



By David A. Deptula



A Reinvigorated Beacon of Aerospace Advocacy

It is my distinct pleasure to introduce myself to you as the dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, the Air Force Association's reinvigorated aerospace power think tank. Our goal is to serve as a beacon for individuals committed to maintaining a strong national defense.

Our team is striving to educate the public about the advantages aerospace power affords in achieving America's global interests. We also aim to inform key decision-makers and cultivate the next generation of policy leaders who understand the advantages of operating in the air, space, and cyberspace domains.

The requirement for a robust Mitchell Institute is especially pertinent as the nation faces an inflection point amidst a financial crisis and shift in the strategic environment. After a decade in which combat operations on the ground dominated the headlines, new realities around the globe demand a reassessment of what it means to project power in an effective, efficient fashion. It is critical to actively engage leaders and the public about aerospace power's attributes.

In many ways, this situation mirrors the strategic environment that confronted the nation's original founding airmen who bore witness to the carnage of trench warfare in World War I. Despite tremendous political, institutional, and budgetary challenges, they remained committed in their quest to advocate for air-minded strategies that projected far less vulnerability and liability than traditional approaches to conflict. My team and I are determined to follow their proud example.

In that vein, we began hosting a series of public forums after my arrival in summer 2013 featuring individuals like retired Gen. T. Michael Moseley, 18th Air Force Chief of Staff, and Maj. Gen. Steven L. Kwast, who directed the Air Force's 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.

As we entered 2014, the Mitchell Institute extended its focus to include the space domain with the inauguration of a monthly forum series on Capitol Hill with top leaders from the space community. Additionally, we recently sponsored a cyberspace dialogue and have hosted forums featuring senior officials from allied air forces.



AFA staff photo by Bridget Dongu

Lt. Gen. Hyungchul Kim, ROKAF vice chief of staff, at a Mitchell Institute event in Arlington, Va., March 21, 2014.

We are also expanding our public outreach efforts beyond the nation's capital with a set of educational events in Boston, Colorado Springs, Los Angeles, and New York. We will hold each of these events in coordination with a local host organization, including AFA chapters, and academic partners, such as the Air Force Academy, Council on Foreign Relations, and RAND Corp.

The Mitchell Institute is also launching formal studies to encourage fresh thinking on how new technologies, organizational constructs, and methods of force integration can enhance the range of options airpower presents to the nation. We are sponsoring three research projects in 2014:

- *Creating a Combat Cloud for the 21st Century:* Aircraft presently engage in a semi-integrated format as both sensors and shooters. Future developments in data sharing promise to dramatically enhance the way in which combat effects are attained, as individual airborne assets are fully integrated with cyber, land, sea, and space systems.

- *Command and Control for the Information Age:* Recognizing that large, centralized, static command and control enterprises impede decision-cycle advantages and project undue vulnerability, this study will explore opportunities presented by a mobile, distributed command and control system.

- *A Consortium Approach to Security Strategy:* The pairing of an increasingly

complex global security environment with sequestration-driven fiscal constraints demands that the United States fully leverage international coalition-based security solutions. This will require a paradigm shift in how we conduct acquisition, training, engagement, policy, and treaty design and execution.

These research projects will culminate with the release of white papers we hope will serve as innovative catalysts for Air Force planning, policy leaders, and industry teams.

Our team is also hosting regular roundtable gatherings for defense officials to meet with leaders from Capitol Hill, academia, think tanks, and industry. We are looking forward to hosting events this year with Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James, Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III, Air Combat Command Commander Gen. Gilmory Michael Hostage III, and others.

Looking to cultivate future aerospace power leaders, we are particularly proud to highlight that we are hosting Maj. Scott Gunn as an Air Force Fellow. An F-15C pilot by trade, the current operational perspective Gunn brings to our team is invaluable. In return, we provide him with unique opportunities to engage throughout the strategic policy community. This is a very productive partnership that we aim to sustain with future fellows.

The Mitchell Institute is also helping to honor aerospace power's tremendous legacy. Of particular note, we are actively engaged with retired Gen. Merrill A. McPeak, 14th Chief of Staff, and retired General Moseley to launch the restoration of the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial in Paris. This site serves as the final resting place for many of America's first combat airmen. Time has taken its toll on the memorial and comprehensive restoration is required.

Working collaboratively, it is my firm belief that the Mitchell Institute can have a positive effect in contributing to our nation's security. We invite you to join us on this journey and become part of our effort to reinvigorate a renewed understanding of the value of aerospace power in securing our nation's objectives. ■

David A. Deptula is the dean of AFA's Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies.