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Book Review – Hap Arnold: The General Who Invented the U.S. Air Force






By Bill Yenne; Regnery History; 304 pages

BY JAN TEGLER - FEBRUARY 1, 2014



Gen. Henry H. Arnold (center), Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, and Col. Ariel W. Nielsen (left), commanding officer of the 350th Fighter Group, 22nd Tactical Air Command, fighter arm of the 12th Air Force, confer with Brig. Gen. Robert S. Israel Jr., Commanding General of the 62nd Wing, while on an inspection tour of one of the fighter bases in the Mediterranean Theater of operations. U.S. Air Force photo (center), Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, and Col. Ariel W. Nielsen (left), commanding officer of the 350th Fighter Group, 22nd Tactical Air Command, fighter arm of the 12th Air Force, confer with Brig. Gen. Robert S. Israel Jr., Commanding General of the 62nd Wing, while on an inspection tour of one of the fighter bases in the Mediterranean Theater of operations. U.S. Air Force photo

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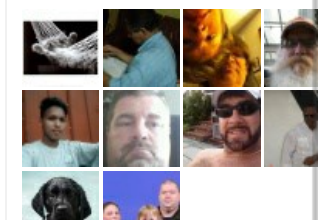
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Henry Harley “Hap” Arnold first took to the sky on May 3, 1911. Instructed by Orville and Wilbur Wright, and Wright test pilot/instructor Al Welsh at a Wright-owned field (a former cow pasture) near the Wright factory in Dayton, Ohio, Arnold soloed just ten days later.

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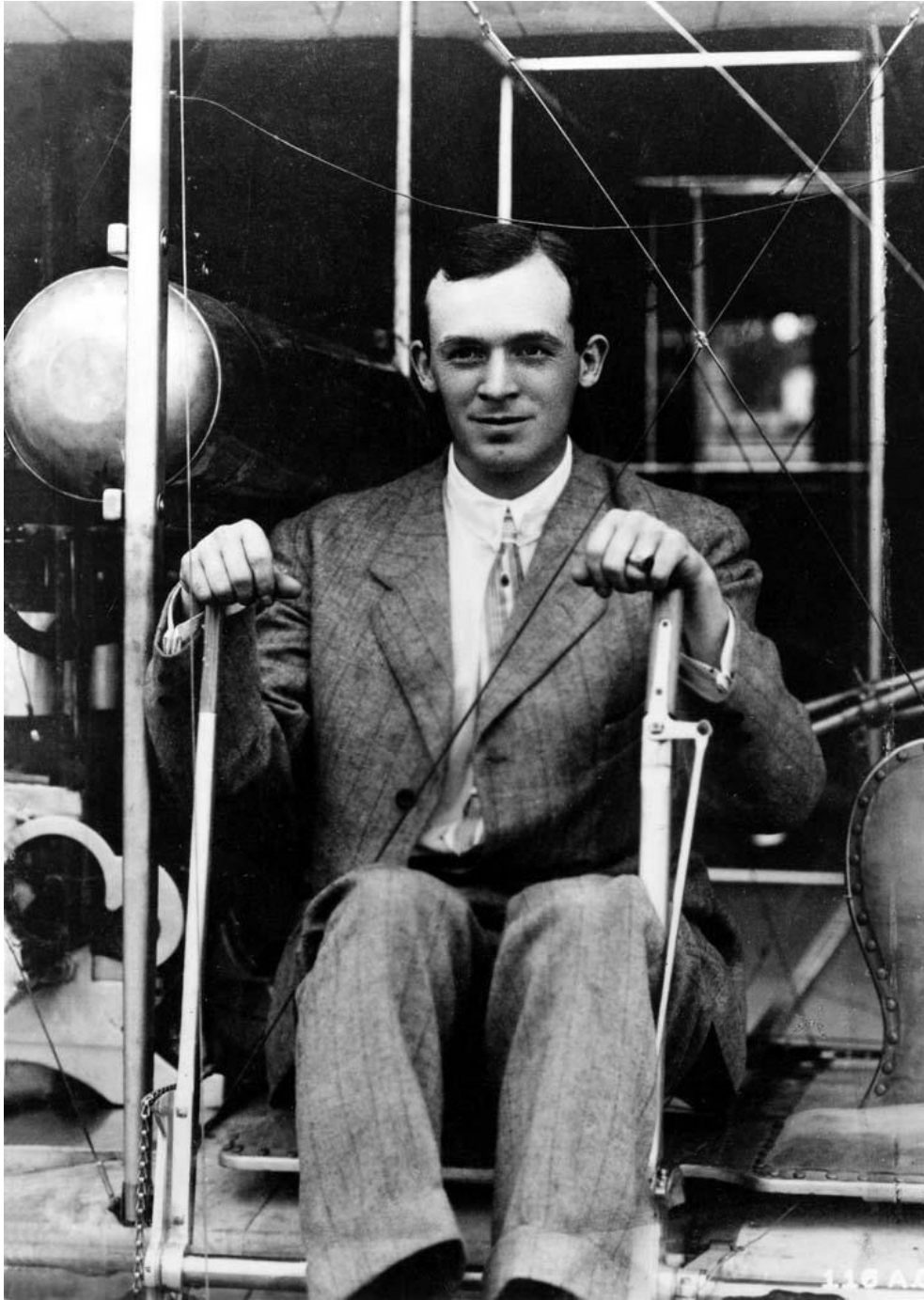
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On July 6, he received accreditation in the form of an **FAI (Fédération Aéronautique Internationale)** pilot certificate. Second Lieutenant Arnold was now one of the first **U.S. Army** aviators, part of a handful of pilots assigned to “aeronautical duty” with the Army’s Signal Corps.



