

# The Mystique of Airpower

## The Airpower Professional's Book Club

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There is no List with a capital L. The great books are simply the books which deal most incisively, most eloquently, most universally, and most timelessly with man and his world.

—Milton Mayer



A GOOD BOOK unread is a tragedy, but one that is read and not discussed is a learning experience largely lost. Book clubs or book discussion groups were invented to

provide the structure (setting?) and the opportunity for people to share their insights on the works of great literature.

Maybe you have wanted to join a book club, but with TDYs, deployments, and busy schedules just simply haven't had the spare time to go to meetings. Perhaps you were afraid the books would not appeal to your tastes. Then consider joining the *Airpower Journal*/Air Chronicles newest effort—the Airpower Professional's Book Club.

For those of you who wonder about the origins of this idea, it had its genesis in the development of the CSAF Professional Reading Program in the spring of 1997,<sup>1</sup> the publication in the *Airpower Journal* of a series of bibliographic essays written by Dr. David Mets,<sup>2</sup> and the inauguration of the *Boston Globe*'s on-line book club.<sup>3</sup>

In the spring 1997 edition, Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, former Air Force chief of staff (CSAF), wrote about the development of the CSAF Professional Reading Program. It was designed as a complement to initiatives that came out of the long-range planning effort to foster the growth of a unifying air and space

culture throughout the Air Force. Together, these initiatives are intended to produce knowledgeable service members who more effectively can employ air and space forces in independent, joint, or coalition operations. Ultimately, they will help prepare current and future Air Force leaders to deal effectively with the challenges they surely will face in a post-cold-war world of austere defense budgets, diverse regional threats, and continued high-operations tempo for our units.<sup>4</sup>

As their titles indicate, the subjects of Dr. Mets's essays have been topically restrictive. The publication of these essays often results in requests from readers for other subjects or more often for a brief list of what books are important for airpower professionals.

The great books idea is not new.<sup>5</sup> For example, in 1947, as part of a grassroots movement to promote continuing education for the general public, a group of Chicagoans led by University of Chicago president Robert Maynard Hutchins and supported by prominent businessmen established the Great Books Foundation. This is a nonprofit organization that provides people of all ages with the opportunity to read, discuss, and learn from outstanding works of literature. Since its inception, the foundation has helped thousands of people throughout the United States begin their own discussion groups in libraries, schools, and community centers.<sup>6</sup> However, as one can readily suppose, involvement in such a program not only requires one to be available but also to invest a great deal of time simply to meet and discuss these books. An excellent idea similar to the Great Books Foundation

aimed at professional development—the Douhet Society—arose at Headquarters 5th Allied Tactical Air Force (5ATAF), a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) headquarters in Vicenza, Italy. The core of the society's aim was to develop a concept of airpower in its participants that was based on theory, history, and contemporary developments.<sup>7</sup>

With the publication of the winter edition, *Airpower Journal*, in cooperation with *Air Chronicles*, will inaugurate a new section—the Airpower Professional's Book Club/Discussion Group. We will ask our senior editorial advisors to submit their own personal list of the top 10 books every airpower professional should read. In addition, we invite *Airpower Journal* readers to submit their own suggestions for such a list. Based on the lists we receive, we will develop our own list of the top 10 airpower professional's books and then launch this book club. Send your list by E-mail to editor@cadre.maxwell.af.mil or mail it to

**Airpower Journal**  
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In the Spring 1999 edition, we hope to publish some of the responses as well as a consolidated top 10 list composed of the most frequently chosen books by both senior editorial advisors and readers. We hope you will read these books and E-mail (or write) a paragraph or two describing what you thought of the book, its permanence, its importance, and its overall value in the development of an airpower professional. We will publish all appropriate submissions in a section of *Air Chronicles* and will print selected responses in *Airpower Journal*.

To stimulate discussion both on-line and in the quarterly editions, we suggest that as you read one of these books, jot down ideas or comments that come to mind. After reading it, reflect on the central theme or subject and how the overall content of the work relates to that theme. Also reflect on any critical observations about the book that can be

made. Again, write down your ideas as they occur to you. Then let the project lie fallow in your mind. After several days, peruse the book once again and draft your comments. Use your own words as much as possible. If you choose to quote from the book you are critiquing, do so sparingly. Lay aside your first draft for two or three days and then revise it for proper English and clarity.

