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Admiral William A. Moffett: Architect of Naval Aviation

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152 Naval War College Review

Grove finishes with the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf. In the case of the former, the traditional role of the surface combatant was almost completely supplanted by aircraft, while in the latter, the major roles played by surface combatants in some of the actions came not as a matter of operational intent but in large measure as consequences of egregious American errors.

Each battle or operation is described and analyzed in a separate chapter generously accompanied by excellent, and in many cases not commonly seen, photographs. A generally well done series of charts nicely complements the text. Short technical descriptions of some of the representative combatants involved in each encounter are given in separate boxes.

However, two things in this book are a bit curious. First, Grove's criticism of Winston Churchill's continual interference in operational matters, particularly as First Sea Lord, and his "fixation with a Mediterranean strategy" is almost strident. Churchill's competence as a strategist is a controversial, complex issue and would seem to be beyond the scope of a book that is primarily concerned with sea battles at the tactical and operational levels. Secondly, although the selection of battles was based primarily on the earlier Ian Allan publication, Grove has included original chapters on Pacific battles in both volumes, to illustrate better his underlying themes. But in this volume, dealing with battles in which surface ships were "still important," American readers must surely wonder why Grove did not include any of the classic 1942–

1943 surface actions in the Southwest Pacific.

Grove is a well known expert in naval affairs. He has been a lecturer at the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth and a visiting professor at the U.S. Naval Academy. His publications include *Vanguard to Trident* and *The Future of Sea Power*, and he is the editor of the latest edition of Corbett's classic, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*.

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Trimble, William F. *Admiral William A. Moffett: Architect of Naval Aviation*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993. 338pp. \$29.95

I had the great privilege of interviewing General Jimmy Doolittle some years ago, and in his concluding remarks to me he compared General Billy Mitchell and Carl Spaatz. Though Spaatz himself would not have agreed, Doolittle asserted that Spaatz had done more good for the cause of airpower and national security than Mitchell. Doolittle likened Mitchell to an oak tree and Spaatz to the bamboo. When a hurricane came, he said, the oak stood for a long time, straight and tall in the midst of adversity, but ultimately it snapped and was useless; the bamboo, on the other hand, flexed with the wind, except on fundamental principles, and when the hurricane abated it sprang back, straight and tall, to resume the struggle. Spaatz's influence may have been less spectacular than Mitchell's, but his impact was long-lasting. Doolittle asserted that he and many other air

officers agreed that Billy Mitchell had done more harm than good for military aviation.

William Trimble's fine book makes one think that in Doolittle's story, Admiral William Moffett's name could easily have been substituted for Carl Spaatz. Moffett was, no doubt, more outspoken than Spaatz and a better politician than Mitchell, but in the end it was his powerful personality, in the new art of public relations during the infancy of electronic media and motion pictures, that enabled him to survive his mistakes.

Trimble is well qualified for this work. He is a visiting professor at the Air War College and a professor of history at Auburn University, which itself is building a considerable reputation in the history of aviation and airpower. He is the author of two other publications and the authority on the Naval Aircraft Factory, perhaps on interwar naval aviation logistics as well.

Although it is clear that the author admires Moffett, he does not claim that the admiral was the perfect naval officer. As an example of Moffett's flaws, Trimble cites the admiral's inability to admit he was wrong. The author speculates that stubbornness was the reason for Moffett's continued commitment to the rigid lighter-than-air flying craft—he died in an airship crash in 1933. Also, the admiral was inclined only to accept staffers who were yes-men, which, according to Trimble, explained Moffett's apparent inability to get along with one assistant, Captain Ernest J. King. With that said, however, Trimble believes that Moffett was well suited for his time in many ways.

Basic to Moffett's achievement was his commitment to a notion that was an article of faith, even in this reviewer's time, at the Naval Academy: a leader is a naval officer first and an aviator second. Moffett held unassailable credentials in command at sea that demonstrated to the inner circle that this credo was not just lip-service. Although he was the leading advocate of naval aviation, he was nevertheless opposed to the idea that a separate aviation corps be created within the Navy. Moffett believed that aviation and the surface fleet should be part of an integrated whole and that the creation of a separate, elite, aviation corps would only lead the service back to the old internal divisions that had existed between the engineers ("Black Gang") and the seaman officers ("Deck Gang"). However, his strategic and doctrinal thought did evolve as he went along. He started out firmly believing that the role of the aircraft was purely auxiliary, that its purpose was to make the battleship fleet more effective in its gunfire and reconnaissance. It was only after the *Lexington* and the *Saratoga* had been in service long enough to provide the evidence he needed that he came to see aviation as an offensive weapon and increased the dive bomber and torpedo bomber deck loads of the new carriers.

Ironically, Moffett was a direct adversary of Mitchell himself. The combination of his naval-officer-first philosophy and the real, external threat of Mitchell to the Navy made it easier for the most conservative admirals to yield more dollars for Moffett's aviation programs than might have been expected. Moffett was the Chief of the

154 Naval War College Review

Bureau of Aeronautics from its founding in 1921 until his death in 1933. These were the pivotal years of the formation of naval airpower: the fundamentals were worked out aboard the USS *Langley*, the U.S. acquired its lead in radial engine development, the great carriers *Lexington* and *Saratoga* were built and brought on line, the catapult was invented, and the dive bomber was conceived and developed—without all of which the war in the Pacific would certainly have been substantially longer and costlier.

In January 1982 I argued in this journal that the subfield of airpower history was an orphan among historians but that there were signs that it was maturing—works dealing with more than the razzle-dazzle adventures of air combat were appearing more frequently. Trimble has shown with this work that interest in airpower history continues to grow.

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Kilduff, Peter. *Richthofen: Beyond the Legend of the Red Baron*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994. 256pp. \$27.95

The latest book on von Richthofen is from an author who also did an earlier book on the Red Baron. However, he believes that the end of the Cold War and the resulting access to East German documents justify another visit to this subject so as to resolve various discrepancies in the historical record. This

reviewer, however, feels that the book can be justified if only on the basis that it is enjoyable, the work of an excellent writer, and by the fact that memoirs and biographies of prominent aces can sometimes provide insights into air combat that hold true despite the passage of eighty years.

Peter Kilduff is an eminent historian with a long list of credits in both naval and World War I aviation. While his most recent books have primarily dealt with World War I, many readers of this journal have enjoyed his excellent histories of carrier aviation. Kilduff is one of the very few historians that this reviewer can personally attest has examined both the original Royal Air Force (RAF) casualty reports and the original German victory claims. Kilduff is fluent in German and has performed most of his research from the original German documents and archives. In addition, over twenty years ago this reviewer and a select group of New England historians were privileged to spend an evening in Kilduff's basement, examining one of the few complete copies of RAF records that was available in this country. At that meeting Kilduff claimed that he would one day have matched every loss to the victory it symbolized. At least for the combats covered in this book, he has achieved that goal.

Although Kilduff's monumental labor on the "who shot whom" question may be the best yet and possibly provides the final answer, he is too much of a gentleman to denigrate errors in earlier accounts. His approach is simply to state the reasons (such as take-off times, distances, range, and endurance figures, etc.) why a particular