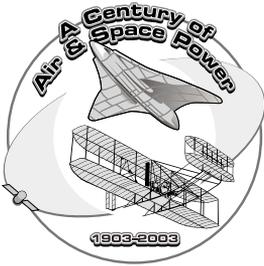


# Alexander P. de Seversky

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Fighter ace, war hero, aircraft designer, entrepreneur, writer, and theorist, Alexander P. de Seversky was one of the best known and most popular aviation figures in America during World War II. His self-appointed mission called for convincing the public that airpower had revolu-

tionized warfare and become decisively important. Although people considered him a theorist, his ideas on airpower were not original; rather, he was a synthesizer and popularizer. At the same time, de Seversky was a prophet, using logic and his interpretation of history to predict the future of air warfare.

Born in Russia in 1894, de Seversky exhibited an interest in flight, even as a child. During the Great War, he joined the Russian Imperial Navy and became a pilot. On his first combat mission, he was shot down, losing a leg as a result. Undaunted, he used a wooden prosthesis, learned how to fly again, and returned to combat, where he shot down 13 German aircraft. In 1917 Russia posted him to the United States as an attaché, but after the Russian Revolution began, he elected to remain in America.

Over the next two decades, de Seversky put his mechanical and business talents to work by founding Seversky Aircraft Corporation, designing not only aircraft, but also bombsights, instruments, and an air-refueling apparatus. In 1935 he designed and built the P-35—the first all-metal monoplane production fighter in the Air Corps. A strikingly beautiful airplane, the P-35 was extremely fast—it won the Bendix Air Race from 1937 to 1939—and had a significantly longer range than other fighter aircraft of its day. It was the direct ancestor of the P-47 Thunderbolt, one of the most important and successful fighter planes of World War II. Unfortunately, de Seversky was a poor businessman, and as war approached, his



board of directors voted him out of office and changed the company's name to Republic. From then on, he turned his attention to writing about and publicizing airpower.

In 1942 de Seversky published the influential *Victory through Air Power*, which the Book of the Month Club chose as one of its featured selections and which Walt Disney made into an animated movie. As many as one of every seven Americans either saw the movie or read the book, and "victory through air power" became a household phrase. De Seversky continued to write for the next 15 years, but his later books did not have the impact of his first one, and, in truth, as time went on he grew increasingly out of touch with technical developments. He simply did not understand nuclear power, jet propulsion, or the new space age.

Nevertheless, Alexander P. de Seversky captured the essence of a new weapon of war—and peace—and then conveyed an understanding of that essence to millions of Americans in a way unmatched by anyone else.

## To Learn More . . .

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