

## Naval War College Review

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Volume 31  
Number 1 *Fall*

Article 31

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1978

# The Fast Carriers: The Forging of an Air Navy, 2d ed.

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### Recommended Citation

Buell, Thomas and Reynolds, Clark G. (1978) "The Fast Carriers: The Forging of an Air Navy, 2d ed.," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 31 : No. 1 , Article 31.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol31/iss1/31>

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"tinsel") had just been introduced, he wished to let these run before using window. Thus the use of window was postponed for another 6 months.

Saundby's thoughts were a mirror of those of General Milch, Luftwaffe Director of Air Equipment, who about the same period said "There is only one worry for us, that the enemy will again catch us on the hop with some radar trickery and we will have to start trotting after him again."

Mandrel, which put noise jamming into the *Freya* early warning radar, and tinsel, which jammed the ground-control radio frequencies, went into service with immediate success. Soon however, the German radar operators got used to mandrel and found how to get round it. They detuned their sets and spread their frequencies and the fighters learned how to home onto jamming. Within 3 months, mandrel had all but lost its effect. Tinsel continued in use until the end of the war, although the Germans were forced to use higher power transmitters and introduce new frequencies. The experience of these two devices shows that Electronic Warfare is a fast-moving campaign where victories are relative, not absolute. Enemy measures, defensive or offensive, can be hampered but never definitely negated. Given time, the adversary will produce antidotes or new equipments immune to the jamming in use.

During all this period the *Wurzberg* ground control radar, the backbone of German Air Defense system, remained unjammed and General Kammhuber, its commander, developed the tactic of coordinating radar, searchlights, flak and night fighters to a high pitch of success. Some of his pilots felt that the system was too rigid and sought to find free-ranging tactics more suited to their personalities. Maj. Hajo Herrman led this group and was allowed limited experiments with day-fighters, using the illumination given by searchlights and the flares used by the British bombers. Nicknamed

"Wild Boar," these tactics were not encouraged as they raised problems of coordination with the flak gunners.

Eventually permission was given for the RAF to use window, and all was set for massive attacks on Hamburg beginning on 24 July 1943. Seven hundred and forty-six bombers attacked that night and the effect of the first use of window was devastating. It appeared as if over 10,000 aircraft were attacking the city. Searchlights, fighters and flak were directed onto false targets and confusion reigned on the German side. Only 11 British aircraft were lost instead of the expected 50. The second night, however, Major Hermann was allowed to use his "Wild Boar" tactics and in the light of fires caused by the bombing started to score successes. By the time the attack was shifted to Berlin, in August, Wild Boar was in full effect, and British loss rates had risen to almost the same level as prewindow days. The 6 months virtual immunity originally hoped for was reduced to a few weeks by the Luftwaffe's swift introduction of tactics only lightly dependent on electronics.

Those responsible for organizing and operating Electronic Warfare equipments and for coordinating E.W. with general tactics will find this book both interesting and useful. They will find that many of their bright ideas have been thought of before, albeit in different parts of the electromagnetic spectrum, perhaps, and under very different conditions. With *Instruments of Darkness* as a guide, the painful reinvention of the electronic warfare wheel may be shortcircuited.

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Reynolds, Clark G. *The Fast Carriers: The Forging of an Air Navy*. 2d ed. Huntington, N.Y.: Robert E. Krieger, 1978. 502pp.

This second edition of *The Fast Carriers*, first published by McGraw-Hill in

## 130 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

1968, poses several philosophical questions on the study of naval history. Samuel Eliot Morison once said the purpose of history is to find out what happened, and why. Most historians would agree. But discerning the truth is particularly difficult in studying the history of war, as Liddell Hart so eloquently addressed in his short treatise, *Why Don't We Learn From History?* Liddell Hart's thesis was that too often flag and general officers have altered the records of their participation in war so that historians might later be persuaded to judge them favorably. Consequently naval and military historians should approach their tasks with caution, skepticism, and humility, for what seems true today may be proven false tomorrow. To emphasize his point, Liddell Hart quoted the American historian, Henry Adams, who replied to a questioning letter: "I have written too much history to believe in it. So if anyone wants to differ from me, I am prepared to agree with him." Liddell Hart then added his own postscript: "The study of war history is especially apt to dispel any illusions—about the reliability of men's testimony and their accuracy in general, even apart from the shaping of facts to suit the purposes of propaganda."