A book-club review is composed of a critical evaluation. Always remember that what we are looking for is a critique of the book, not simply a description of its contents. So, when you write your paragraph or two, try to address these four key questions:

1. **What is the book about?** This question leads to other questions. Does the book have a central theme? Does it argue a thesis? What is the author's purpose? (The latter may be stated explicitly in the preface or conclusion, or it may be implied within the book itself.) Did the author achieve that purpose? Early on, try to summarize the theme, thesis, or subject in a sentence or two. Strenuously resist any temptation to describe the full contents of the book; as noted above, your critical analysis of the book is what really counts.
2. **Is the book reliable?** The first question to ask about a work of nonfiction is, Is it true? Again, this question prompts other questions:
  - a. **Who is the author?** What are his or her qualifications for writing a book on this particular subject? Has the author written other books? If so, are those other works about a related subject?
  - b. **Where did the author obtain information for the book?** Is the book based on the author's personal observations of events? Is it based on primary sources—letters, diaries, speeches, manuscripts, and archival records—that were contemporary or nearly contemporary with the period or subject about which the

author is writing? Or is the book based on secondary sources, that is, on works that were written after the time of the event using the primary sources? As a related matter, be sure to include some mention of how the author identifies the sources upon which the book is based—by a bibliography, by notes, in the preface or introduction, or simply by casual references within the text.

- c. Are the sources reliable? If the book is based on primary materials, are those materials credible? If based on secondary authorities, are those accounts reputable? Briefly but precisely identify some representative examples of the sources employed.
- d. Does the author use evidence with care and discrimination? Does the author read into the evidence ideas or facts that are not there? Is the author fair to all parties, or is he swayed by bias or prejudice? Cite specific examples of bias or prejudice or of fairness. Also consider the following questions: Are the facts correct? Do you consider the interpretations valid? Is the thesis well supported by evi-

dence and logical reasoning? Have you been persuaded to accept the author's conclusions? Whatever your answers to the last four questions, explain your reasons for answering them as you did.

3. Is the material well presented? Is the book understandable? Are the contents well organized? Does the author introduce the subject in clear and simple terms or does he or she presuppose the reader possesses general knowledge of the subject?
4. Does the book make a contribution to the field? What, if anything, did the book contribute to your knowledge and understanding of the subject? Would you recommend the book to someone else? Explain why or why not.<sup>8</sup>

When you finish, send your submission to the same address as listed above. We prefer E-mail since we intend to post your comments on the World Wide Web in *Air Chronicles* as we receive them. Check out the site<sup>9</sup> when the club gets going; and if you disagree with another reader's critique of a book, respond; we're aiming at developing an ongoing discussion.

#### Notes

1. Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, "CSAF Professional Reading Program," *Airpower Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 63-65.

2. These essays by Dr. David R. Mets were as follows: "A Pacific Sampler: Fodder for Professional Development," *Airpower Journal* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 80-98; "Bomber Barons, Bureaucrats, and Budgets: Your Professional Reading on the Theory and Doctrine of Strategic Air Attack," *Airpower Journal* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 76-96; "Fodder for Professional Development: Reference Works for the Air Warrior/Scholar," *Airpower Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 53-65; and "To Kill a Stalking Bird: Fodder for Your Professional Reading on Air and Space Superiority," *Airpower Journal* 12, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 71-101.

3. This club developed out of the statement by Massachusetts state education chairman John Silber's request that one of his associates develop a reading list for students composed of books that all well-informed US citizens should read. The *Globe* editors invited their readers to submit their suggestions for such a list, and based on the hundreds of letters and E-mail messages they received, they developed a list of Top 10 books—and launched their book club. [http://www.boston.com/globe/metro/packages/book\\_list/about.htm](http://www.boston.com/globe/metro/packages/book_list/about.htm).

4. Fogleman, 64.

5. Following are some of these available on the WWW: the Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults (<http://www.uchicago.edu/grahamschool/bp/index2.html>); Center for the Study of the Great Ideas (<http://www.TheGreatIdeas.org>); Colby Committee—Wachs Great Books Forum at Colby College, Maine (<http://www.dol.net/~greatbooks/colby.htm>); Great Books Discussion List—an unmoderated list serv open to anyone with an interest in ideas (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~mcneil/chat.htm>); Great Books of Western Civilization Café (<http://cafes.mirror.org/gbcafe1.cgi>); Saint John's College (<http://www.sjca.edu>); and Thomas Aquinas College (<http://www.thomasaquinas.edu>).

6. See The Great Books Foundation home page at <http://www.greatbooks.com/fact.html>.

7. Lt Col Kimble D. Stohry, "The Douhet Society: A Recipe for Your Professional Development Program?" *Airpower Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 22-33.

8. Adapted from a student handout attributed to Dr. Harold T. Parker, professor emeritus at Duke University.

9. The *Air Chronicles* home page may be found at <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil>.