

Boyne, Walter J. *Beyond the Wild Blue: A History of the United States Air Force, 1947-1997.* New York: St. Martin's, 1997.

Few people have lived a part of history and then been able to write objectively about that history. Walter Boyne has written passionately about the first 50 years of the United States Air Force as only one who has been a member of the Air Force could. He is unapologetic for his admiration and respect for those leaders both in uniform and in the civilian leadership of the United States whose vision, determination and political savvy have helped create what is arguably the most effective instrument of destructive power on the planet. Because of his career as an Air Force pilot and director of the National Air and Space Museum, he has first hand experience of battles in the air, in the squadron and in the politics of Washington. He writes both from direct knowledge and from his personal contact with many of the key leaders from throughout most of the Air Force's 50 years.

A central theme of the book is the tradition of innovation and planning for the future that was begun by Gen. Henry "Hap" Arnold. One of America's first military aviators, Gen. Arnold, more than any one individual, helped mold the structure and the vision of the Air Force. The unbelievable results we see today with stealth aircraft and laser guided weapons are the natural result of the investment by the Air Force in the research and development of weapons to fight "the next war" rather than the last one. Although Arnold retired before it became an independent service, because of his leadership and vision he was made the first, and to date, the only five star General of the Air Force.

Boyne sets the scene with a summary of US military air power from the time of the first Wright flyers. He then leads us through the many changes in the Air Force over its first 50 years. The wars won and lost as well as the periods of tension when the battles were fought in Congress are both described from the perspective of a loyal member of the team. Particularly valuable is the credit and attention which Boyne pays to the non-combat branches of the Air Force. These organizations include, among others, Air Training Command, now Air Education and Training Command, which is responsible for the ongoing education and training of all Air Force members. Also described are Air Force Systems Command and Air Force Logistics Command, now combined into Air Force Material Command. They have been responsible for the design, development, acquisition and maintenance of the aircraft, weapons, communications systems, and all the coordination with industry to assure that the Air Force can fight. Boyne also very appropriately credits much of the Air Force's success to the talented and dedicated enlisted force which has developed over the years.

If I would fault anything in this book, it is the simplistic view that America lost the war in Viet Nam because of the impossible "rules of engagement" (ROE) that President Johnson and especially his Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara placed on the war fighters. Boyne holds the opinion, shared by many military leaders, that America could have won that war if the generals who understood the principles of war were allowed to apply unrestricted power against the enemy. He hammers this position home with what the coalition Air Forces accomplished against Iraq in Desert Storm. The danger of this logic is that it implies that wars are always won by the side that has the greater ability to

destroy its opponents. In Viet Nam, it was not the weapons but the will of the opposing governments, which determined who held the field. In the future, if rogue nations and non-state organizations recognize that they cannot challenge the USAF in the air, they will choose other ways to attack America. A rental truck full of fertilizer driven by a determined individual can destroy and kill just as well as a billion dollar aircraft.

The book has several excellent appendices including an exhaustive day to day chronology of the most important events of the entire period of air power in America. It also lists the senior leaders; officer, enlisted, and civilian for the first 50 years.

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[The views expressed by the author of this review are not necessarily the views of the government of the United States nor of the US Air Force and should not be construed as such.]