When Dr. Reynolds first published *The Fast Carriers* 10 years ago, he had taken on one of the most emotional subjects of the Second World War. Airpower, whether naval or military, too often fails to be treated calmly or objectively. It arouses passions either for or against and as a new and untested form of warfare struggling for status during the Second World War, it was subject both to extravagant claims and to violent denunciations. The wartime efforts of Army Air Force extremists to unify all of the nation's air forces into one service exacerbated suspicions and hostilities even more. Given these controversies, a balanced, impartial, unbiased study of the role of naval

airpower was needed and would have been welcomed.

Unfortunately, neither edition of *The Fast Carriers* entirely meets these criteria. Instead, both editions too often uncritically reflect the views of proponents who asserted that naval airpower alone could defeat Japan, that naval aviators were best qualified to direct the war against Japan, and that an antiaviation conspiracy (presumably battleship officers) thwarted their enlightened concepts of modern naval warfare. The source material often was selectively chosen to support these theses, with unduly heavy reliance on uncorroborated entries in the self-serving diaries of John H. Towers and Frederick C. Sherman.

Reynolds' views have not changed with time in this second edition. In an unusual preface to this edition, the author quotes favorable extracts from reviews of the first edition. "*The Fast Carriers*," the author concludes, "has, thus far at least, stood the test of time and historical evaluation, hence there is no reason for the original text to be altered in any significant way. The writer is therefore pleased to introduce to a new generation of readers a revised edition which is different only in corrected minor errors, an updated bibliography, and the inclusion of some previously unavailable but important documentary materials..." The author does acknowledge that in recent years at least two historical writers have disagreed with certain aspects of his book, but they are dismissed as having chosen "to ignore the challenges made about their subjects in *The Fast Carriers*."

How, then, has *The Fast Carriers* stood the test of time? Certainly it retains its proaviation bias and fails to recognize that defeating Japan required the combined seapower resources of the United States: airpower; amphibious forces; submarines; mobile logistical support; and civilian industrial capacity.

No one component of seapower alone could have defeated Japan, but the carrier advocates continued to insist that if given a free hand the fast carriers could have destroyed the Imperial Navy and thus rendered Japan helpless, quickly ending the war. Yet these same advocates failed to recognize that a decisive sea battle was possible only if both fleets were willing to fight. But the Japanese were not inclined to risk their fleet unless they had a chance of winning and therefore could not be expected to cooperate—and after the Battle of Midway the Imperial Navy fought only when an amphibious assault had begun. In these cases the American naval commander was faced with two incompatible missions, covering the invasion or leaving the troops in order to seek a remote sea battle. Spruance at Saipan and Halsey at Leyte will forever manifest this classic dilemma.

Towers is the protagonist of *The Fast Carriers* and rightly so as he was the principal American naval airpower advocate of the war. The author asserts that King so disliked Towers that he banished Towers from Washington to Pearl Harbor and then denied Towers a command at sea. This view is based upon Towers' mistaken perception rather than reality. Towers was so accustomed to his role of martyr that he had become almost paranoid by the Second World War. He and King had been friends before the war; indeed, when King had been Chief of the Bureau of Naval Aeronautics in the early 1930s, he had saved Towers' career when the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery had wanted to retire Towers owing to defective vision. King had prevailed upon Leahy, then Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, to retain Towers on active duty because of his importance to naval aviation. One evening in the late 1930s, however, Towers insulted King in a drunken argument and from then on Towers felt that King held a grudge that forevermore had hurt

Towers' career. Towers did not realize that King was accustomed to such insults and promptly forgot them. Indeed, the only people King could not forgive were lazy, careless, or stupid. Towers was none of these.

