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Steve Ewing and John B. Lundstrom, *Fateful Rendezvous: The Life of Butch O'Hare*. Naval Institute Press, 1997. 312 pp. Notes, sources, index, maps, photos and appendix.

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Naval Institute Press has re-released this handsome paperback edition of one of the true classics of modern naval biography by noted authors John Lundstrom and Steve Ewing. Edward “Butch” O’Hare is the World War II Navy hero after whom an airport in Chicago is named. If you ever wondered why then this book is for you. If you ever wanted to read about the turbulent period between world wars, then this book is for you. If you ever wanted to know how Al Capone, the famous gangster is related to one of the Navy’s most enduring heroes from the early years of the War in the Pacific . . . then this book is for you.

This is not a typical biography, in part because the life it covers is so short and ended tragically and abruptly one dark night in late 1943 over the Pacific. Ewing and Lundstrom do so many wonderful things with the story that one has a hard time knowing where to start. Instead of giving away some of the treasures the book reveals I will instead focus more narrowly on what the book holds for students of naval history, especially those interested in the early history of naval aviation. In many respects, despite his heroism and *sang froid*, Edward “Butch” O’Hare was representative of the type and caliber of the average officer the Navy produced and sent into combat during World War II. A naval academy graduate and aviator from the get-go, O’Hare comes across as a “company man.” O’Hare is neither a radical, a recluse, nor a sycophant—instead one gets a very complicated portrait of a fairly simple person; a young American who wants to serve his country by flying for the Navy.

Readers interested in combat narrative, too, will find some the best prose available on naval air combat at sea. I can testify that the authors have managed to create something quite rare, capturing in words the dynamism and tension of an operational aircraft carrier and its rhythms. This reviewer has served on five different aircraft carriers, including one of World War II vintage, and can say that he has never “read” it described so well. The air-to-air actions of the Navy’s pilots written about here set a new standard for this kind of gripping history when it first came out. The authors manage to transcend biography and transitioned into the realm of tactical and operational military history—a difficult transition for even the best biographers. They just as easily transition

from the danger of combat and landing aboard a pitching deck back to the boredom and routine of Butch's life on a World War II warship. These portions of the book paint the ups, downs and absurdities of life at sea in World War II as well as the brief romantic bursts of naval aviation combat. The authors also display a sensitivity to the adversaries from the Japanese naval air arm that is lacking in most books of this type. The Japanese come across as human beings instead of the militarized automatons we often see them portrayed as in many popular histories.

Where the authors really succeed in this book, and established in 1997 a groundbreaking approach, was their ability to capture the person within his cultural and institutional context without dehumanizing or trivializing him. If one wants to understand, from the perspective of the life of one individual, why U.S. naval aviation performed so well in the early years of World War II (one of Lundstrom's major themes in all his books), then one must read this book. Lundstrom more recently has done a somewhat similar favor for the long-neglected Frank Jack Fletcher, victor of the Coral Sea and Midway. However, it is in this book that one sees the approach at its finest. The book is personable, like its main character. The tragedy of Butch's death, even though we know it is coming, reflects the heart-wrenching experience it must have been for his family. The cost of freedom is high and one is tempted to ask, where are the Butch O'Hares of today? This reviewer suspects they are closer to us, likely, than we even realize.



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