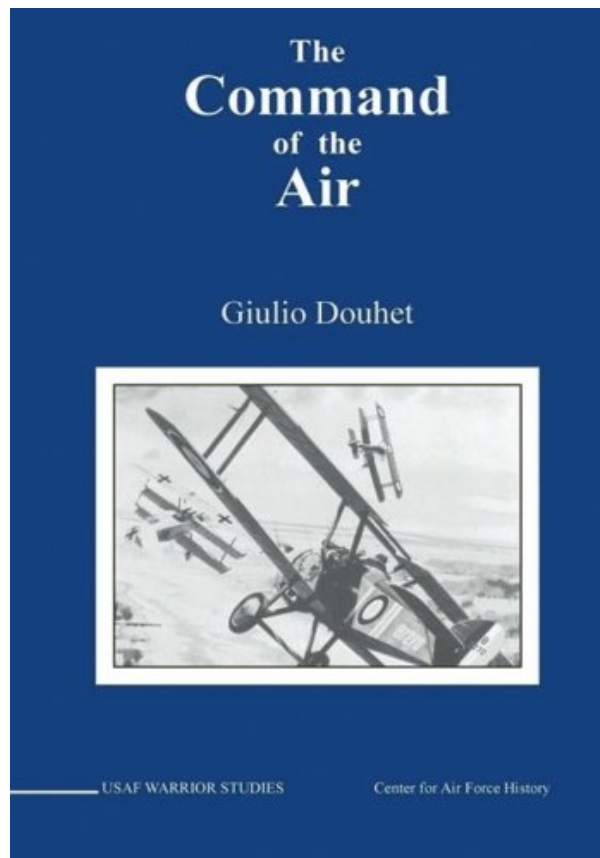


# THE COMMAND OF THE AIR (USAF WARRIOR STUDIES) BY GIULIO DOUHET



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# The Command of the Air

Giulio Douhet



USAF WARRIOR STUDIES

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## Review

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## Language Notes

Text: English, Italian (translation)

## About the Author

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# **THE COMMAND OF THE AIR (USAF WARRIOR STUDIES) BY GIULIO DOUHET PDF**

This reprint of the 1942 English translation of Douhet's works, while titled "Command of the Air", actually consists of five separate works: the original 1921 edition of "Command of the Air", a second edition of 1927, a 1928 monograph titled "Probable Aspects of Future War", a polemical article of 1929 called "Recapitulation" and the 1930 study "The War of 19-." By transporting ourselves back to the 1920s, past not only the Vietnam and Korean Wars, but nearly two decades before World War II, we become silent observers of the unfolding drama of airpower's history. Knowing that transpired after Douhet wrote, we can test our understanding, find the assumptions and conclusions of Douhet that proved false, and read with wonder those that proved true. Some of what he wrote today seems almost timeless, 'principles' perhaps of the employment of aircraft in war. Giulio Douhet was a prophet. From the perspective of today, he still bears pondering. Serious thinking about the nature of war and the role of aerospace power will not in our lifetime cease to be of value.

- Sales Rank: #919097 in Books
- Published on: 2015-10-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.00" h x .93" w x 7.00" l, 1.56 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 410 pages

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Cited more than quoted, quoted more than read

By E. M. Van Court

I recently read Benjamin Lambeth's *Air Power Against Terror*, a study of the first seven or eight months after 9/11, with emphasis of the ousting of the Taliban and other air operations in Afghanistan. All the thoughts and theories that I had always heard credited to Giulio Douhet seemed to be vindicated by the success of the operations in Afghanistan. Then it dawned on me, I had only taken other people's word for what Douhet had said and meant. This is easily fixed. In addition to the Air University's edition, the complete translation of Douhet's *Command of the Air* with the 1928 additions appears in *Roots of Strategy* Book 4.

Douhet was a visionary, and like most true visionaries got almost as much wrong as he got right. It would be very easy to focus on the arbitrary and unrealistic organization of an independent air force, campaign planning, and battle damage assessment theories, but it would be equally easy to ignore that in 1921, Douhet was advocating a joint organization for a nation's forces, something that didn't really happen in the U.S. until the 1980s, and is still not as far along as it should be. The general principles of air power laid down by Douhet are remarkably similar to the "10 Propositions Regarding Air Power" by Phillip S Meilinger, suggesting that Douhet has weathered the decades well.

Rather than nitpick the arbitrary nature of Douhet's 'units of destruction' and 'bombing units' (which I would accept as hypothetical numbers for discussion rather than rigid projections), I think the underlying conceptual shortcomings are more interesting.

-Douhet assumed that symmetrical or semi-symmetrical conflict between industrial powers were all that mattered. Even in 1928, colonial fights, insurgencies, revolutions etc had started to disrupt the nature of conflict. There is an element of irony in a leader with a transformational vision missing an environmental element that should have been considered (especially after the 'regime change' in Russia in 1918).

-Douhet didn't understand human nature. He firmly believed that strategic bombing would break the will of a nation. This simply isn't true, as demonstrated in WWII, Viet Nam, Serbia, and Palestine, to name a few cases after the writing of 'Command of the Air'. He did, however, understand that a nation's -capability- to fight could be greatly diminished through the use of air power, as was demonstrated in WWII, Operation Rolling Thunder II in Viet Nam, Serbia, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

-Douhet didn't understand human nature. He didn't acknowledge propaganda, information campaigns, or media as an adjunct of conflict. The will of the people is a valid target, but lethal weapons are extremely ineffective in altering it. Information operations, however...

-Douhet underestimated technology. This is counterintuitive, but there it is. He was somewhat pessimistic about improvements in accuracy of air ordnance, and modern precision munitions with 2m CEP were beyond his wildest flights of fancy, but make his vision much more plausible. I won't go into altitudes he discusses, versus modern air machines, or unmanned aircraft. His pessimism about technology is especially ironic as he firmly understood that air power is technology driven.

-He says the right things about a joint military, but never addresses how soldiers on the ground can make aircraft more effective. This is probably driven by the challenges of ground to air communication in 1928, but even then, wireless telephony was steadily improving, and he could have speculated about forward air controllers and elite ground units coordinating with air craft.

This was an interesting bit of history, and a fairly enjoyable read. Douhet was passionate about air power and aircraft, and had a grand vision that had more correct than not (even though some of the correct points are ignored by air power advocates these days). This book is an important text if you want to understand modern air power and how we got here.

E. M. Van Court

7 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Douhet's Command of the Air

By A Customer

This book truly shows the beginnings of Air Power theories. This book was written in an attempt to talk the Italian government into using Airpower as a new weapon. Douhet initially failed in this venture, but the Italians later realized their mistake. While the views and opinions of Douhet are at times extremely different from airpower today, and may seem a little ridiculous, this is certainly excellent reading for those who wish to begin learning about the origins of airpower theory.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

A must-have addition to your military history library.

By TomHunter1968

No matter where you buy this book, if you are interested in military history, particularly in the use of strategic air power, this is a must have read for your library. Douhet was one of the most influential thinkers in the history of military air power and its potential to influence the overall outcome of a war, and is studied even today by air forces worldwide, as well as the mandatory reading lists at the US military academies.

Personally, I consider this work to be on the same shelf as Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, though obviously the former dealt much more in theory than does Douhet, whose writings are more "operational" and practical. Regardless, this is a military classic and I think it is essential for anyone seeking to understand the role of air power in state vs state warfare.

One can debate whether Douhet's theories were and are valid (and goodness knows, they are); however, I don't think his influence on the potential and employment of strategic air power can be denied.

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