



American and British Aircraft Carrier Development, 1919-1941

Thomas C. Hone, Norman Friedman

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The development of aircraft carriers and carrier operations sparked a revolution in military affairs, changing completely and irrevocably the prosecution of war at sea. Previous studies and histories of carrier aviation have focused on just one or two factors, such as individual leadership or advances in aviation technology, to explain the development of carrier forces. By contrast, this new history compares the development of carriers and carrier aircraft by two very different navies to illuminate the many factors that effect the adoption of new military technology.

Focusing on the critical years after World War I, the authors trace the personal, organizational, and institutional elements that moved the U.S. Navy and the Royal Navy along different paths of aircraft carrier development and operations. In a clear, almost conversational tone the authors draw on years of research to explain why and how the Royal Navy lost its once considerable lead in carrier doctrine and carrier aircraft development to the Americans in the years after 1919.

Originally asked to produce a study for the Office of the Secretary of Defense that would maximize the value of decreasing defense funds through wise investment in new technologies, the authors revised and expanded that work after a wide-ranging, international search for previously unused primary sources. This new effort offers both compelling history and a trenchant essay on how and why military organizations adopt and develop revolutionary technology. Its unconventional approach should appeal to readers interested in modern naval history and in revolutions in military affairs.

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