

## Reviews & Previews

### LeMay: A Biography

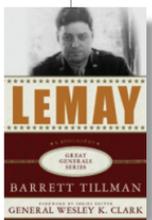
by Barrett Tillman, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 205 pp., \$21.95.

**LATELY, BIOGRAPHERS** have tended to concentrate on their subjects' personalities and environment as much as on their achievements. Not so with *LeMay: A Biography*, written by Barrett Tillman for Palgrave Macmillan's

"Great Generals" series. General Curtis E. LeMay was a legendarily stoic man, and the author does not even attempt to crack that veneer.

Rather, Tillman highlights LeMay's aeronautical and martial achievements during World War II and, as head of the Strategic Air Command and chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force, the cold war.

Introduced by a tepid, unenlightening forward by General Wesley Clark, the book is as much a chronicle of LeMay's airplanes as it is of the man himself,



from the Consolidated PT-3 biplane trainer he flew in 1927 to the six-engine XB-70 Valkyrie he advocated in 1964. LeMay's name is closely associated with some grand airplanes, including Boeing's B-17 Flying Fortress and B-29 Superfortress and Convair's B-58 Hustler.

As Tillman introduces each airplane, he shows LeMay's hand in driving development or honing tactics. An interested reader will pick up plenty of lore from the early days of these famed airplanes; in this regard, the book is a success.

However, despite its

detailed research, the book shows little understanding of the kind of guy he was. In fact, some of the anecdotes celebrating LeMay's micro-managerial style suffer from a lack of personal context.

For example, Tillman marvels at the fact that LeMay was instrumental in bringing the M-16 rifle into existence after he popped off a few rounds from an AR-15 (the M-16's predecessor) at a party. The festivities were held at the home of the president of the company that owned Armalite, which made the rifle and went on to win the M-16 contract.

Well, was LeMay in the habit of partying with military contractors? Did he enjoy it or feel obligated to go? Was the AR-15 test shoot at the party a public relations stunt? Was it a favor to a friend, a professional obligation, or a setup? Was it typical

behavior for LeMay? The reader has no idea. No family members and few military contemporaries are interviewed, and no personal papers are explored, aside from LeMay's own published works.

If a book is going to rely on the dry recitation of the technical achievements of a military career, it helps to have a subject the size of LeMay. His influence is lasting, under-appreciated, and often maligned by stereotypes.

A biography of a general, especially one as influential and fascinating as LeMay, does not have to be packed with emotion and psychoanalysis. But at some point, the achievements are not enough. The measure of a man has to include an appraisal of his character.

■ ■ ■ JOE PAPPALARDO IS AN ASSOCIATE EDITOR AT *AIR & SPACE* AND THE AUTHOR OF "ALENIA'S GAMBLE," P. 28

## >>> Fun Stuff <<<

### Hydrogen Rocket Kit 1876

by Estes, [www.estesrockets.com](http://www.estesrockets.com), \$29.99.

**THE HYDROGEN ROCKET'S** trick is that it electrolyzes a citric acid solution to produce hydrogen bubbles, which boil up from a generator and collect in the shaft of the rocket. Press the igniter and – pop! – the rocket blasts itself to about 60 feet. This toy is not meant for the impatient, however; if the instructions are not followed precisely, it will not work.

Only one of my first dozen attempts launched, but after I scoured the directions and mastered the launch protocol, the rocket popped repeatedly until it was time to go home (to find a G.I. Joe figure to strap to it).



### Moon in My Room

by Uncle Milton, [www.unclemilton.com](http://www.unclemilton.com), \$27.95.

**SURE, THERE IS A LATENT EDUCATIONAL** purpose for Moon in My Room: Put in batteries, hang it on the wall, and use a remote control to cycle through 12 lunar phases, from new to full moon. An audio CD provides a short, friendly, and wide-ranging lecture on topics from the Apollo missions to the Seneca tribe's belief in a wolf spirit that sang the moon into existence. Really, though, this is the world's most charming nightlight – I smile every night when I turn it on before bedtime.

■ ■ ■ SAM GOLDBERG, A FORMER ASSOCIATE EDITOR AT *AIR & SPACE*, DEVELOPS MUSEUM EXHIBITS IN SEATTLE, WASHINGTON.

