



# On the Bookshelf

## Books Every Pilot Should Own

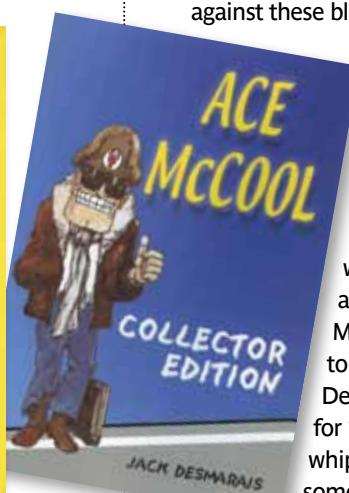
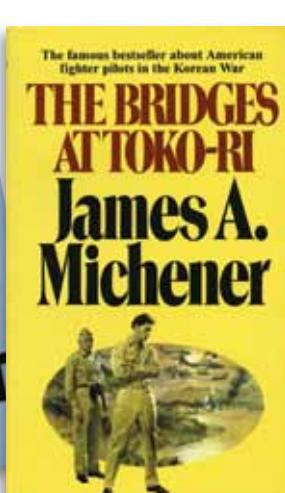
By Jan W. Steenblik, Technical Editor

In this fifth installment of "On the Bookshelf," we offer up this holiday season a sampling of aviation books that should interest many readers, including our Canadian members, devotees of military aviation, and general aviation enthusiasts.

On June 11, 2005, the world lost one of the last great romantics: Gordon Baxter, known to millions as simply "Bax," died.

A lifelong resident of southeast Texas, Bax was a popular radio personality in Beaumont and Port Arthur, a private pilot, and a columnist for newspapers and magazines. In 1970, he began writing a monthly column, "Bax Seat," for *Flying*.

*Bax Seat: Log of a Pasture Pilot*, a Ziff-Davis book distributed by McGraw-Hill, was published in 1978. Columns from Bax's



first several years with *Flying* are interlaced with humorous and witty background on his sometimes tumultuous relationship with the Ivy League editors in New York.

Former *Flying* executive editor Stephan Wilkinson wrote in the foreword, "Bax has something that writers lust after—an ear, one of the things that made Mark Twain great...."

Gordon Baxter loved general aviation, pilots and other "airplane people," country airports, big and little airshows, crop dusters, biplanes (especially Stearmans), his Mooney.

He had friends and admirers everywhere—fellow pilots who would turn first to "Bax Seat" with each new issue of *Flying*. This book is for them, and for anyone who's ever flown summer touch-and-goes on grass in a J-3 with the windows open ("And with your head out like that, you can smell the tires crush the clover").

James A. Michener's *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, a 120-page novella published in 1953, portrays U.S. naval aviation in the Korean War, the 1950–53 "police action" that led to the current stalemate of North and South Korea divided by a demilitarized zone.

Michener spent time on two U.S. Navy carriers to research a series of articles on the air war for *The Saturday Evening Post*, one of the premier U.S. general interest magazines of the day. Another result was this book.

*The Bridges at Toko-Ri* focuses on a resentful 29-year-old U.S. Navy fighter pilot, Harry Brubaker, recalled to active duty for Korea and thus leaving behind his wife, two young daughters, and a career as an attorney in Denver. Brubaker flies the McDonnell F2H Banshee, a single-seat carrier-based fighter. He confronts his fear of participating in an attack on the fiercely defended rail and truck bridges that run through a narrow valley and are vital to the communists' supply chain.

One of the principal themes of the novel is the lack of knowledge of, and interest in, the war on the part of the Americans back home.

Michener authored or coauthored more than 40 titles, including Pulitzer-winning *Tales of the South Pacific* and best-sellers *Hawaii*, *Texas*, *The Covenant*, and *The Source*. Measured

against these blockbusters, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* is a trifle, but it remains one of the few literary treatments of the Korean "police action." As such, it has earned a place on aviators' bookshelves.

Do judge *Ace McCool*, by Canadian airline pilot Jack Desmarais (now retired), by its cover: The crazy characters who work for fictional Down East International, a small, corner-cutting outfit based in Moncton, New Brunswick, are over-the-top cartoonish. But, oh, are they funny. Desmarais's monthly column about DEI ran for 14½ years in *Canadian Aviation*. Desmarais whipped up insane, convoluted plots that somehow always worked out in the end.

World War II veteran Ace McCool started DEI with a hangar and a de Havilland Dragon Rapide (1930s cabin biplane), both obtained by questionable means, then moved up to DC-3s, Vickers Vanguards, and a Boeing 727. The columns are, among other things, a paean to the Vanguard, a four-engine turboprop similar to the Lockheed Electra. The airline is perpetually on the brink of financial ruin, but the challenging flying and the weekly "pilot meetings" at the Heroes Bar & Grill more than make up for the shaky credit rating.

DEI's limits for hand-flown ILS approaches are 50 and an eighth, but the weather in the Maritimes is often WOXOF, and Moncton Tower controllers turn a blind eye to the "Woxies" landing in zero-zero. All DEI airplanes sport a "Have Landed" light in the cabin to let passengers know the pilots ("polemasters of the first order") have once again painted it on in the fog.

Buy this book only if you're willing to laugh long and hard at your airline industry (no matter where you live and work). It's a superb spoof by a guy who spent 37 years in airline cockpits.

Now let's hear your picks. Drop us a line at Magazine@ALPA.org or *Air Line Pilot*, P.O. Box 1169, Herndon, VA 20172-1169, and tell us what your favorite aviation books are and why.

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