Then-Lt. Henry H. Arnold at the Wright School, Dayton, Ohio, in May 1911. U.S. Air Force photo

No military aviator’s badge existed as yet. Metal “wings” weren’t introduced until 1912. Assigned to College Park, Md. (the Army’s first official airfield) and

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Toward the end of World War II, the Tuskegee Airmen went head-to-head against German Me 262s:
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equipped with a single airplane, he and fellow flier 2nd Lt. Tommy Milling were the only two pilots on duty in all of the service.

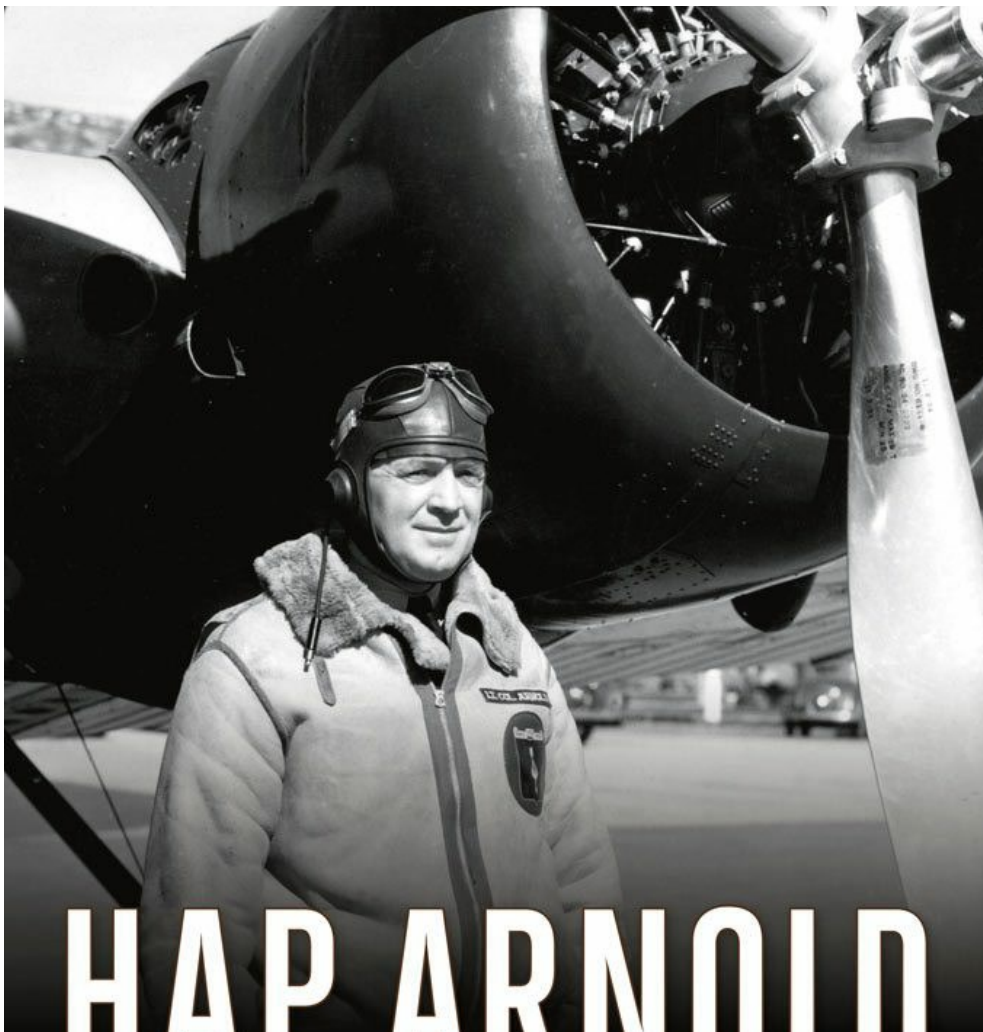
Just 33 years later, Gen. Hap Arnold was the United States Army Air Forces' Chief, commanding 2.4 million men and women and nearly 80,000 aircraft – the largest air force in history.

