

151 Bataljon, staaltjies en ook die bylaes met nuttige gegewens, voltooi die blik op 1SDB.

Pantser in Aksie is 'n aangename leeservaring vir die Weermaglid sowel as iemand wat buite die militêre sfeer staan. Die skrywer werk suinig en oordeelkundig met die militêre terminologie sodat die leser nie voel dat hy deur die taal uitgesluit word nie. Dieselfde leser word eweneens gemaklik in die soms vreemde militêre milieu tuisgemaak.'

L. Jooste, *Dokumentasiediens SAW, Privaatsak X289, Pretoria 0001.*

UNDER FIRE -

AN AMERICAN STORY

Oliver L. North with William Novak
1991

Harper Collins, Zondervan USA
446 pages

Illustrated

R 109 (Hardcover)

ISBN 0060183349

Under Fire is the official autobiography of Oliver North and is available in both hardcover and paperback editions. Although the former is of a considerably better quality and contains more photographs, the softcover is naturally less expensive and contains an extra chapter. From the first page, *Under Fire*, is a compelling read and remains so throughout, despite the substantial detail which does not lend itself to enhancing one's ability to understand the complex workings of the United States Federal Government. Rather than concentrating solely on the Iran-Contra scandal, *Under Fire* seeks to be much more and might better be described as a personalised history of Middle America. Although the book opens with the scandal and how news of it was broken to the world in November 1986, it soon rearranges itself into a chronological pattern and reverts to the days of Oliver North's childhood in upstate New York.

Set in what remains one of the happier and more prosperous periods of American history, tales from North's school days provide for animated and amusing reading. The writer has a dry sense

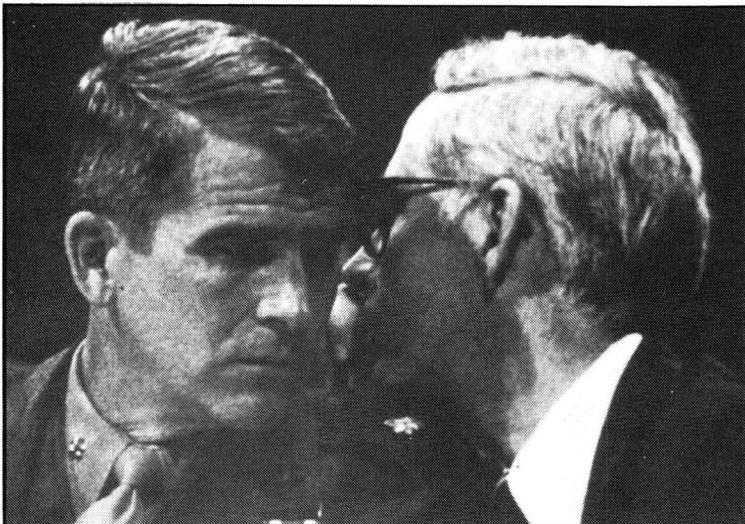
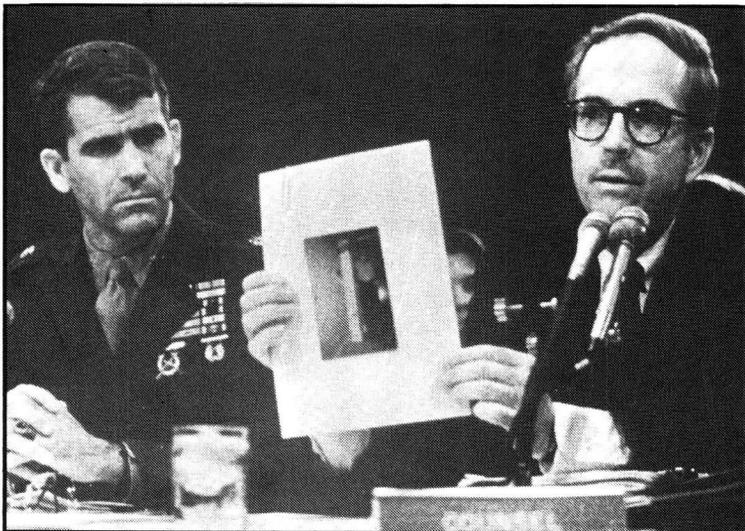
of humour which can be very appealing. The impression is conveyed that the North family members saw themselves as thorough-going patriots, which coloured young Ollie's outlook to some extent. For instance, he describes the Second World War as "the war that America won for the world", which is an utter perversion of the truth. Those who are interested in military matters will find the chapters on North's days at Annapolis and his early career as a marine infantry officer both absorbing and informative. His account of the Vietnam War is particularly refreshing, primarily because the motivations and viewpoints offered differ from what is politically acceptable. Written from the point of view of a soldier who believed implicitly in his country's need to be involved in Vietnam, it conveys the overwhelming sense of isolation felt by servicemen at that time. This is in stark contrast to the customary Vietnam reports of young men whose adverse war experiences apparently drove them to seek solace in the hippie movement.

After the war, Oliver North continued to serve in the Marine Corps as a training officer, instructing young marines on the finer points of ground combat. During this time he made tours of duty in Europe and Japan, and also served at various bases in the United States. In 1982, North was posted to the National Security Council in Washington D.C., where he was promoted to lieutenant colonel. At the NSC he became involved in foreign policy enterprises dealing with the Middle East and South America, which eventually erupted into the Iran-Contra-Gate scandal.

