# BOOK REVIEW

Fallows, J. (2001). *Free flight: From airline hell to a new age of travel*. New York: PublicAffairs. Pp. ix + 254. ISBN 1-58648-040-5. U.S. $25.00 hard cover.

Reviewed by Mary M. Fink, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

*Free Flight: From Airline Hell to a New Age of Travel* vividly characterizes the trials associated with modern commercial air transportation that have evolved since the dawn of deregulation of the industry in 1978. The tome, authored by magazine correspondent James Fallows, provides the reader with both a historical evolution of the "slowing" of commercial air travel and the personal experiences of the author as he recalls his flight lessons and a coast-to-coast family trip in a small aircraft. This book is not targeted solely at the aviation enthusiast; rather, anyone who has ever sat in a crowded airport enduring the inefficiencies of today's hub-and-spoke system would be enlightened by this factual and personal work.

Fallows begins his work with a personal revelation of his lifelong attraction to flying. His passion for aviation is illustrated by tales of boyhood assembly of balsa wood airplanes, models, and aviation merit badges in scouts legitimize the roots of his interest. What follows in the pages of the first chapter, *Visual Romance*, "…the intoxication of seeing the world from above" (p. 23), is a recollection of the author's flight training. This description provides the non-pilot reader with a basic, yet solid vocabulary of flight terminology.

The following chapters jump to an informational history of general aviation manufacturing firms. The focus quickly narrows to *The Boys from Baraboo*, as chapter two is entitled. The "boys" to whom Fallows is referring are Alan and Dale Klapmeier, founders of the Cirrus Design company. At a time when general aviation manufacturing had nearly come to a halt, the Klapmeiers decided that the stagnation was due not solely to litigation, but had more to do with the reality that "the planes themselves, and the whole experience of small-plane travel, were no longer worth the money… Smaller planes got more expensive each year but didn't get any

faster, more efficient, or more comfortable" (p. 49). Thus the Klapmeiers, along with a small team of engineers, set out to develop a revolution in the general aviation market.

Fallows switches gears in chapter three to reveal that while the Klapmeiers were beginning their journey, a team of colleagues known as the *GA Mafia* met weekly at a pizza parlor to discuss necessary technological leaps for the future of aviation. NASA's Dr. Bruce Holmes, organizer of the Advanced General Aviation Transportation Experiments (AGATE) project, led this 'gang' and later the Small Aircraft Transportation System (SATS) and General Aviation Propulsion (GAP) research endeavors. Their theme echoed that of the Klapmeiers': "small planes had to become much better if they were to be of practical use" (p. 64).

The following chapters discuss the advancement of technology and the emergence of new types of aviation manufacturing companies and their products. The next three chapters are dedicated entirely to the development of Cirrus aircraft. Contained within the multitude of pages are tales of the difficulties encountered not only in developing a new breed of aircraft, but also in selling such a revolutionary product to both investors and customers. Chapter seven parallels this struggle as in the general aviation jet market. Eclipse Aviation, an equally entrepreneurial firm, focused on the higher end of the market. *Disruptive Technology*, as the chapter is appropriately named, serves as the theme for the entire book. This concept holds true for members of Cirrus, Eclipse, NASA, and Williams International (a small aircraft jet engine producer contracted by NASA and later teamed with Eclipse). Fallows goes on to explain that disruptive technology provides an "order-of-magnitude change [in an industry] that measured product innovation in single-digit numbers" (p. 185).

Fallows concludes his work by reserving the eighth and final chapter with a personal account of his family's cross-country adventure from California to Massachusetts in a Cirrus. The reviewer finds balance in this chapter, as the author puts theory into practice. Fallows speaks equally about the vast improvements in general aviation that are embodied in the Cirrus aircraft (added safety, speed, comfort and liberation from the hub-and-spoke system of airline travel) and the inevitable obstacles to overcome (poor weather, turbulence and personal pilotage challenges, to name a few).

*Free Flight: From Airline Hell to a New Age of Travel* flows freely and is an easy read. The reviewer noted only two errors. On page 62, Fallows incorrectly refers to NASA's Headquarters as being located in Langley, Virginia. The Headquarters is located in Washington, D.C. While NASA's Langley Research Center is located in Langley, Virginia. There was a minor typographical error that did not interfere with the understanding of the text.

The reviewer recommends *Free Flight: From Airline Hell to a New Age of Travel* to a wide array of readers, from the aviation enthusiast to the hardened pilot to the curious public. Fallows provides hope for the future of air travel. By reserving a niche in the general aviation market for trips less than 1,500 miles in length, Free Flight recognizes the traveler's newly realized need. Commercial aviation is still necessary to accommodate trips intended for further destinations, but the for the rest there may be new options. This book helps to set the stage for an innovative way to look at aviation and travel overall.

**Reviewer Description**

Mrs. Mary Fink is the Coordinator of Research and Special Programs for the Aviation Institute at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She holds Master's and Bachelor's degrees in Aviation Administration from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. In addition to administering NASA-funded research programs in excess of $5 million, Ms. Fink is also an instructor for the Aviation Institute. She recently completed a term serving on the University of Nebraska at Omaha Graduate Council, Committee on Policy and Planning. She is a Federal Aviation Administration licensed pilot and is a member of the American Society for Public Administration; Women in Aviation, International; the Omaha-area 99s; Alpha Eta Rho, International Aviation Fraternity; and Omicron Delta Kappa Leadership Society. Her research interests lie in the areas of transportation policy and intermodal systems.