



Reviewed Work(s): Limiting Risk in America's Wars by Phillip S. Meilinger

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“must read” book. The author, Mark Hasara, Lt Col, USAF (Ret) and pilot call sign “Sluggo,” offers an exciting inside look at the aircraft refueling world. Reading Hasara’s personal stories and tactical incidents from over 20 years of active flying missions is illuminating! And these included missions during the Cold War, Desert Shield, Desert Storm, the Iraq War, and Enduring Freedom. I never realized how little I knew and how much I underappreciated the role of our USAF tanker fleet. The reader learns early in the book that nearly all military aircraft operations anywhere in the world must have air refueling tankers available and integrated into any mission plan in order to succeed. One quickly identifies with the air refueling motto: “Nobody kicks ass without our gas—nobody.”

The book starts with a very positive and supportive foreword by Rush Limbaugh. Hasara flew and operated the Boeing KC–135 Stratotanker throughout his career from the late 1980s to 2003. Each chapter begins with appropriate “world celebrity quotes” and ends with “Lessons from the Cockpit.” Hasara includes some excellent photographs which he took over the years. Some of his most interesting stories come from refueling aircraft of different countries. Different procedures, different languages, and various levels of training all add up to challenging situations. One such incident involved the “brute force disconnect” by an F–15 of the Royal Saudi Air Force which inadvertently broke off the nozzle from the refueling boom. The pilot asked, “We make air mess, no?” A good sense of humor is valuable in situations like this.

For me, a very interesting piece of history came from the KC–135 being called the “water wagon.” The KC–135, with 165,000 pounds of fuel, was too heavy for take-off without water injection into the engines. “Six-hundred and seventy gallons of demineralized water burns in about 125 seconds during a wet thrust take-off.” It was standard operating procedure for increased thrust. This is great stuff to learn.

Another incident occurred in 2003 when three KC–135s were assigned to specifically support six black jets (F–117 stealth fighters) coming to Saudi Arabia. The tower held these tankers at the runway for 30 minutes past their assigned time while a group of fighters were given priority takeoffs. As a consequence, the tankers missed the F–117s; and these black jets had to return home due to low fuel and scrubbed their mission. Frustrating to all, especially the tankers who pride themselves on always being there to support all missions. But the commander of U.S. Central Command Air Forces, General Moseley, defused the situation by seeing the big picture (over 800 aircraft) and declaring the confusion due to the “fog of war.” Many unplanned things always happen!

Although it could be due to my lack of experience in military air operations, I did find one negative aspect in reading this book. There are many military abbrevia-

tions and acronyms without any reference glossary: pilot call signs, squadron names, ground area zones, organizations, air space sequences, refueling corridors, refueling zones, weapons, etc. Many are defined when first used, and then you are on your own. It can be confusing and annoying. Even with this challenging problem, this is a good book to read. Bravo to tanker pilots.

Paul D. Stone, Docent, NASM’s Udvar-Hazy Center



Limiting Risk in America’s Wars. By Phillip S. Meilinger. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2017. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. Xix, 277. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-1-68247-250-7

Phillip Meilinger is an airpower historian of long standing whose interests have always extended beyond the facts to both the theory and philosophy of the uses of airpower. He has contributed to what we know of previous theorists as well as contributing his own thoughts. This book is the latest distillation of his ideas of how the United States can and should use airpower to achieve its goals with the least cost and risk. Meilinger is not arguing that we can achieve our goals with no risk or cost: politics and war always have associated costs and risks. His point is that the United States has become wedded to a philosophy involving interventions in the form of large ground formations which fails to take advantage of our asymmetric power in the form of airpower—tremendously capable special operations forces and an intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance capability unmatched anywhere in the world. When we can match these capabilities with indigenous forces, he argues we have hit on a war-winning combination.

