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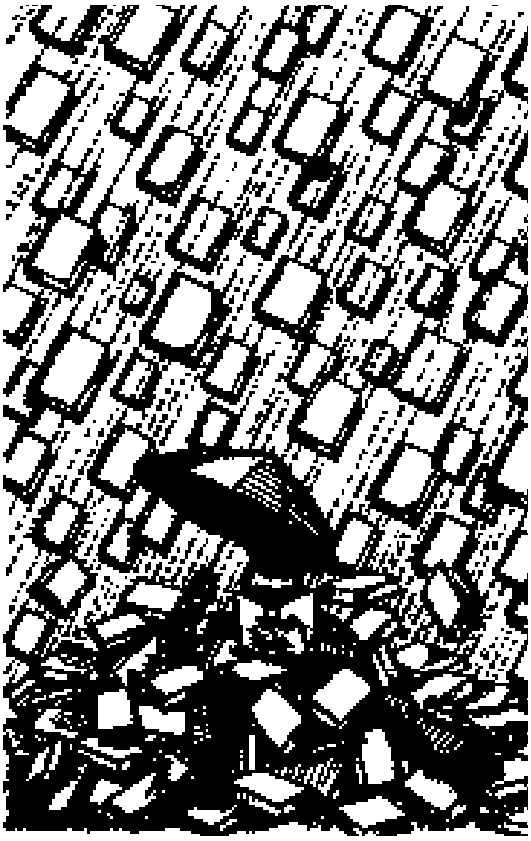

The Mystique of Airpower

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

IN THE WINTER 1998 issue of *Airpower Journal,* we introduced the Airpower Professional's Book Club. We've had an encouraging response so far and hope to keep hearing from you, our readers. Although it's still too early to publish our top-10 list, in this update we again identify some of the titles that you have suggested. Perhaps this will help those of you who are still thinking about your own lists.

- *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat* by Col John A. Warden III.
- *Airpower: Theory and Practice* edited by John Gooch.
- *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* by Neil Sheehan.
- *The Changing Face of War: Learning from History* edited by Allan D. English.
- *Chemical and Biological Weapons: A Survey of Proliferation* by Edward M. Spiers.
- *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* by Samuel P. Huntington.
- *Command Arrangements for Peace Operations* by David S. Alberts and Richard E. Hayes.
- *Command Decision* by William Wister Haines.
- *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America*

by Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski.

- *Complexity, Global Politics, and National Security* edited by David S. Alberts and Thomas J. Czerwinski.
- *Control of Joint Forces: A New Perspective* by Clarence E. McKnight.
- *Coup d'État: A Practical Handbook* by Edward Luttwak.
- *Covert German Rearmament, 1919–1939: Deception and Misperception* by Barton Whaley.
- *Critical Mass: The Dangerous Race for Superweapons in a Fragmenting World* by William E. Burrows and Robert Windrem.
- *The Defense Policies of Nations: A Comparative Study* edited by Douglas J. Murray and Paul R. Viotti.
- *The General* by C. S. Forester.
- *International Peacekeeping* by Paul F. Diehl.
- *Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942–1991* by James A. Winnefeld and Dana J. Johnson.
- *The Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara.
- *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* edited by Peter Paret.
- *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* edited by Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein.
- *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought,* 2d ed., by Michael I. Handel.
- *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* edited by Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett.
- *Military Space* by Lyn Dutton.
- *Nuclear Ambitions: The Spread of Nuclear Weapons, 1989–1990* by Leonard S. Spector and Jacqueline R. Smith.
- *Once an Eagle* by Anton Myrer.
- *The Patterns of War since the Eighteenth Century,* 2d ed., by Larry H. Addington.
- *The Profession of Arms* by Gen Sir John Hackett.
- *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* by Paul M. Kennedy.
- *The Sword and the Pen: Selections from the World's Greatest Military Writings* prepared by Sir Basil Liddell Hart, edited by Adrian Liddell Hart.
- *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* by Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May.
- *The United Nations and Peacekeeping: Results, Limitations, and Prospects: The Lessons of 40 Years of Experience* edited by Indar Jit Rikhye and Kjell Skjelsbaek.
- *War in the Modern World* by Theodore Ropp.

Remember to send your list by E-mail to editor@cadre.maxwell.af.mil or mail it to *Airpower Journal,* Attn: Book Club, 401 Chennault Circle, Maxwell AFB AL 36112-6428.

Although we don't yet have the consolidated list, it will be out soon. For those of you with Internet connections, keep your eye on the *Air Chronicles* home page (http://www. airpower.maxwell.af.mil). We'll publish it there first.

If you missed our announcements in the Winter and Spring issues and wonder what is going on, *APJ* has inaugurated a new, continuing section—the Airpower Professional's Book Club. In addition to soliciting titles from the "names" in the airpower arena, we also invited *APJ* readers to submit their

own lists of the top-10 books for the airpower professional. Based on the lists we receive, we will develop our own. 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 determine how the overall content of the work relates to that theme. Also reflect on any critical observations that you can make about the book. 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 we are looking for 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 archi-val 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 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 or she 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 evidence 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. [1]

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. If you disagree with another reader's critique of a book, respond; we're aiming at developing an ongoing discussion. ■

Note

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