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John Andreas Olsen, *Air Commanders*. Washington: Potomac Books, 2013. Pp. xiii, 503. ISBN 978-1-61234-577-2.

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*Air Commanders*, edited by John Andreas Olsen (Norwegian Ministry of Defense), provides a detailed look at twelve air leaders through the eyes of noted air power historians and others working in the field.<sup>1</sup> It seeks to isolate the specific qualifications of successful air force leaders and airmen in wartime, serving both as a primer for future air commanders and an insightful analysis of leadership qualities for military historians and general readers. However, the book leaves one questioning whether the talents of air force leaders really differ from those of leaders in any other arena, military or civilian. The underlying principles that emerge are familiar to students of leadership in ground and naval warfare as well as in the private sector. Only American airmen are discussed;<sup>2</sup> even within that purview, there are notable omissions: for example, Billy Mitchell, Henry H. “Hap” Arnold (though he was not a combat leader), James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle, and Ira Eaker. Still, *Air Commanders* fills a sizeable void by ranging over the last seventy-five years of aerial warfare.

The volume’s twelve chapters are distributed in three parts, broadly devoted to World War II, Korea and Vietnam, and (Olsen’s particular area of interest) “Modern Conflicts,” though the careers of several airmen spanned multiple eras. Fully one-sixth of the work treats air leaders and operations in the former Yugoslavia, a disproportion perhaps justified by the importance of actions there and the still-contested legacy of independent air operations in that region. Editor Olsen’s service with the NATO command in Sarajevo might be relevant in this regard.<sup>3</sup>

#### Part I

1. Richard G. Davis (National Museum of the US Army), “Carl A. Spaatz: Bomber Baron” (29–65).
2. Alan Stephens (Univ. of New South Wales), “George C. Kenney: ‘A Kind of Renaissance Airman’” (66–100).
3. Richard R. Muller (School of Advanced Air and Space Studies), “Otto P. Weyland: ‘Best Damned General in the Air Corps’” (101–31).
4. Williamson Murray (Ohio State Univ.), “Curtis E. LeMay: Airman Extraordinary” (132–60).

Richard Davis’s straightforward account of Carl Spaatz’s career as the premiere operational airman in the European theater in World War II draws heavily on his earlier authoritative biography.<sup>4</sup> We read here that Spaatz’s luck, management skills, killer instinct, perseverance, and trustworthiness were critical to his success. Well and good, but such traits are not unique to air leadership. Davis notes that Spaatz’s often-overlooked influence in the waning days of the Pacific war “ensured that the strategic bombardment of Japan would not be subsumed into tactical operations” (61), a dubious accomplishment given the effectiveness of aerial mining in the war’s final months. Noted, too, is Spaatz’s role in the establishment of Strategic Air Command (SAC) and Tactical Air Command during the Air Force’s formative days, an organizational structure dating to his time as head of the Northwest African Air Forces earlier in the war. But the lack of balance and communication between the two commands led to the service’s decision to combine them into Air Combat Command in 1991. Spaatz was also instrumental in the Air Force Academy’s adoption of “more

1. At least four of the authors are or have been faculty or students at the US Air Force Academy’s School of Advanced Air and Space Studies.

2. Olsen concedes that there are European airmen who “merit closer examination” (6); indeed, another, equally instructive anthology could be devoted to such British air commanders as Hugh Trenchard, Arthur Tedder, Jack Slessor, and Arthur Coningham.

3. See *Nato HQ Sarajevo* – [www.miwsr.com/rd/1324.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1324.htm).

4. *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe* (Washington: Ctr for Air Force History, 1993).

of a liberal arts curriculum than its more technically oriented fellow academies had” (65), an emphasis sadly in decline since the general’s passing.

Alan Stephens provides a nuanced account of George Kenney’s leadership career, describing his spectacular operational successes in the Southwest Pacific before his utter failure as the first SAC commander—he was replaced by the iconic Curtis LeMay. Stephens rightly stresses that Kenney’s technical expertise in engineering and logistics served him well in the early campaigns directed from Australia, but that he was often undermined by an inability to work or share credit with the Royal Australian Air Force. Stephens advises current air commanders to learn the advantages of Kenney’s “airfield hopping,” as opposed to “island hopping,” campaign in the Pacific.

