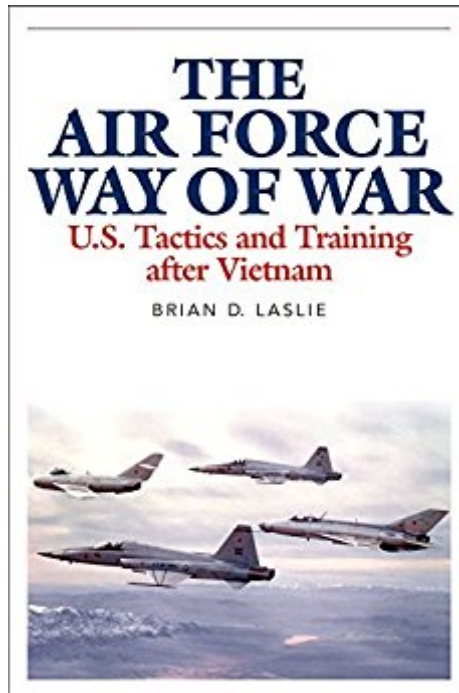


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The Air Force Way Of War: U.S. Tactics And Training After Vietnam



Synopsis

On December 18, 1972, more than one hundred U.S. B-52 bombers flew over North Vietnam to initiate Operation Linebacker II. During the next eleven days, sixteen of these planes were shot down and another four suffered heavy damage. These losses soon proved so devastating that Strategic Air Command was ordered to halt the bombing. The U.S. Air Force's poor performance in this and other operations during Vietnam was partly due to the fact that they had trained their pilots according to methods devised during World War II and the Korean War, when strategic bombers attacking targets were expected to take heavy losses. Warfare had changed by the 1960s, but the USAF had not adapted. Between 1972 and 1991, however, the Air Force dramatically changed its doctrines and began to overhaul the way it trained pilots through the introduction of a groundbreaking new training program called "Red Flag." In *The Air Force Way of War*, Brian D. Laslie examines the revolution in pilot instruction that Red Flag brought about after Vietnam. The program's new instruction methods were dubbed "realistic" because they prepared pilots for real-life situations better than the simple cockpit simulations of the past, and students gained proficiency on primary and secondary missions instead of superficially training for numerous possible scenarios. In addition to discussing the program's methods, Laslie analyzes the way its graduates actually functioned in combat during the 1980s and '90s in places such as Grenada, Panama, Libya, and Iraq. Military historians have traditionally emphasized the primacy of technological developments during this period and have overlooked the vital importance of advances in training, but Laslie's unprecedented study of Red Flag addresses this oversight through its examination of the seminal program.

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Customer Reviews

This excellent study traces the development of the employment of aircraft and aerial training exercises through the eyes of air personnel: from those who flew in Vietnam to those who led and executed operations Desert Storm (1991) and Allied Force (1999). While this work does not ignore the effects or importance of technology, it is not the focus. Along the way, the book emphasizes the roles of individuals and organizations. It also focused on changes in doctrine, tactics, and, most important, training that transformed the operation concepts of the Air Force. This change in training was developed by junior officers, and generals helped it come to fruition. The book explores training programs and schools such as the USAF Fighter Weapons School at Nellis AFB in Nevada as well as large-force-employment exercises such as operation Red Flag, and it notes several specific developments that show why the rise of realistic training exercises helps explain success in the Gulf War. The book is first a history of how developments in training -most notably those at Red Flag exercises- changed how USAF conducted warfare. Second, participation in Red Flag and other exercises was crucial to the development of the air plan for operation Desert Storm, thus the Red Flag exercise greatly influenced combat planning and execution. The book demonstrated that, just as massive technological development allowed success in the Persian Gulf War, there was an equally important development in the way air power operators and planners conceived of and trained for aerial warfare. The use of air power throughout the Vietnam conflict was ineffective.

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