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Wonderful Flying Machines: A History of U.S. Coast Guard Helicopters

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recognized that the Navy itself had sound thinkers in the command field, but he found that many naval officers were novices at the conference table or in general staff work. The most brilliant concept, he would point out, is of no significance without the wherewithal to pursue it.

As Deputy CNO for Logistics back at the Pentagon, Carney found a difficult postwar situation within the Navy, with personal resentments, animosities, and buried feelings over some of the events of World War II. There were also strong convictions on the part of the aviators, submariners, and amphibious people that they were respectively the only ones who "had fought, bled, and died." As Carney expressed it, "You have to be deactivated for awhile after you have come out of a fighting environment. . . . You're not a very good guy to live with."

The struggle over unification is described in some detail, and the reader is given a ringside seat and an understanding of what went on, and "how we got here from there."

Although Carney retired over forty years ago, his observations about the Washington scene are not dated; they can be very helpful to the new war college graduate headed for the Pentagon. One recalls the old French saying, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Personalities change, people change, weapons change, but the wheel need not be reinvented. Problems of one era are not necessarily unlike those of the next.

In the mind of this reviewer, two items in Admiral Carney's Pentagon experience stand out. When Francis P. Matthews became Secretary of the Navy in 1949, he was heard to say that there

was not an admiral in whom he could have confidence or could trust. He later admitted that he had changed his opinion. The other concerns Carney's views on the assignment of fleet commanders. He felt that this was a military decision and that he was the best judge. The Secretary, a civilian, had a horizon limited by the corridors of the Pentagon but had a tendency to take a strong position in the assignments of commands of operating forces. Admiral Carney predicted that this would be an ever-recurring phenomenon. In 1996, thirty years later, it is safe to say he is still right!

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On 7 December 1941, a U.S. Coast Guard aviator, Lieutenant Frank A. Erickson, ran to his General Quarters station, a control tower on Ford Island. His post gave a vast panorama of the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor. As Erickson watched, he saw there was no method for rapidly recovering the large number of sailors floundering helplessly in the water. Some months earlier, Erickson had read an article by Igor Sikorsky describing a small helicopter he had developed. Erickson felt that here was the ideal rescue tool for U.S. Coast Guard aviators to help those in distress. From this time forward, Erickson was consumed—and this word does not adequately convey his fervor—by an effort

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to bring the U.S. Coast Guard to adopt the strange machine as a rescue tool.

Barrett T. ("Tom") Beard, a retired U.S. Coast Guard fixed-wing and helicopter pilot with a master's degree in history, uses Erickson's unpublished papers to trace the struggle for acceptance of the rescue in the U.S. Coast Guard. Most readers of naval history do not know the Coast Guard can rightfully claim that "they created the helicopter envisioned by Sikorsky . . . and Erickson. The other military services . . . reaped the benefits of this early development and expanded on it." This book, however, is much more than the recounting of the difficulties of making a military organization accept a strange new technology. How a machine can go from being labeled a "flying palm tree" to becoming one of the service's better-known resources is indeed an interesting story, one that Beard tells very well. There are, however, two additional currents running through this book.

The first involves the inner workings of the United States' smallest armed force, little known to most readers of naval history, or even to members of the other four, larger armed forces. *Wonderful Flying Machines* brings out the very divisive arguments between those who felt the Coast Guard's aviation arm should consist only of fixed-wing aircraft and those, led by the strong personality of Erickson, who saw rotary-wing craft as the only logical means of rescuing those in distress at sea. Leading the fixed-wing advocates was the forceful, cigar-smoking Captain Donald B. MacDiarmid. MacDiarmid had graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy "through the grace of God and somebody's mistake" but became arguably

the best seaplane pilot in the Coast Guard. "MacDiarmid was a cockpit man. His mission, as he saw it, was to save lives and, moreover, prove the seaplane capable of that task." The strong personalities of the two opposing advocated form a compelling part of this history.

Although Erickson is known by many Coast Guard aviators for his efforts, there is another little-known Coast Guard officer in this story, Captain William J. Kossler, who is responsible for initiating the program which led to helicopter development. Kossler basically used Erickson as the visible point man, while he worked quietly at headquarters. However, Kossler died while the project was in its infancy.

A second interesting current running through this history is that of the officers who sacrificed their careers for an idea. When military officers are finished with this book, they may ponder the questions the author poses: "Is there now a place for new men and women of the Coast Guard, or of any military service, to assume the roles of a Kossler or an Erickson and create a contribution to society as significant as the helicopter? Will managers of today or of the future recognize and support this type of genius?"

This is one of those rare histories that show the contributions which the United States Coast Guard has made to naval history. The book is recommended to anyone interested in military and naval history, either in or out of aviation.

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