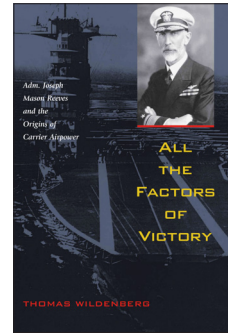


Book Review

All the Factors of Victory: Admiral Joseph Mason Reeves and the Origins of Carrier Airpower



By Thomas Wildenburg

Publisher: US Naval Institute Press (15th January 2019) (ISBN-13: 9781682472996), 352 pages

Reviewed by Dr Steven Paget

Biography: Dr Steven Paget is the University of Portsmouth's Director of Academic Support Services at Royal Air Force College Cranwell. Prior to that, he was a lecturer in strategy and operations at the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Command and Staff College and an NZDF Teaching Fellow at the Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Massey University.

Introduction

Admiral Joseph Mason Reeves, the first United States Navy (USN) aviation-qualified officer to reach flag rank, has been referred to as 'the father of carrier warfare'. It is somewhat ironic that an officer that achieved public notoriety during his service has been subjected to such limited scholarly attention in the historiography. Thomas Wildenberg should be commended for shining further light on Admiral Reeves – described by the book's author as 'an extremely talented officer, well versed in all aspects of naval science' (p. 265) – given his pivotal influence on the development of US naval aviation. The contribution of Reeves has perhaps been undervalued by his pioneering work on naval aviation being conducted during peacetime, even though the legacies of his efforts were evident during the Second World War. His eventual specialism in naval aviation was mutually beneficial. Reeves undoubtedly helped to advance carrier aviation, but the increasing prominence and importance of naval aviation may also have helped to progress his career.

The book examines the length of Reeves' career, involving a range of sea and shore appointments, and spanning the Spanish-American War, the First World War and the Second World War. The detailed examination of each of his appointments buttresses Wildenberg's conclusion that innovations by Reeves 'laid the foundations for all of the major tenets of modern carrier doctrine' (p. 266). In *All the Factors of Victory*, Wildenberg has not only produced a detailed and informative biography of Reeves, but a window into the history of the USN during a crucial time in its development. The book provides insights into life at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis in the late 19th Century and touches briefly on significant issues such as the intersection of civilian and military aviation and the importance of competition in the aviation industry. *All the Factors of Victory* also does an excellent job of detailing Reeves' navigation of the potential minefield of career progression. While Reeves is the focus of the book, Wildenberg weaves the contributions and innovations of other officers (both well known and less so) into the narrative, but could perhaps have examined the wider trends in naval aviation in greater detail for context.

Whilst the book discusses a wealth of material of historical interest, it is also replete with anecdotes and examples of contemporary relevance, aside from the obvious issue of the employment of carrier air power. As Wildenberg notes, Reeves' career was underpinned by, and a testament to, the three equally important pillars: education, training and experience. In addition, the value of wargaming is evident from the insights that Reeves gained during his time at the Naval War College. Reeves' career was built on innovation as he sought to rectify deficiencies and introduce enhancements in all of his posts throughout his career. Indeed, Reeves settled for nothing short of excellence and applied the same standards to his subordinates as well as to himself. In both the development of the USN's aviation capability and the advancement of Reeves, the importance of media relations and positive public relations is evident. Perhaps one of the most important takeaways for practitioners, which appears in the preface and explains, in part, why Reeves may have received comparatively scant academic attention, is the importance of writing. Wildenberg notes that despite being a brilliant orator, Reeves left 'few writings and no personal papers' (p.x).

The book is well researched and Wildenberg weaves together historical records from a range of archives. The author is able to piece together a convincing picture yet is sometimes compelled to rely on assumptions given the paucity of material relating to certain issues. It could be argued that while some assertions are stretched too far occasionally, such as when Wildenberg speculates as to what may have happened if Reeves had been in command at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, most assumptions are reasonable and logical.

Overall, this is a well-researched and convincingly argued book that should find a home in both professional and personal libraries. It will be of interest to both practitioners and scholars of air and naval power and is particularly pertinent for British readers given the re-introduction of aircraft carriers into the Royal Navy.

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