The book is relatively short but covers a lot of ground. Meilinger discusses prominent military theorists (Hart, Fuller, Clausewitz, Jomini, and Sun Tzu) as well as providing historical examples to support his arguments. I found it curious that he failed to bring in the concept of the Clausewitzian trinity of the people, military, and political leadership, as he does discuss the issues of image in a global 24/7 news cycle world and the corresponding impact operations (especially failed ones) have on our country. His discussion of theory, however, almost completely bypasses the airpower theorists he knows so well. He discusses John Warden’s airpower theory focusing on its ability to impact an enemy directly while bypassing his strength in the form of his fielded forces. He mentions John Boyd’s theory of the OODA (observe, orient, decide, act) loop in passing but without expanding on its use and impact. There is no mention whatever of other well-known airpower theorists (the big three of early theory—Mitchell, Douhet and Trenchard—being the most obvious). The biggest shortcom-

ing of this book, however, is the failure to address this strategy in light of the reemergence of peer and near-peer competitors in the form of Russia and China. While Meilinger doesn't state definitively that this is a theory for use in Iraq- and Afghanistan-type scenarios, his arguments and examples all point that way. He argues that nuclear weapons have made the concept of major-power force-on-force conflict obsolete. Given Russia's penchant for using proxies in seeking her foreign policy goals, this strategy might be useful; but a more robust discussion would be helpful. And while nuclear weapons certainly make the idea of a major war difficult to contemplate, our adversaries are continually seeking ways to confront us to gain advantage while avoiding our strengths. This discussion is exactly the sort of conversation needed to address these issues.

This is the sort of book we need to help continue the discussion of how the United States should be engaging in the world. The Air Force is currently developing its next generation bomber which will incorporate the latest in stealth, propulsion, and information technology. At the same time, it is exploring a relatively simple light-attack platform for use in smaller conflicts. These cost money, and the more we discuss what we are trying to accomplish and what systems are required, the better prepared we'll be. This book is a valuable addition to that discussion.

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The Origins of American Strategic Bombing Theory. By Craig F. Morris. Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. x, 250. \$34.95 ISBN: 9-78168247252-1

Discussions of the development of US strategic bombing theory leading up to World War II often focus on several elements as the main impetus behind this key component of airpower: the works of key individuals such as Generals Billy Mitchell and Benjamin Foulois, the emergence of enabling technologies such as long-range aircraft and the Norden bombsight, and organizational decisions such as the creation of General Headquarters Air Force. Morris, an assistant professor of history at the Air Force Academy, rejects the idea that any single factor played a dominant role in the development of strategic bombing theory. He presents the counter view that it was a combination of many forces that worked together to pave the way for the emergence of strategic bombing as the Army Air Forces' primary mission during World War II.

One of Morris's themes is that the path toward development of strategic bombing theory was not a steady line of progress that began with the creation of the Aero-

nautical Division of the Signal Corps in 1907 and culminated in the publication of the comprehensive strategic bombing plan known as Air War Plans Division No. 1 (AWPD-1) in 1941. To the contrary, progress could best be described as two steps forward and one step back, with an occasional breakthrough that moved the Air Service (under its various names) closer toward the goal of a coherent and comprehensive doctrine for the employment of strategic bombing. He makes the case that this isn't surprising, given the complex interplay among senior military and civilian leaders, mid-level planners, technology, competing priorities within the US military, the changing nature of warfare, and America's evolving perception of its place in the world.

Morris identifies the development of strategic bombing theory as being rooted in the experience of the 1916-1917 Mexican Expedition, which made aviators painfully aware of the need to better define the role of aviation in combat. One of the officers who flew during the Mexican Expedition was Edgar Gorrell who, by the end of World War I, had risen to the rank of lieutenant colonel and was a member of the Allied Expeditionary Force Air Service technical section. Adding his own views to ideas borrowed from British and French allies, Gorrell developed what Morris calls "the first clearly defined American vision of strategic bombing." The vision emphasized the separation of strategic bombing from tactical aviation, careful selection of targets critical to the enemy's industrial capability, and concentrated bombing of each target. Morris notes that these three principles—*independence, targeting, and concentration*—would be the cornerstones of strategic bombing doctrine for the next hundred years.

Unfortunately, this plan was approved eight weeks after the war ended. A return to peacetime conditions, with the accompanying force reductions and budget cuts, meant that there would not be an opportunity to implement Gorrell's plan.

In the interwar years, a number of factors had an impact on the development of strategic bombing theory. These included efforts to overcome the insistence by senior Army leaders that the primary role of aviation was to support the ground war, the emergence of the B-17 as a game-changing bombing platform, the eventual recognition that an effective bombing campaign could have a meaningful impact on the enemy's ability to wage war, the reshaping of the Air Corps Tactical School as an incubator for forward-thinking planners, and the 1939 appointment of General George Marshall as Army Chief of Staff. Morris covers all these factors and many others in considerable detail, clearly explaining how individuals and events, both within the Air Service and external, shaped the bombing theory that was published as AWPD-1 four months before America's entry into World War II.

This book is a well-researched, well-written descrip-