

—“Muster, Rainy Morning,” by Mitchell Jamieson, USNR.

From Capt. of the Head to Comdr.

ALL THE SHIP'S AT SEA. By William J. Lederer. New York: William Sloane Assoc. 292 pp. \$3.

By LEWIS H. CONARROE

IN 1930 Bill Lederer, hospital apprentice, second class, was made captain of the head (latrine) in Barracks B, Newport, R.I. Taking his cue perhaps from Gilbert & Sullivan, he polished up the plumbing so carefully that now he's a Commander in the Reg Na-vee. It is as Cmdr. William J. Lederer, USN, though still an enlisted man at heart, that he looks astern to his gob days, his Annapolis training, and all subsequent duty and chronicles the high moments, meaning the many he can still laugh about, in an autobiography robust with chuckles.

“All the Ship's at Sea” (watch that apostrophe if you're to catch the spirit of the book) is a fast-paced, somewhat haphazard collection of yarns tending to prove that life among the Regulars can be mighty irregular if you lead sufficiently charmed a life, which Bill does with almost incredible consistency. Indeed, it is hard to tell in this engaging bull-session what is fiction and what is fact. A few characters seem believable enough. But others, like Blippo Burke, Abe Brown, and Leo-the-Lion Ridd, are either too good or too bad to take on faith. Likewise, Hymie O'Toole, Lederer's crony in and out of more picklements than you'll find in a dozen Dagwood cartoons. The whole book, in fact, repeats the predicament-climax-happy-ending formula of a daily comic strip.

Not that this proves offensive. “All the Ship's at Sea” is no book to be taken seriously. Thus, such antics as clouting a master-at-arms over the head with a can of jumbo asparagus and tattooing unprintable messages

on unmentionable parts of a Glasgow hussy named Maggie are not only allowable but, as Bill Lederer relates them, wildly hilarious.

On the other hand, the book has its serious chapters. The most exciting, and among the better written, describe the two gravest situations a Navy man can face: having his own ship shot from under him and standing as the defendant in a court martial. From the first of these experiences, reported in the Michener manner, Bill Lederer came out with a whole hide. From the second, because his counsel refused to let him present the very testimony that would clear him, he emerged rather skinned-up and doomed never again to take command at sea.

In spite of this injustice, plus the normal amount of gripes and grievances to be expected of an officer who has seen the Navy from the crew's cramped berthing as well as from wardroom country, Cmdr. Lederer manages to turn the other cheek. With all her faults, he wants it noted, he loves the Navy well. Yet one has the feeling the Commander has written with one eye carefully on his fitness report, speaking only as openly as he dares and glossing over many a regimental evil that secretly browns him off.

This book of rollicking reminiscences shows Bill Lederer to be a man with an undeniable flair of storytelling. It also demonstrates what has been said before: that a few years in the enlisted ranks as a prerequisite for Annapolis might result in both better leadership and improved morale throughout all levels of naval enlistment and command.

Lewis H. Conarroe is author of “Off My Sea Chest,” a book of reminiscences about Navy life.

Air Gospel

SLIPSTREAM: The Autobiography of an Air Craftsman. By Eugene E. Wilson. New York: Whittlesey House. 328 pp. \$4.50.

By C. R. SMITH

EUGENE E. WILSON, long-time naval officer and afterward a prominent aviation manufacturing executive, resigned his industrial connections last year, “convinced that the situation called for a new book on aviation, a sort of bible of air power, or at least its gospel.”

This is that book. That it finally fits neither exalted designation is no reflection on its actual accomplishment as an ardent and articulate narrative of a forthright fellow who was in the middle of many epic problems that have influenced the progress of aviation since 1924. Mr. Wilson is an admirable champion and disciple of Adm. William A. Moffett, who developed the technology of naval aviation while General Billy Mitchell was becoming the martyr of military air power. The author's statements on the swirling controversy between the Army and Navy air-power advocates during the early aeronautical days reveal a thoroughly disciplined point of view. He moves smoothly over the same subject as of recent and present times, with more diplomacy.

For the student of aviation progress, his documented story of engine experimentation in the Navy has particular interest. An Annapolis graduate, career naval officer, and for some time head of the engine section of the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics in the mid-Twenties, he helped bring about the acceptance of air-cooled airplane engines. This alone qualified him for a high place among the contributors to the improvement of the economics of air transportation.

Later on the book tells in an agreeable fashion the story of the author's participation in the complications prior to and during World War II, when he saw some of his theories tested and also experienced some of the headaches of war production as an industrial executive. He had resigned from the Navy to become an aviation manufacturing official with United Aircraft in 1929. The war slows down the narrative as he pauses for personal identifications and falters over occasional lapses in objectivity. But colorful reminiscences of these troubled times are provided for specialized readers. Some of the interpretations will provoke spirited discussions in ward-rooms, officers' clubs, and Pentagon corridors.

It is when the writer reaches the

postwar era that philosophical paradox rears its amorphous presence. He makes a strong point that the air transport operators and aircraft manufacturers suffer from over-regulation by the Government's bureaucratic agencies. He believes, most reasonably, that "economic regulation by political agency is an anachronism." But his stream of consistency wanders. In the first part of the book the author has not minimized the significant part played by Army and Navy contracts in supporting the fledgling aircraft industry. He does not follow through, in detail, the transition from departmental patronage to tightening bureaucratic controls that now surround aircraft manufacturing and air transport. The missing middle of the story is important to those who fear the lowering shadow of Governmental interference over vital private enterprises that affect public convenience and national welfare.

