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Preface

This book represents an attempt to catalogue all the aircraft carriers that have seen service in the world's navies, together with the designs that, whilst not realised, have had a significant influence on the technical evolution of the type or on the design of subsequent vessels within a particular navy. With such broad terms of reference, some qualifications are naturally called for. Thus, for the purposes of this work, an aircraft carrier has been defined as a sea-going warship, the primary responsibility of which is the direct operation of heavier-than-air craft in an offensive or a defensive role and the provision for these aircraft of such facilities as are required for their sustained operation. Ships such as seaplane tenders, whose principal roles have generally been support and maintenance, have therefore been excluded, as have 'hybrid' carriers – for example, the battleship-carriers that served with the Japanese Navy during the Second World War, where the air element was subordinated to other naval considerations (in their case, heavy guns). Similarly, ships equipped with auxiliary take-off facilities, such as catapult-armed merchant (CAM) ships and, for that matter, modern cruisers and frigates, have been omitted.

The inclusion of so many individual vessels, several the sole representative of their class, has inevitably restricted discussion; however, in order to supply something other than a mere list of statistics, which can mean very little if taken in isolation, each class is provided with background information explaining why a particular design was adopted and why certain characteristics were highlighted. Brief career notes for each commissioned carrier, together with details of important modifications made and of its

fate, are also given.

The data tables in each case relate to the carrier in question as originally completed, any in-service alterations being outlined in the accompanying notes. Where several ships in one class were completed to slightly different designs, for example the Japanese *Soryus* and the US Improved *Forrestals*, the data apply to the first completed ship in that class, deviations from these in subsequent vessels again being noted in the text. The statistics for classes or individual carriers not completed generally give information for the final design.

In the tables, it should be noted that flight-deck dimensions are approximate and relate to usable flight-deck area; for example, round-downs are not for these purposes included. Moreover, flight-deck width varies along the length of the carrier, most particularly where an angled deck is incorporated. 'Beam' is maximum waterline beam, or below-water maximum beam where bulges are fitted. The figures for aircraft complement give only a general picture of a carrier's aviation capacity: much would, of course, depend on aircraft type and whether a permanent deck park was employed – the wartime *Illustrious*, for example, had a nominal capacity of 36 machines, but in practice operated over fifty on many occasions. Crew complement figures combine that of the ship and that of the air group.

The main part of the book is prefaced by some introductory chapters in which the evolution of the carrier as a ship type has been traced, together with the development of those design features that differentiate the carrier