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E. R. Johnson. *United States Naval Aviation, 1919-1941: Aircraft, Airships and Ships between the Wars.* Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2011. 352 pp. $45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-4550-9.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey

Burke on Johnson

This is a book that does not quite live up to its advertising but is, nevertheless, worth owning. The description on the back cover (and in the McFarland catalog) claims that "The critical factors that shaped Naval Aviation after World War I–naval treaties, fleet tactics, government programs, leadership and organization, as well as the emergence of Marine Corps and Coast Guard aviation–are discussed in depth." The book does not deliver the "in depth" part: Johnson's discussion of these factors consists of about five pages of introduction as well as brief portions of text preceding the different divisions of the book. These are synthesized from published secondary sources and lack specific citations. I suspect the descriptive text was written by an editor or someone in the sales department, since Johnson's preface describes this introduction more accurately as "a historical summary listing the major influences" on Naval Aviation. (Johnson uses the term inclusively, specifically addressing Marine Corps and Coast Guard aviation as well.)

Given the small space allotted to it, it is no surprise that the introduction brushes lightly across the broad history of interwar influences on U.S. Naval Aviation. Nor can I fault his selection of a half-dozen Navy officers and one Marine who played important roles in interwar aviation, though I am surprised that the Navy list did not include John Towers. Roy Geiger is a good choice to represent the Marine Corps, but it is arguable whether he is a better choice (if you must choose only one) than Alfred A. Cunningham, Thomas C. Turner, or Ross E. Rowell, all of whom also headed Marine Aviation in the interwar period and made contributions outside this role as well.

Johnson's introduction and the material introducing each part and section of the book, while interesting, present nothing new to a scholar of Naval Aviation. The real strength of the book is as reference material for Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard Aviation from (roughly) Armistice Day to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Johnson has ordered his book into three parts, covering heavier-than-air craft, lighter-than-air craft, and aviation ships. This kind of reference usually relegates lighter-than-air craft to an appendix, if it addresses them at all, and the inclusion of (water-borne) ships makes this volume a real rarity.

Within each part, entries are ordered first by type, and then by chronological appearance. (Given that he includes some airplane designs that never got beyond one experimental prototype, I presume the order is defined either by first flight or the date of delivery to the Navy for testing. Johnson does not make this clear.) Within heavier-than-air craft, the types are: attack (which includes torpedo planes, torpedo/bombers, and scout/bombers); fighters (including fighter/bombers); observation and scout aircraft; patrol aircraft; and trainer, transport, and utility aircraft. Johnson's entries include autogyros evaluated for use as observation aircraft and gliders acquired to train Marine pilots for glider-borne assaults (a plan that never materialized). Lighter-than-air craft are separated into rigid and non-rigid types. This organization does allow the reader who goes through the entries to see the many turns and occasional dead ends in the development of each aircraft type. Looked at this way, the wandering path of technical development becomes clearer, and the reader gets a better sense of why some models were put into production while others were not, though this organization does mean greater reliance on the index if the book used as a reference volume.

The third part of the book, "Aviation-Related Ship Development," includes the usual lineup of aircraft carriers and light carriers (of which there was one of the latter in the Navy inventory before the Pearl Harbor attack: the *USS Long Island*, launched in June 1941). In addition, Johnson includes seaplane and airship tenders, and seaplane-equipped warships–not only battleships and cruisers, but also the interwar experiments

with submarines, destroyers, and gunboats. He even includes the interwar flying deck cruiser proposal that never got beyond the design stage.

Appendices cover foreign aircraft and airships acquired by the Navy during the period as well as experimental racing aircraft. Typical of this type of reference book, the appendices include an explanation of the Navy designation codes for airplanes, airships, squadrons, and (since he covers them) relevant ship types along with the dates those codes were in use. In the case of ships, the presentation is potentially misleading: it identifies several designations as types "assigned to aviation," which might lead someone to interpret this as a special code for aviation ships, when in fact those designations were for the type as a whole and were not different for those ships reassigned to aviation duties. For instance, Johnson gives "AC= Coal Collier assigned to aviation," when all colliers (he uses the redundant "coal collier" consistently in the text as well) carried the designation AC regardless of their status with aviation–the leading "A" standing for "auxiliary," not "aviation." However, this is a minor point. Johnson also includes a useful list of common abbreviations employed in Naval Aviation, as well as a glossary of both naval and aeronautical terms.

Johnson has provided excellent three-view line drawings (with split dorsal/ventral plan view) of all heavier-than-air craft and profile drawings of all lighter-than-air craft in the book (very useful for researchers attempting to identify aircraft photographed from odd angles. In addition, every aircraft and most of the ship entries include at least one photo of the vehicle being described. There are also eight pages of colored plates showing profiles of selected aircraft, though because there is no explanation for the mostly similar-looking paint schemes and markings, these would seem to be mainly decorative for anyone not already familiar with such details.

The book has the typical problems of any heavily illustrated work with a dynamic layout: the text flowing around the illustrations is sometimes hard to follow to the next text block, and illustrations occasionally appear overleaf from their associated text. But these are not fatal flaws.

Johnson has selected only aircraft and vessels assigned to aviation that appeared on the Navy's equipment lists between 1919 and 1941.(For ships, the relevant date seems to be the date it was assigned to aviation duties in the case of converted or non-specialist vessels, or the date of launching for aviation vessels built as such.) Though his intention is to cover the interwar period, his aircraft entries stray a little bit into WWII by including experimental prototypes of designs whose production models did not appear until well into the Second World War. Because so many of the ships he has included saw service throughout the war, this part of the book slips easily into wartime developments and, in some cases, even early Cold War history.

United States Naval Aviation, 1919-1941 is not the U.S. Navy equivalent of Maurer Maurer's *Aviation in the U.S. Army, 1919-1939* (1987), in spite of what the back cover might suggest. I do think it would serve as a good starting point for someone wishing to learn the issues confronting and shaping interwar U.S. Naval Aviation, and the careful, patient reader will be able to follow the meandering development of airplanes, airships, and aviation ships between the two world wars. The work does, however, deserve space on a reference bookshelf, for it brings together in one volume information otherwise scattered across many sources, and provides good photographs and the oh-so-useful three-view drawings.

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