Richard Muller’s account of Otto “Opie” Weyland is a most welcome contribution, since the remarkable general’s career has, inexplicably, not been the subject of a dedicated biography.<sup>5</sup> After beginning with solid coverage of Weyland’s prewar career as an independent thinker who “did not fully imbibe the strategic bombing theory” (103) (providing further confirmation of the existence of this species of airman!), Muller continues the story through his instrumental role as commander of the Far East Air Force (FEAF) in what evolved into a primarily tactical campaign well-suited to Weyland’s talents. He notes that Weyland benefited from practical developments in the North African theater, where prewar doctrinal changes were less a factor than operational constraints. He correctly asserts that “failure was more a function of inadequate training and lack of experience” (106).

Williamson Murray writes that Curtis LeMay is “still to this day the most controversial senior leader in the history of the United States Air Force” (132). He recognizes that his later indiscretions—he was George Wallace’s running mate on a segregation platform in 1968—would “taint LeMay for the rest of his life” (157) but weighs them against his tremendous tactical and operational contributions early in World War II and his role in building SAC into the power it eventually became. At the same time, LeMay, as Chief of Staff, presided over an Air Force in Vietnam that was “not prepared to fight a conventional war, much less a war against insurgents” (155).

## Part II

5. James S. Corum (Baltic Defense College), “William H. Tunner: Master of Airlift” (161–90).
6. Thomas A. Keaney (Johns Hopkins Univ. School of Advanced International Studies), “George E. Stratemeyer: Organizer of Air Power” (191–224).
7. Case Cunningham (US Air Force), “William W. Momyer: An Air Power Mind” (225–56).
8. Stephen P. Randolph (US Air Force [ret.]), “John W. Vogt: The Easter Offensive and Nixon’s War in Vietnam” (257–300).

William Tunner is more “manager” than “warrior” in James Corum’s assessment of his contributions to the Hump and Berlin airlifts. Though modern airmen might bristle at such a characterization, it is becoming increasingly relevant,<sup>6</sup> since, Corum writes, for air logisticians, “a managerial approach is certainly more effective than reliance on a warrior ethic” (189). Whether this is true of air commanders in general is debatable.

George Stratemeyer’s career culminated in command of FEAF early in the Korean War. In his essay, Thomas Keaney stresses the critical value of good relations between an air commander and his theater commander (in this case, Douglas MacArthur). Even though the B-36/USS *United States* controversy, or “Revolt of the Admirals,” had poisoned interservice relations in the years prior to the war, Stratemeyer wrote during the war that MacArthur “believes in air power, he knows how to use it, and he has backed me one hundred percent” (211).

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5. His accomplishments as “Patton’s Airman” have been chronicled elsewhere: e.g., David Spires, *Patton’s Air Force* (Washington: Smithsonian, 2002), and *Air Power for Patton’s Army* (Honolulu: U Pr of the Pacific, 2005).

6. Management is the most popular major at the US Air Force Academy.

Case Cunningham's essay on William Momyer, though it reveals little not already known from the general's autobiography,<sup>7</sup> does give some insight into the Air Force's ineffectiveness in Vietnam. Momyer eventually got the "single manager" concept approved, foreshadowing the modern Combined Forces Air Component Commander, but could not convince his superiors that the military was unlikely to solve an inherently political problem: "If there had been a more valid evaluation of our political objectives in Vietnam, I believe it would have revealed our military forces couldn't produce the conditions dictated by the specifics of the objectives. Thus, there would have been a change in the political objectives or a decision not to commit forces with a consequent loss of the country" (256); this is, after all, just what happened. The US experience in Vietnam certainly taught later air power leaders valuable lessons in the employment of military forces, but at the cost of tens of thousands of American lives.

John Vogt had to navigate stormy seas to bring the 1972 Operation Linebacker campaigns to a successful conclusion. He was burdened by tense relations with MACV<sup>8</sup> commander Creighton Abrams, an imperative from President Nixon to help extricate the nation from the war, and the heavy-handed yet unsupportive help of SAC. Though Vogt succeeded in both Linebacker campaigns, he was no more effective than others in finding a military solution in Vietnam, Stephen Randolph points out, after the American withdrawal left South Vietnamese forces without the massive air support they had become accustomed to (296).

