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# HAP: The Story of the U.S Air Force and the Man Who Built it, General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold

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strategist, planner, thinker—in other words, the personal traits it took to be a great military leader—remain untold in this book.

Marshall's colleagues on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the men with whom he made the grand strategy that won the war, are also misrepresented and misunderstood. The JCS Chairman, William D. Leahy, is vaguely described as "the fourth member of the JCS." Ernest J. King is misidentified as the "Navy Chief of Staff" (sic) and also as "Commander in Chief of U.S. Navy Operations" (sic). The author's careless disregard as to who did what is intensely irritating to those who value accuracy. King, so says the author, commanded a flotilla of destroyers in the First World War (he commanded a division of submarines after the war); the Bureau of Aeronautics is identified as the "Air Division Command"; and the author's assertion that King had made carrier landings on the USS *Lexington* is fabrication. Such inaccuracies, while not major in themselves, are nevertheless typical of the author's sloppy research. (The author in this same passage managed to distort King's womanizing into an innuendo against naval officers and their wives that was so demeaning that this reviewer was tempted to relegate the book to the circular file then and there.)

The author begs the question of Marshall's role in history by simply quoting accolades from others as prima facie evidence that Marshall was a great man. Hence there is every reason to believe that the author is unsure of what Marshall actually did. The result is a shallow biography of superficial anecdotes devoid of either interpretation or analysis. The writing style matches the contents: the text is burdened both with slang (the Japanese are described as "bayonet-waving

bullies" with "greedy eyes") and absurd metaphors (bad news from the Middle East "came limping in," and American advisors in North Africa "were as useful in solving the problems of the French in Algiers as goldfish in a bowl of piranhas").

Enough. This is a wretched book, steeped in trivialities, its veracity discredited, hastily slapped together to exploit Marshall's name for uncritical public consumption. The pity is that gullible readers will swallow it whole. Military biography is cursed with journalists who write what they think the public will buy and who have only the dimmest awareness of the people they write about. Public understanding of the military profession has become a hopeless proposition.

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Editors Note: The George C. Marshall Research Foundation is in the process of publishing *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*. The first volume, "*The Soldierly Spirit, December 1880-June 1939*," edited by Larry I. Bland and Sharon R. Ritenour was published by the Johns Hopkins University Press in 1981.

Coffey, Thomas M. *HAP: The Story of the U.S. Air Force and the Man Who Built it, General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold*. New York: Viking Press, 1982. 416pp. \$19.95

As the book's jacket claims that it is the definitive biography of General Henry H. Arnold (it is the only one, aside from Arnold's autobiography, *Global Mission*), the author's qualifications are therefore significant. Thomas Coffey was once himself a pilot in the force Arnold commanded. Since the war, he has made an impressive career as a journalist, a drama and movie critic, and a writer of television scripts and books. Of course, the fact that the book is well written and readable and that the author

himself was once qualified in Arnold's vocation do not mean that Coffey is not capable of producing a *scholarly* biography. Nor do they mean that he is.

The nature of Coffey's book is conditioned by his selection of sources. His bibliography is impressive enough. He conducted many interviews himself and used many others done by the Albert Simpson Historical Research Center and Columbia University. As Coffey builds conflict into the story by setting up the Navy as the domestic nemesis of Arnold and his air arm, it is significant that nowhere do we find any mention of interviews with the Navy survivors or any significant documentation arising from sources favorable to that side of the budgetary battles of the interwar period. Though most of the primary source collections of the Library of Congress, the Air Force Academy Library, and the Albert Simpson Center (among others) are listed in the bibliography, the footnotes make me think that Coffey was much more reliant on the memories of his interviewees and on the secondary sources than he was on the collections. One suspects that he dipped into the latter here and there, and relied on published works for the reconstruction of the main part of the story. Had he done more with the documentary collections it might have resulted in a better balanced book (even without inputs from Navy sources or foreign archives). As it is, he depends much too heavily on the recollections of family members and old friends speaking long, long after the events they describe.

