



The Air Force Way of War: US Tactics and Training after Vietnam

Brian Laslie

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On December 18, 1972, more than 100 US B-52 bombers flew over North Vietnam to initiate Operation Linebacker II. During the next 11 days, 16 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 US 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. 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.

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