### Part III

9. Richard P. Hallion (Office of the Air Force Chief Scientist), "Charles A. Horner: Desert Storm Maestro" (301-31).
10. Mark A. Bucknam (US Air Force), "Michael E. Ryan: Architect of Air Power Success" (332-71).
11. Rebecca L. Grant (Gen. Billy Mitchell Inst. for Air Power Studies), "Michael C. Short: Airman Undaunted" (372-94).
12. James D. Kiras (School of Advanced Air and Space Studies), "T. Michael Moseley: Air Power Warrior" (395-428).

Sadly, this final block of articles, on the conflicts in Yugoslavia and in Southwest Asia, features the most relevant examples and weakest evidence for the importance of air leadership, as digital-era communications threatened the air commander's autonomy and relevance. Richard Hallion begins his essay with a strong brief for Charles Horner's importance to the Desert Storm air campaign, highlighting the value of his close relationship with the theater commander, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf. Horner ensured that there would be "no more Vietnams," certainly not as regards the air campaign in Iraq (331).

Mark Bucknam's account of Michael Ryan's service in Bosnia concentrates on operations, but concludes with a primer on the ten salient aspects of his subject's leadership, concluding with "integrity and strength of character" (317). All ten have broad relevance to fields outside of air warfare.

Rebecca Grant's discussion of Michael Short's service in Operation Allied Force in Kosovo is thinly documented and highly critical of Gen. Wesley Clark, to whom she ascribes an "inbred prejudice and lack of knowledge about air power" (384). Hence, this is a case of influence exerted despite poor relations with a theater commander and a consequent lingering resentment toward him.

James Kiras's assessment of T. Michael Moseley's tenure as the Commander of Central Command's Air Forces during Operations Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Iraqi Freedom is the most hagiographic in the collection. He downplays, for example, Moseley's forced resignation as Chief of Staff in 2008. The brief, measured evaluation of air generalship in this piece helps compensate for the book's lack of a conclusion.

The authors' concentration on air leadership is a welcome change from typical technology-driven discussions of air power; the best weapons in the world are worthless without motivated and trained individu-

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7. *Air Power in Three Wars* (1978; rpt. Maxwell AF Base: Air U Pr, 2003).

8. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

als directing their use. “In their quest to ‘sell their product’ to the public and to politicians, airmen often deliver uncritical hymns of praise to air power rather than sound and logical explanations based on their own experience”<sup>9</sup> (2). Yes, but the profiles of the airmen selected here do little to remedy this, especially since those treating more recent campaigns depend heavily on interviews with and assistance from their still-very-much-alive subjects. And, too, Olsen’s premise that the careers of *successful* leaders are most enlightening is questionable. As Chuck Horner himself put it, “you don’t learn from success, you learn from failure” (303).

A leitmotif of the book is the current of anti-intellectualism permeating the service and the careers of the “Great Captains” it describes. Olsen observes that “Obviously, outstanding grades in school are not a precondition for great leadership” (10). Davis labels Spaatz “an indifferent student” (30), whose time at West Point “produced a permanent distaste for professional military education” (31). Keaney reveals that Stratemeyer “was not a strong student”—poor grades set him back a class at West Point (194); he also reinforces Davis’s characterization of Spaatz by noting that, at the Command and General Staff School at Ft. Leavenworth, he “showed his lack of interest by finishing close to the bottom of his class and receiving negative reviews of his promotion potential” (195). Randolph writes that Vogt’s Ivy League degrees (Yale, Columbia, and Harvard) did not ensure him a place in the pantheon of Air Force leaders (262). Michael Ryan, Bucknam asserts, was “not the bookish type” nor, by his own admission, “the most gifted student”; he failed several entrance exams before being admitted to a selective high school in Omaha because of his athletic prowess (335).

All the individuals featured in *Air Commanders* enjoyed successful careers, but might have done better still had they devoted more time to a deep, systematic study of history. If Olsen’s anthology stimulates current and future air commanders to reflect critically on past campaigns and leaders, his own and his coauthors’ efforts will have been justified.

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9. Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Airpower: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (NY: Free Press, 1989), is a notable exception.