In reality, King was acutely aware of the dissatisfaction of the aviators early in the war, and it was he who initiated the controversial Yarnell survey described in Chapter Two. King sent Towers to Pearl Harbor because King recognized that Nimitz was ignorant about airpower and might unintentionally misuse the Pacific Fleet's carriers. Given Towers' seniority and dominant personality, King could rely upon him to see that the carriers were properly employed. Certainly Towers wanted to go to sea—every respectable flag officer disliked being ashore—but King insisted that personal desires had to be set aside for the good of the service. Towers was needed ashore at Pearl Harbor. There were plenty of other aviators who could command the carriers at sea, but only Towers had the authority and prestige to protect the best interests of naval aviation within CINCPAC headquarters. And Towers did this so vigorously that Nimitz came to dislike him intensely. When King recommended that Towers go to sea in early 1945, Nimitz adamantly refused to agree.

Despite the author's assertion that nothing new has been found over the past 10 years that would affect his text, there has been a number of new facts that could have been incorporated into the second edition. The case of Miles Browning is an example. The author continues to state that Browning was a tactical genius at Midway, and time and again cites Browning as the epitome of an aviator chief of staff for a surface flag officer. Browning's role at Midway has, in fact, been discredited in recent years. Even Morison has admitted that Browning had been more a burden than an asset to Spruance. Browning's ineptness had become so notorious by 1943

## 132 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

that King demanded that Nimitz replace him without delay as Halsey's chief of staff.

On the contrary, then, new sources and new interpretations have appeared in the past decade which could have been incorporated into this second edition. It is regrettable that the text does not reflect them. Nevertheless, *The Fast Carriers* is valuable, not as a balanced history of naval aviation, but rather as a mirror of the views of naval aviators seeking recognition for their service. Its summary of technical developments is also valuable. No other book has done as well in describing the emergence of the carrier as a principal tactical weapon of the Navy in the Second World War. Thus by its uniqueness, despite its flaws, *The Fast Carriers* remains as an important book on the history of naval warfare.

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Rohwer, Jürgen. *The Critical Convoy Battles of March, 1943*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1977. 356pp.

The Atlantic Ocean frequently has been the scene of great battles. Perhaps the most intense of these conflicts was during what Winston Churchill called the 20th century's "forty years war." The outcome of both the First and Second World Wars depended to a significant degree on the results of submarine against convoy in the Atlantic.

Jürgen Rohwer, noted German naval historian and editor of *Marine Rundschau*, has exhaustively researched a brief but crucial period in this theater. The Battle of the Atlantic—Germany's attempt in World War II to intervene decisively in the seaborne flow of material from the United States to England—reached a point of crisis during the winter of 1942-1943. During the last quarter of 1942, for the first time since the beginning of the war, Allied production of merchant shipping

exceeded losses (both to weather and Axis activities). In May 1943 Churchill surveyed the Atlantic situation, as well as that in North Africa, Russia, and the Pacific, and declared the "end of the beginning" of winning the war. The intervening period—January through April 1943—was of decisive importance.

"Few outside the two Navies and merchant marine," wrote Samuel Eliot Morison,

realized how serious the situation had become in March 1943. The U-boats . . . sank 108 ships that month, totaling 627,000 tons, and lost only 15 of their number. So many Allied escort vessels were under repair that the group organization was disintegrating. So many U-boats were at sea . . . that evasive routing was futile . . . No enemy ever came so near to disrupting Atlantic communications as [Germany] did that month.

It is precisely that month, March 1943, that Rohwer addresses in his book. In particular, he describes the events surrounding the transits of the convoys designated SC. 122, HX. 229, and HX. 229A.

The author has intensively researched both Allied and German sources to produce a greatly detailed narrative. So great is the detail, in fact, that *Critical Convoy Battles* is a book for the specialist. It is itself a valuable historical source document. Included in the 200 pages of text and the 153 pages of appendixes and bibliography is a wealth of information about the participants—the men as well as the ships—from both sides in the Battle of the Atlantic. The book also contains many detailed diagrams and tables. The photographs are so numerous and excellent that they alone justify the book's purchase.

The convoys discussed were attacked almost continuously during their transit. Although the Germans regarded this battle, occurring primarily from 16-19 March, as a victory—no U-boats were