The influence of aviation on the daily lives of the people could have been stressed more if this had not been such a subjective narrative. But it remains a record of vision, struggle, and achievement, as well as an outspoken autobiography of a man whose opinions and activities have had a not inconsiderable impact on his industry.

C. R. Smith is president of American Airlines and a veteran aircraftsman.

Polio-Stricken Songstress

INTERRUPTED MELODY. By Marjorie Lawrence. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts. \$3.50.

By BETSEY BARTON

THE FIRST half of this book reads like an exuberant fairy tale. It has all the proper ingredients. An ugly duckling of a farm girl in Australia discovers she is endowed (by who knows what fairy godmother) with the gift of a golden voice. She dreams of running away to the city, where she will sing for a teacher who will clap his hands in amazement and beg to be allowed to train her. She will learn to be beautiful, she dreams, as beautiful as her voice is lovely, discarding her thick woolen farm clothes, her heavy farm-girl's figure. And she will leave Australia for Paris and New York, where her voice will capture the hearts of millions of people including, as all fairy tales must, that of a Prince Charming.

While she milked her father's cows each morning Marjorie Lawrence dreamed all these things and at an early age, and in rapid succession, made each one of them come true. She ran away to Melbourne and sang for Ivor Boustead, who realized at once that she had one of the greatest natural voices he had ever heard. After studying with him for a year she went

to Paris, where she worked with the famous Cécile Gilly. She got her first engagement in Monte Carlo and the French provinces. Then it was the Paris Opera and two years later the Met.

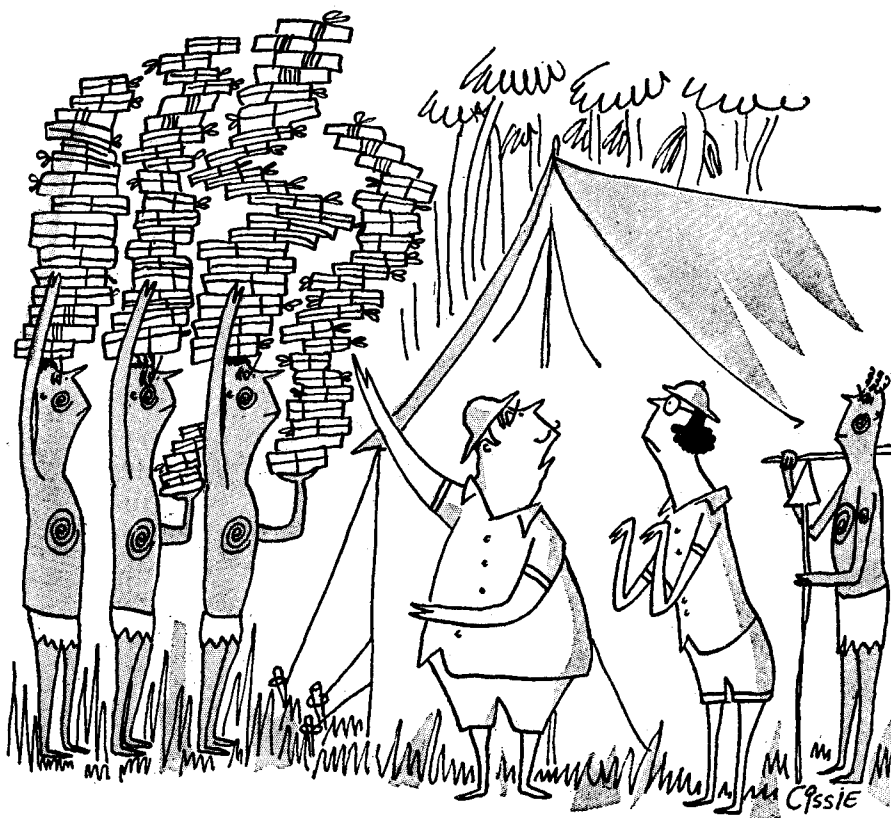
By 1941 Marjorie Lawrence had sung all over America, Europe, and South America. She had performed with the most brilliant singers and conductors in the music world on its most famous opera stages, in its most celebrated concert halls. She had met, fallen in love with, and married Dr. Thomas King, with whom she was ideally happy. Everywhere she was acclaimed as one of the world's top opera stars.

But here the fairytale ends.

In Mexico, soon after her honeymoon, while singing "Die Walküre" she fell to the floor consumed with agonizing pains. Several days later she was completely paralyzed. In terror, her husband took her to Hot Springs, then to Sister Kenny in Minneapolis, where he learned the Kenny treatment. But the months brought little improvement. When it was time for the season at the Met to begin Marjorie Lawrence knew she would not be there. "Those dead legs do the Salome dance! That awkward arm flaunt Brunhilde's shield! Those awkward fingers click Carmen's castenets! This body lure a Tristan or a Scarpia. No . . . no."

The fairy tale is indeed over; reality begins. But the reader feels no sense of loss, for here is the record of one of the most appealing love stories in history. Marjorie Lawrence fought to learn to sing again, and did. She sang from her wheelchair in wartime on the farthest battlefields to which our troops had been sent. She sang for them, the wounded and the despairing, and at the same time she sang for herself, drawing courage and strength from each of her own performances. Five years after her illness, after immense effort and exercise, she sang as she had once thought she might never again sing—standing up.

That she accomplished all this is enormously to her credit, but it is perhaps more to the credit of her husband, Dr. Thomas King. His devotion to her never failed, his faith in her recovery became her own, as did his faith in God. Whenever she had mastered one thing, made one little gain, he urged her ahead, pushed her on to something new. He had given up his own life that they might create one together. Each of her victories was therefore a triumph for them both. On this principle he helped rebuild her life.



"Gad, Myrtle, we forgot to cancel the book clubs!"