

By Bastian Lieberman
www.bajalipublishing.com
Lots of graphs and charts, £13.99

Many's the time I've struggled through a Pilots Operating Handbook or an instruction manual and thought I could make a better job of conveying the same information. They're usually written by technicians for technicians – long on graphs and short on laughs – and deploy the kind of prose which represents the written equivalent of a bloke droning on at a whiteboard when the sun's shining outside. However... give it a go and you'll find it's not so easy to do it any other way. Explanations become lengthy and convoluted, jokes fall flat and (most importantly) the calluses on liability lawyers' palms start itching. Bastian Lieberman has had a go at sexing up the R44 handbook, and he's avoided all the problems of elongated explanations by including the graphs and diagrams, which calls into question the purpose of the enterprise. What we've got here is slightly different from the 44 handbook, slightly more accessible, but whether it's different enough to justify the outlay I'm not sure. You still need the kind of brain that absorbs concepts via this sort of data, rather than a brain that seizes up at the sight of a formula or a C of G diagram. That said, there are some interesting hints and tips in here, so if you're a 44 anorak, send away.

– *Pat Malone* ■

