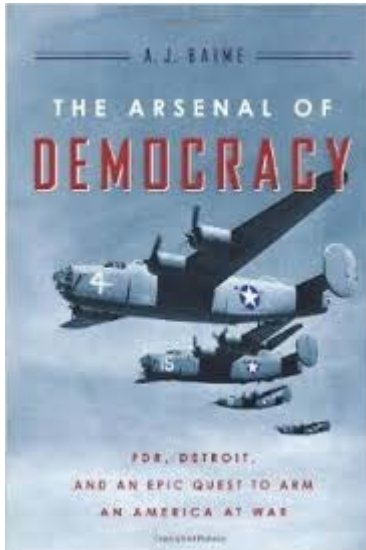


**Book Review – *The Arsenal of Democracy – FDR, Detroit, and an epic quest to arm an America at war*
by A J Baime**

Review by Chris Hope, Master CFI



I love reading books about WW II flying. Imagining the “aluminum overcast” of B-17s in formation over Europe, flown by young men just recently out of high school just sends little shivers down my spine. And I love reading books about American history and the stories about how unprepared we were for WW II. But a story that I had never really thought about is how we actually moved from “totally unprepared” to that “aluminum overcast”. This book tells part of that story.

A wonderful case history of a corporate success in spite of itself is that of the Ford Motor Company. According to company histories, Henry rolled out his first working automobile at the age of 32 in 1896. There is no argument that he was a mechanical wonder, and he certainly knew how to adapt assembly line techniques to automobile manufacturing. But when it came to the interpersonal skills needed to work with others, he left a lot to be desired. A.J. Baime does an excellent job of weaving the needs of a nation entering a war against the most formidable enemy this nation ever faced, with the personalities of the men who actually put weapons in the hands of the American fighting man.

In 1940, Henry Ford was adamantly opposed to any action which implied that this nation might be fighting a war in the near future. He hated Franklin Roosevelt, and wanted nothing to do with anything that FDR might approve. Additionally, Henry was opposed to manufacturing any item that might end up in the hands of our future allies. Henry was definitely in that camp that felt that Europe’s wars were Europe’s problems.

But by 1940, the Ford Motor Company was really a company with two heads, and there was always a question of who is in charge at any one time. Henry, in his late 70s, was definitely the president. But much of the day-to-day operations had been turned over to his son Edsel. And Henry and Edsel had definite, opposing views on America’s part of the war effort. In January 1941, with a plant still popping out automobiles, Edsel agreed to build a totally new plant that would mass-produce aircraft – something that had never been done before. And when the President stated that this country needed thousands of B-24s, and needed them NOW, Edsel stated that he would have a new B-24 rolling out of that unbuilt plant every hour, every day. Edsel proposed a massive new plant which would become the largest manufacturing plant in the country, built totally on his own

sayso with hope that he could talk Henry and the government into both agreeing to the need and to some reimbursement.

This book is as exciting as any TV series We have a plant needing thousands of workers, but no place for housing. We have a father and son, battling each other and battling their own health issues. We have a country undergoing massive social changes as the Ford looks for workers in the black south, and in the legion of women left at home as the husbands went war. We have a company in the ironic position of building aircraft, tanks, engine, and a host of other war material for the war effort, while at the same time the company's plants in Europe have been nationalized by the Nazi party to build similar equipment for Germany. This is the stuff of a great saga, an Blaine does not disappoint.



Chris loves to read, write, and fly, but not necessarily in that order

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And here are more favorites: www.ChrisHopeFAAFlightInstructor.com/books/books.html