

Books Every Pilot Should Own

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The act of rising above the surface of the earth on solid wings has inspired some great literature. Even in this ever-more-electronic 21st century, some of the greatest pleasure and inspiration can still be found only within the covers of a book—something a pilot can carry easily on a trip. Books make great gifts—for a pilot friend or relative, or yourself.

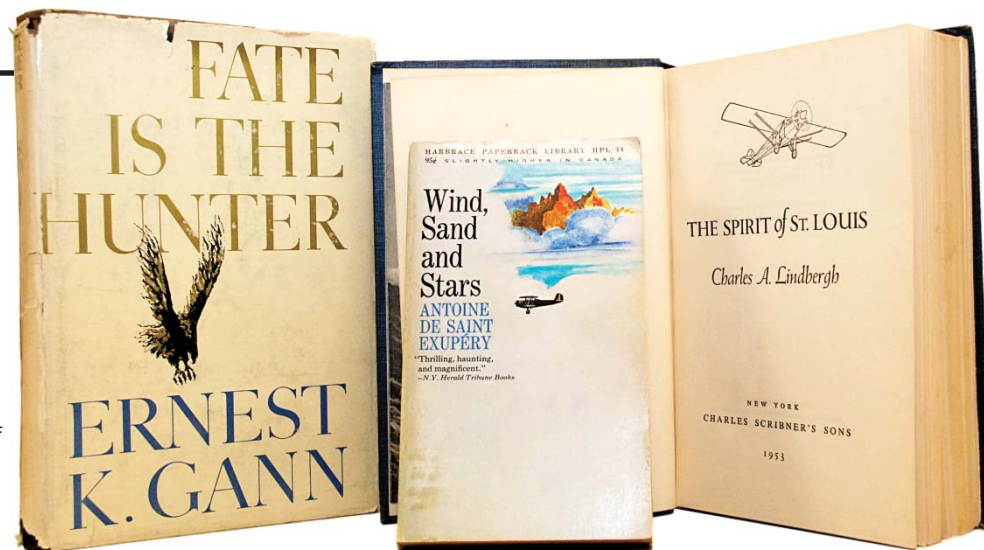
The library shelves groan with the weight of all the books written about aviation—some great, some wretched, many in between. Where to start?

On this page we'll offer a short list of three classics of aviation literature—i.e., meeting one definition of "literature" as "writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest." All of these books ennoble the audacious act of leaving the earth in an airplane and navigating the great ocean of air. But they extend well beyond mere recounting of facts, dates, names; they explore the grander, eternal themes—the nature of life, death, honor, courage, valor, service, exploration, adventure. What it is to be human.

But don't necessarily take our word for it. To give the electronic era its due, one of the glories of the Internet is that you can visit websites such as Amazon.com and pull up superb, detailed book reviews by other readers—some by fellow pilots—and sift them for a general impression of the book. The reviews often will also lead to other literary gems.

So here's our short list:

Wind, Sand, and Stars, by Antoine de St.-Exupery (1939 Grand Prix du roman de l'Academie francaise): Perhaps no one has ever written more lyrically about flight than "Saint Ex," a pioneering French airmail pilot who flew dangerous early routes over the Pyrenees, the Sahara Desert, and the southern Andes in open-cockpit, round-engined ragwings all too frequently forced down by weather or engine trouble. Best known for his classic tale for children, *The Little Prince*, St.-Exupery authored several superb titles, including *Night Flight*, *Flight to Arras*, and *Southern Mail* before disappearing in 1944 during a recon mission over the Mediterranean (his airplane was found on the bottom of the sea a few years ago). *Outside* magazine put *Wind, Sand,*



and *Stars* above all others on its list of top 25 adventure/exploration books.

The Spirit of St. Louis, by Charles A. Lindbergh (1954 Pulitzer Prize for biography or autobiography): Like St.-Exupery, Lindbergh (eventually named an honorary ALPA member) was an early airmail pilot; *The Spirit of St. Louis* is the Lone Eagle's account of his historic solo transatlantic nonstop flight from New York to Paris in May 1927. Some see in *Spirit* the hand of Lindbergh's wife, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, herself a pilot and gifted writer (see *North to the Orient*, her account of the Lindberghs' pioneering flight around the Pacific rim to Asia in an open-cockpit floatplane). No matter who actually wrote it, *Spirit* certainly deserved the Pulitzer Prize.

Fate Is the Hunter, by Ernest K. Gann (1961 best-seller): Gann was an airline pilot in the 1930s and '40s, and later a playwright and prolific novelist. Among Gann's several works that deal with aviation (including *The High and the Mighty*, *Island in the Sky*, and *The Aviator*), this memoir is the one every airline pilot should own. Gann writes wonderfully about the night when he and his captain "shook [fear's] filthy hand" in an ice-laden DC-2. Years later, he almost wiped out the Taj Mahal. On another occasion, he had the delicious pleasure of watching propulsion engineers who suspected pilot error squirm while all four engines quit on a DC-4 over the Pacific.

Now let's hear *your* picks—aviation literature, history (of course, every airline pilot should own both volumes of *Flying the Line*, ALPA's history written by George Hopkins), biography, memoirs, even art and photo books. Drop us a line at Magazine@alpa.org or *Air Line Pilot*, P.O. Box 1169, Herndon, VA 20172-1169 and tell us what aviation books you cherish above all others, and why. 📖