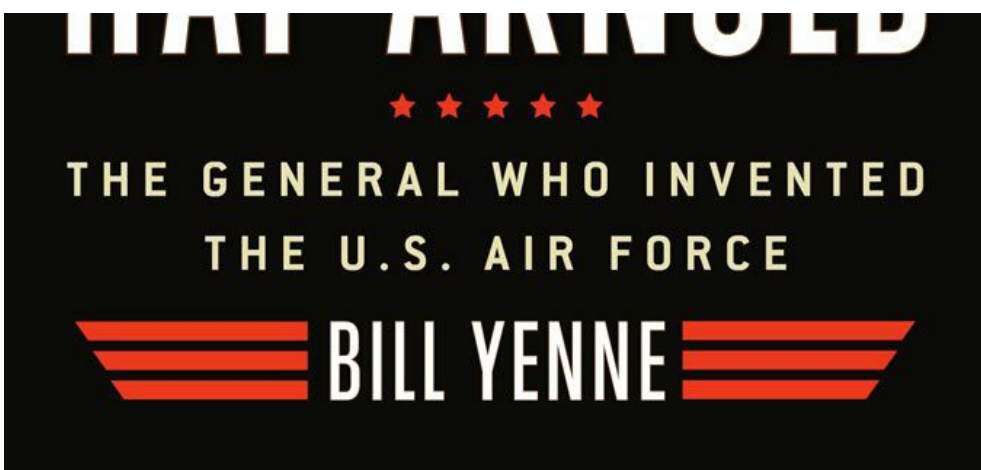
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That stunning contrast is emblematic of Arnold's career. And his role as “the founding father of the modern [United States Air Force](#),” as author Bill Yenne refers to it, is the primary thrust of this very interesting biography.

It is Yenne's contention that Arnold is one of the most underappreciated military leaders in American history. Widely revered within the Air Force, his name is undoubtedly less familiar to the American public than iconic figures ranging from George Washington and [Ulysses S. Grant](#) to [Douglas MacArthur](#) and Dwight D. Eisenhower.





Hap Arnold: The General Who Invented the U.S. Air Force, by Bill Yenne; Regnery History; 304 pages

Hap Arnold: The General Who Invented the U.S. Air Force chronicles Arnold's life and career, from his upbringing as the son of a country doctor near Philadelphia through his appointment as the Air Force's only five-star general in history. Along the way, the book highlights Arnold's struggles as an advocate for strategic airpower and a separate air force.