Further, the documentation style itself deprives the book of the label "definitive biography." When Coffey does cite a letter from one of the actors to another, for example, he seldom gives its location. A letter from Spaatz to Arnold, without a date or location given, could be found

almost anywhere among 115,000 items in the Spaatz Collection, somewhere in the Arnold Collection, among the Eaker papers (as he was a close friend of both), or maybe even in the National Archives. Consequently, Coffey's research cannot be duplicated in many of its dimensions and its utility to historians is therefore severely limited. Finally, two of the classical sources on the subject are conspicuous by their absence from the footnotes though one does appear in the bibliography: first, the *United States Strategic Bombing Survey* and, second, W.E. Craven and James L. Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. In many, many cases Coffey is satisfied to cite the suspect recollections of primary actors when he could just as well have buttressed their testimony with the USSBS or Craven and Cate. If then, the biography of General Arnold cannot be classified as a scholarly one, could it possibly have some other utility?

The story of Hap Arnold might well be worthwhile for the popular market as entertainment or inspiration or general information—provided it did not do violence to the truth as it *would* appear in a "definitive" biography. Here Coffey comes closer to the mark. His writing style is lively and readable. He gives the work the appearance of impartiality by highlighting some of the defects of his hero—his irascibility, his failure to take care of his body, his neglect of his family in favor of his career, his ruthlessness, the apparent failure of his nerve early in his flying career, and the seemingly temporary alienations between Arnold and his wife. Thus, Coffey *does* deal with the warts and it is hard to say whether he does so effectively because the judgment in the end must be a subjective one. For the general reader there is enough gossip, adventure and conflict to make the story move—perhaps the conflict is overdone,

however, for Arnold (as Coffey admits) was no Mitchell. If the entertainment value is there, does the interpretation square with the main lines of airpower history as it is now understood—or are the variances satisfactorily explained?

Though Coffey clearly does accept uncritically the standard Air Corps assumption that those who did not wear wings were generally old “fogeys” and reactionaries, for the most part he avoids the controversial issues of the history of interwar and Second World War airpower. Notwithstanding the jacket’s assertion that this is “The Story of the U.S. Air Force and the Man Who Built it,” it is much more the story of the man than it is a tale of the air arm. Though Coffey has most of his facts about airpower history straight, all of it is fairly well known already and if the reader’s goal is to enhance his knowledge in that field, he would do better to look elsewhere.

If the reader is interested in the study of military leadership, *HAP* is of some worth. Though it relies very heavily on Arnold’s own *Global Missions* and the testimony of his three sons, there is enough to constitute an impressionistic portrait of his character. He was irascible. He was impatient. He was ambitious, perhaps excessively so—if one is to believe the testimony of some of his rivals. He was not the world’s most impressive family man. But perhaps he *was* the sort of leader that was required by *that* particular crisis. The World War One air mobilization was a dismal failure—and Arnold, then a colonel in Washington, was on the scene to observe all the mistakes that were made then. Twenty years later, armed with that knowledge, a driving and impatient character, and possessed with enough ruthlessness to do what needed to be done, Arnold may well have been the

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man for the hour. Dwight Eisenhower in his diaries wondered whether Arnold’s closest chum, General Carl Spaatz, had enough toughness for air leadership—but there was no question in Arnold’s case. It seems clear from the evidence offered by Coffey that Arnold cannot have been a very nice man to work for, but that he got the job done. The organization of the Army’s air arm for World War Two *was* far superior to that of the earlier war. He was the organizer; fortunately he had some lieutenants who were possessed with entirely different personalities much better suited for the employment of the instruments that Arnold built.

*HAP* is not a major contribution to the history of airpower; it is an interesting case study in one possible style of leadership that proved successful in an emergency setting where the main problem was quickly organizing and building a force to fight a major war. In short, taken with a grain of salt, *HAP* can provide an entertaining evening of reading but it is *not* a definitive work.

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Bloodworth, Dennis. *The Messiah and the Mandarins: Mao Tse-tung and the Ironies of Power*. New York: Atheneum, 1982. 331pp. \$15.95

Statesmen and literary figures are subject to constant reevaluation by posterity. The process begins immediately after their deaths and, in the case of giants, goes on for centuries. Usually, these ratings are at their highest in the immediate years following their demise. Then, there is a decline followed by almost cyclical fluctuations. In the case of Mao, this has not been true. Almost simultaneously at his death in 1976, the revisionists took over in obvious reaction