



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

REPLY TO  
ATTN OF:

Your Supervisor

SUBJECT:

Professional Reading

TO:

A New Lieutenant

A good professional reading program can be an asset to your career. Such a program should include five key areas: history, biographies, current events, current literature of your specialty, and pleasure reading. Each has its place in your personal and professional development as a citizen and as an Air Force officer.

I believe that situations basically don't change but rather people, locations and the resources available to deal with these situations are the things that change. It is for this reason that an appreciation of history is indispensable to your career. By having an appreciation of past events we enable ourselves to more successfully cope with current and projected future events. Our profession demands that we be highly adaptable to change and stress and the history of the world is marked by change and stress. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that you know what happened yesterday to more successfully deal with what is happening today and what might happen tomorrow.

History did not just happen; people reacted to various situations, made decisions, and took actions which resulted in further actions and reactions which concluded in what we call history. Therefore, it is equally important to have an appreciation for the actions and reactions of the people who made history. By reading the biographies of successful leaders like Truman, Tubman, Patton, Bethune, MacArthur, Churchill, Napoleon, Bradley, Kennedy, and King, you can examine their uses of the resources available to them to deal with the situations of their day. You can evaluate their methods of dealing with people, determine how and perhaps why they arrived at particular decisions, and compare the characteristics and styles of leadership they exercised to achieve their success.

Certainly you will not be able to copy their methods precisely, but by reviewing the actions of great leaders we gain vicarious experiences which could serve us well when confronted with similar situations today. The important thing to remember, should you choose to follow their example, is to use the resources available to you today in dealing with the recurring situations of the past.

Current events are another element of your professional reading program. Newspapers and magazines are ready sources of current events. In our profession, we must be sensitive to what is going on within our nation and around the world. We should use this information to predict national and international trends and select our reading materials personal and professional, accordingly. For example, it is important that we have an appreciation for what is going on in the halls of government because this is a source of direction for the military. I am not suggesting that you run out and read the congressional record or that you adopt an active political life; I am simply suggesting that you be aware of the national direction that is indicated by the actions of our elected officials.

On a broader scale, pay attention to what is happening in the world at large; be especially sensitive to activities in those parts of the world in which we have national interests. It is entirely possible that you may read about it today and tomorrow be on your way.

The technical literature of your specialty is an especially important part of your professional reading program. Technological changes are occurring so quickly in almost every specialty that you are destined to obsolescence if you fail to read the current technical literature of your specialty.

Finally, I suggest you leave some time to read for pleasure. Pleasure reading rounds out your program and enables you to relate more easily with others on the contemporary issues of our day.

If you have an appreciation for history, the vicarious experiences of the great men and women who made this history, a feel for current national and international events, the knowledge of the current technology of your specialty, and a sense of contemporary trends gained through pleasure reading, you will be better equipped to deal with your responsibilities in or out of uniform.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul G. Patton". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Paul G. Patton, Colonel, USAF  
AN OLD LIEUTENANT