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Ed Heinemann, Combat Aircraft Designer



Synopsis

Dust jacket notes: "Ed Heinemann has been the guiding force behind a remarkably successful series of combat aircraft, from the Dauntless dive bomber to the A-4 Skyhawk jet. In this comprehensive autobiographical record of his achievements, Ed Heinemann and coauthor, Rosario 'Zip' Rausa, have tried to tell it like it was, including the lows as well as the highs. Despite tragedies in his personal life and a formal education limited to high school, Ed Heinemann became one of the legendary stalwarts in the golden age of aviation. Here is the story behind some of the world's most successful aircraft, including the Dauntless, the Skyraider (affectionately known as the 'Ford'), the Skystreak and Skyrocket research planes, and the Skywarrior and Skyhawk, as well as many others. The text is amply augmented with detailed line drawings, photos, and performance data. At one time or another Ed Heinemann worked with many of the men whose contributions have made aviation what it is today. His story includes personal glimpses of such pioneers as General Hap Arnold, Donald Douglas, Jack Northrop, Howard Hughes, Admiral Apollo Soucek, Admiral Thomas Moorer, and the great rocket scientist, Werner Von Braun, to name only a few. Zip Rausa skillfully recounts Heinemann's professional life through the artful use of tape recordings in which Heinemann reviews his long list of accomplishments in great detail. Thus, the style of this readable first-person narrative is that of Ed Heinemann himself. The result is a well-researched, lavishly illustrated book that makes an important contribution to the history of aviation...."

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Customer Reviews

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If you're a serious student of American military aircraft it doesn't take long before you hear of Heinemann and the series of "Winners" (his favorite term flying r successful aircraft) that he designed for Douglas in the 40s-60s. This book gives you an inside look at how they were created. It's technical, but general enough for anyone to understand. My only complaint is that's not technical or detailed enough. His descriptions do seem to gloss over the some of the problems encountered. His job as head engineer meant that while he may not have personally come up with any necessary solutions, he would have certainly known if them. I would have liked a few more "nuts and bolts" about both the designs and testing as well as the military political story every post-war modern combat jet has. As such, I found Bill Gunston's history of the A-4 Skyhawk more compelling in his book "Attack Aircraft of the West". (I can also highly recommend his back oaks "Bombers of the West" and "Fighters of the 50s" for excellent developmental histories of aircraft). Probably, he wanted to keep the book accessible to more general readers, (the fact the book was published by the Naval Institute seems to support this), and perhaps he didn't want to come across as critical of Douglas. He does give more details on older designs like the SBD, so perhaps he was less forthcoming out of security or proprietary concerns. All in all, this is an interesting combination of autobiography and history. If you're a fan of his many aircraft, I'd certainly

recommend this. But a serious aviation buffs will want a few more details.

In a foreward, Adm. Tom Connolly quips: [The Skyraider was] " ...the greatest workhorse the Navy ever had. It was loved and trusted by those who flew it. A pilot who trusts his plane is a bold pilot. And bold pilots really do the job. " Heinemann had no greater pleasure than that his creations inspired confidence. Heinemann grew with Douglas Aircraft, while the industry evolved toward all aluminum, retractable gear, closed cockpit planes. Starting as a draftsman, he observed the planning, bid-placement and building of many trend-setters. Those rugged mounts of WW II did not appear fully formed; each was preceded by testbeds that he often flew in to observe operation. We read the development of the U.S. Navy's SBD divebomber, starting with BT-1, the fly-off against Vought's contender, especially the innovations that enabled SBDs to make stable, near vertical 250 mph dives and 9G (!) pullouts. This was the weapon that sank Japanese carriers at the Battle of Midway. Yet Douglas developed more military projects: A-20s, -26s, A-1 Skyraider, -3 Skywarrior, -4 Skyhawk, and numerous test models. Throughout, his mantra of saving weight and striving for simplicity is expressed with numerous examples. He had perserverance, even laying by runways to film aircraft tires as they deformed during hard landings. Last, the 'Heinemann way', is explained as extreme KISS method. Remember how violent carrier landings can be, test everything with that in mind, make design changes by consensus, keep staffs small, and assign responsibility down the organization. Utilize talented people. Listen to pilots. A highly readable companion to the books describing these tough birds in combat.

Seldom do we have documentation from key individuals in key positions at key moments in history. In the history of aviation, this autobiography of Ed Heinemann fills that niche. One of a handful of key innovators who shaped military (and commercial) aviation in the 20th century, Heinemann lays out in very readable fashion the progress we made in this field from the late 1930's through the 1960's, an era that saw us going operationally from 200 mph propellor driven to supersonic jet aircraft, and even rocket powered resarch planes. The force of its first person narrative lends great credibility to the subject matter and I highly recommend it for anyone who seeks the details behind some of the great aircraft that came from the Douglas organization.

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