

GRACE HOPPER AND THE INVENTION OF THE
INFORMATION AGE

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I first came across Admiral Grace Murray Hopper when I was a teenager attending my sister's graduation from the College of William and Mary. The fiery speaker stoked my imagination and influenced my own career choices, first as a naval officer, then as an academic, and finally as an information technology entrepreneur.

Hopper was a well-known figure in the Navy, but when I arrived at the University of California at Berkeley I found, to my surprise, that many people there did not know about her accomplishments. Berkeley in the late 1990s was at the epicenter of the “dot com” boom, a phenomenon dominated by young male entrepreneurs who slept under their desks, dreamed of stock options, and believed they were inventing the Information Age for the first time.

Under the guidance of Cathryn Carson, Jack Lesche, Todd La Porte, Roger Hahn, and Thomas Hughes, I began piecing together the evolution of the Information Age.

Not only did Grace Hopper play a pivotal role in creating the foundation for the computer industry; she was surrounded by remarkable men and women whose contributions have been overlooked or forgotten. I have woven their story into this book, with Hopper's early career serving as the binding thread.

Cathy Carson influenced me greatly during my time at Berkeley. Her work ethic and her dedication to this project will forever be appreciated. I also felt very fortunate to spend quiet summer afternoons learning from one of the founders of the field of the history of technology, Thomas Hughes. He helped me understand how technologies evolve and grow, and what role system builders such as Hopper play in the process of technical innovation.

Over the years I spent many hours in archives throughout the country. The help of the archivists at these repositories in sifting through documents was invaluable. In particular, the good people at the Archives Center at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, at the Charles Babbage Institute's Center for the History of Information Technology at the University of Minnesota, at the Harvard University Archives in Cambridge, and at the Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia must be commended. Special thanks to Alison Oswald at the Smithsonian and to Jeffrey Yost and Arthur Norberg at the Charles Babbage Institute. I especially enjoyed Arthur's insights based on his Remington Rand research.

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