Few people have an in depth understanding of Iran-Contra, mainly due to the poor media reporting on the affair, which tended to become sidetracked with issues such as the sales statistics of Ollie North dolls or the size of the gap between the same person's front teeth. Iran-Contra actually covers two different secret operations that were carried out by the Reagan administration in the middle 1980's. The first phase was an attempt to develop an opening to the revolutionary government of Iran, which would hopefully

lead to the release of American hostages in the Lebanon who were being held by pro-Iranian Islamic groups. As a means to achieving this, the secret sale of arms to the Iranians in exchange for their cooperation was authorised. The second phase was an operation which comprised the administration's efforts to maintain covert American support for the Nicaraguan resistance, known as the Contras. This situation resulted after the United States Congress had forced the CIA to cease its support for the resistance as it was souring U.S. relations in central America. The two projects were eventually linked by a financial connection as well as the fact that several individuals were involved in both operations. The groundwork for both programmes was carried out by North under the direction of his superior, Admiral John Pointdexter, who in turn reported personally to the President and his advisors.

Due to the fact that it had done much to prevent dealings with these organisations, the Congress was consequently outraged when it learned of the administration's initiatives in this area. The President, who was well aware that his executive privileges did not extend to overruling bills ratified by Congress, therefore acted immediately to contain the damage and avoid possible impeachment. At the time of the congressional investigations into the affair, the official line from the ruling administration was that the President and his staff had not been aware that arms were being sold to the Iranians and that the resulting revenue was being channelled into the Nicaraguan resistance movement. White House spokesmen stated implicitly that this scheme was all the work of one marine lieutenant colonel with the possible knowledge of his superior, Admiral Pointdexter. Few people believed this to be the case at the time and North



During the congressional hearings, Brendan Sullivan insisted that he wasn't a potted plant. He's not. Potted plants don't tell you to cool off when you're angry. They don't kick your ankle under the table, either. (UPI/Bettmann)

was widely perceived as being the *fall guy*. In his autobiography North presents a convincing case for his own defence. At no point in the book does he attempt to deny involvement in arms sales or providing aid to the Contras. Yet what does become very clear is that President Reagan, his advisors and the members of the National Security Council were all fully aware of, and sanctioned, these activities. Although the full facts will probably never be known, what is obvious is that the Reagan administration acted to protect itself by offering Congress scapegoats. It remains astonishing to many observers that Reagan was able to escape a fate similar to that of fellow republican president, Richard Nixon, who, aside from experiencing acute public humiliation was also saddled with the ignominious nickname of "Tricky Dicky".

It is precisely because of this cover-up that *Under Fire* makes an important contribution to contemporary American history. The book presents a different viewpoint on many important events from the past three decades. Not least of these is the Iran-Contra scandal. To a large extent *Under Fire* is a successful exposé of the most spectacular presidential cover-up ever. Admittedly, at times, the sheer mass of facts can become heavy going, but on the whole it is very well written. From a grammatical point of view one is unfortunately subjected to American English, which can really be quite dreadful. Jarring sentences such as, "everything I owned fit into the back of my car" or "My students would occasionally tell me of being spit on", occur from time to time. Nevertheless the book's merits outweigh its flaws, it is well illustrated with photographs from private and press collections and is a story well told which ends on a subtle note of triumph. Oliver North is essentially an optimist and his belief in the American ideal has evidently survived. Many of us on the sidelines, however, continue to wonder that the myth of American justice and liberty has managed to endure for so long.

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**ACE OF ACES M ST J PATTLE:
TOP-SCORING ALLIED FIGHTER
PILOT OF WORLD WAR**

E.C.R. Baker

1992

Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing

pp 288

ISBN 1-874-80048-0

R75,95

Ace of aces deur E.C.R. Baker is die eerste boek in 'n nuwe reeks, *Aviators in Africa*, uitgegee deur Ashanti-Uitgewers. Hierdie reeks verwoord die wêreldwye erkenning vir hul vaardigheid en dapperheid in die lug gedurende die twee wêreldoorloë ontvang het. In *Ace of aces* word die kort, maar avontuurlike loopbaan van M.T. St John Pattle as die Geallieerdes se mees suksesvolle vegvlieënier uitgebeeld teen die agtergrond van die verdediging van Egipte en Griekeland gedurende Brittanje se donker dae van 1940\41.

Die outeur se lewendige belangstelling in en agtergrondskennis van veral die twee wêreldoorloë se vegvlieëniers en hul vliegtuie stel hom in staat om die biografie op 'n besonder boeiende en beskrywende wyse te verhaal. Baker, 'n voormalige onderwyser, is dan ook die outeur van verskeie artikels wat in die *Royal Air Force Review* verskyn het asook van 'n reeks biografieë wat deur William Kimber gepubliseer is onder die titel *The fighter aces of the Royal Air Force*. *Ace of aces* is saamgestel uit onderhoude en korrespondensie wat Baker met oud-medevlieëniers en grondpersoneel van Pattle gevoer het. Foto's, briewe, dagboeke en logboeke afkomstig van hierdie persone is as hoofbron vir die boek gebruik. Baker se navorsing is bemoeilik, daar alle amp telike rekords van 33 Eskader, waarvan Pattle vir 'n kort ruk die bevelvoerder was, met die Britse ontruiming van Griekeland in 1941 vernietig is om te voorkom dat dit in die hande van die oprukkende Duitse magte val. Baker gee aan die leser 'n blik in die daaglikse lewe van die Royal Air Force se vegvlieëniers en hul grondbemanning in Griekeland gedurende die winter van 1940\41, waar hul dikwels onder haglike toestande en sonder die nodige toerusting moes funksioneer. Die