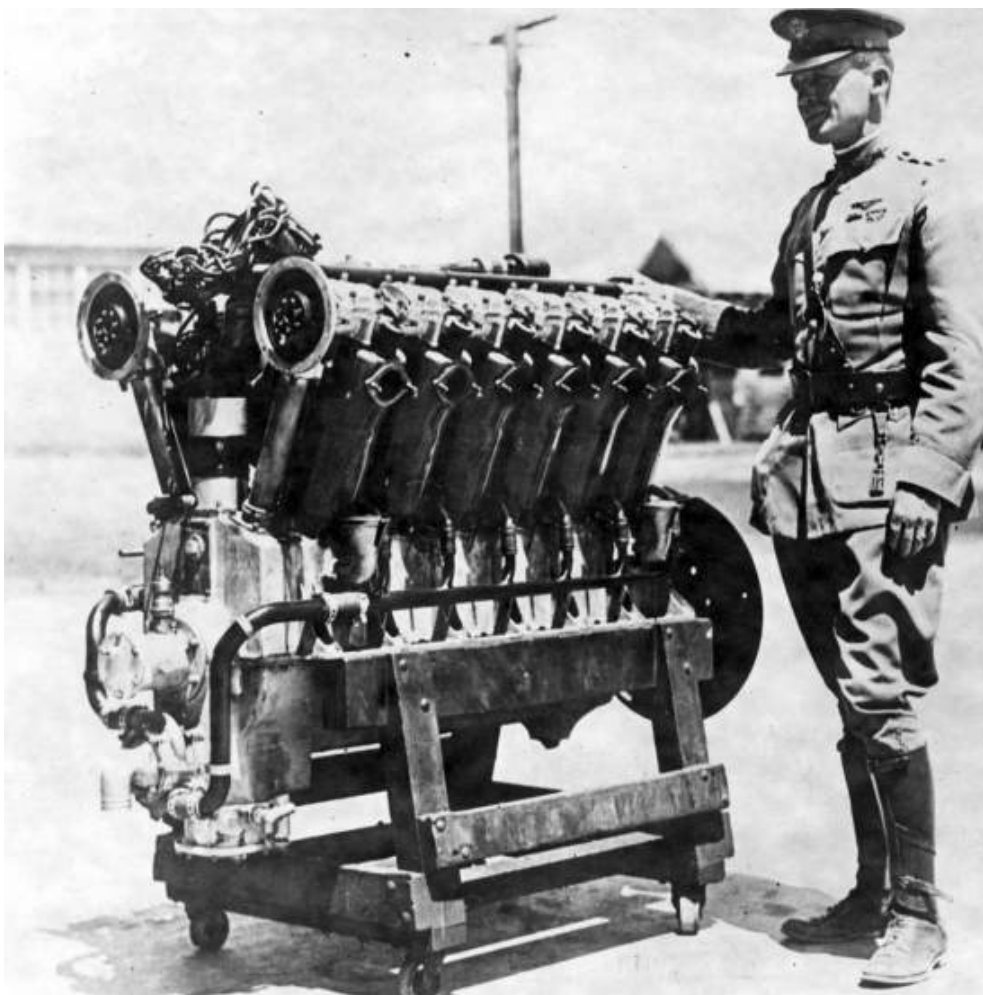
Interestingly, Yenne points out that Hap Arnold himself had to be convinced of aviation's relevance to the military and to his own career – first as an aspiring cavalryman at [West Point](#) and later after a near death experience while flying at [Fort Riley](#), Kan. in late 1912.

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Interestingly, Yenne points out that Hap Arnold himself had to be convinced of aviation's relevance to the military and to his own career – first as an aspiring cavalryman at West Point and later after a near death experience while flying at Fort Riley, Kan. in late 1912.

Arnold turned his back on flying after the incident, returning to the infantry for a stint in the Philippines. Four years passed before none other than Maj. William Lendrum “Billy” Mitchell persuaded him to rejoin the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps and resume flying. Arnold would go on to be one of Mitchell's strongest supporters, inspired by the maverick officer to pursue their shared vision for strategic airpower.

Mitchell was just one of the seminal military figures Arnold counted as a friend. Early connections with other Army aviators including Carl “Tooe” Spaatz, [Jimmy Doolittle](#) and Ira Eaker, and regular Army commanders like [George Catlett Marshall](#) proved indispensable in 1938 when Arnold was assigned the monumental task of building the Army Air Corps into a modern air force. As Yenne illustrates with a quote from Arnold's memoirs, it was a massively daunting assignment.



Then-Maj. Henry H. Arnold standing beside the first Liberty Engine turned out use during World War I. Arnold put to use lessons he learned during his time as the executive officer of the Signal Corps Aviation Section during World War I, to buildup the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II. U.S. Air Force photo

“It is one thing to sit on the sidelines and say what should or should not have been done in order to prevent this or that from happening,” Arnold observed. “It is another when you have the responsibility for the task staring you right in the face”

Between 1938, when he assumed command, and December 11, 1941 **when the U.S. declared war on the Axis powers**, Arnold took Air Corps strength from less than eighteen hundred aircraft to almost five thousand. From there on, he worked himself to the point of exhaustion (and four wartime heart attacks) assembling the arsenal of aircraft that would populate his strategic and tactical air forces and air transport command in Europe and the Pacific.

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The historic build-up was remarkable but as the biography astutely observes, the effort was in a way the second time around for Arnold. Appointed as executive officer of the Signal Corps Aviation Section in April 1917, after the U.S. entered WWI, the newly promoted brevet-colonel faced the responsibility of transforming the Army's aviation section from a force of twenty-six qualified pilots and fifty-five outdated training aircraft to a force of five thousand pilots and 4,500 combat aircraft.

Arnold was also a guiding force behind the U.S. Army Air Forces' concept of operations in World War II. When the **RAF** objected to the Army Air Force's engagement in precision daylight bombing early in the war, favoring its own nighttime carpet bombing strategy, Arnold stood up for Army Air Forces' doctrine. Daylight bombing was the only way to effectively target and destroy Germany's ability to make war he maintained. His argument prevailed, leading to **the now famous Combined Bomber Offensive (day/night raids)** that paved the way for **the Normandy landings** and the liberation of Europe in 1944.



In the Pacific, it was Arnold's strong support for the B-29 Superfortress (plagued early in its development by a range of issues) as **the prime tool for strategic airpower in the theater** and his belief that Japan, like Germany, must be rendered incapable of making war that led to **daily missions over the Land of the Rising Sun in 1945**.

To make sure strategic airpower would help bring the war in the Pacific to a rapid climax, Arnold took the unprecedented step of retaining personal command of the all-B-29-equipped **20th Air Force**. In the end of course, it was **the B-29 that brought Japan to its knees**.

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As great as Hap Arnold's contribution to victory in World War II was, Yenne points out that even in the midst of the largest conflict in human history he was looking into the future.

As great as Hap Arnold's contribution to victory in World War II was, Yenne points out that even in the midst of the largest conflict in human history he was looking into the future. Enlisting the American scientific/academic community to pursue advanced technology from the early days of the war, he laid the groundwork for an independent postwar air force and the doctrine and aircraft that would guide and equip the service for decades thereafter.

To quote Bill Yenne: “The process culminated in the National Security Act of 1947, the National Military Establishment, which became the **Department of Defense** in 1949. Most of the act's provisions became effective on Sept. 18, 1947. It was on that date that the independent Air Force, which had been the fervent dream of Hap Arnold and so many others in the decades since Billy Mitchell's time, was born. On that date, Tooley Spaatz exchanged his khaki cap for a blue one, becoming the first chief of staff of the new Air Force.”





Gen. Hap Arnold, commander of the U.S. Army Air Forces, examining the "Mempis Belle" after it returned to the United States. Arnold was responsible for the successful Combined Bomber Offensive that helped to defeat Germany. U.S. Air Force photo

The service itself is the legacy of Hap Arnold - The General Who Invented the U.S. Air Force.

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BY **JAN TEGLER**

Jan Tegler is a writer/broadcaster from Severna Park, Md. His work appears in a variety...



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Philip Lyon · Byu

I hope this book is different, but it seems typical of the wartime air farce propaganda that implied Arnold walked on water.

The fact is he never claimed to be the smartest man in the room, and while the air farce hagiographies imply this simply proves his humility, he was just being honest unlike the air farce.

One wonders whether the book treats any of the huge mistakes made by Arnold and or the rest of the "bomber uber alles" conspiracy brotherhood.

Time does not permit me to detail all of them, but here are some just off the top of my head.

Quite aside from a whole series of "air minded" army chiefs of staff who saw to it that the youngest branch of the army got the lion's share of the available budget during the worst of the depression etc, and were vilified for it for not giving more when they didn't have it by the ... [See More](#)

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