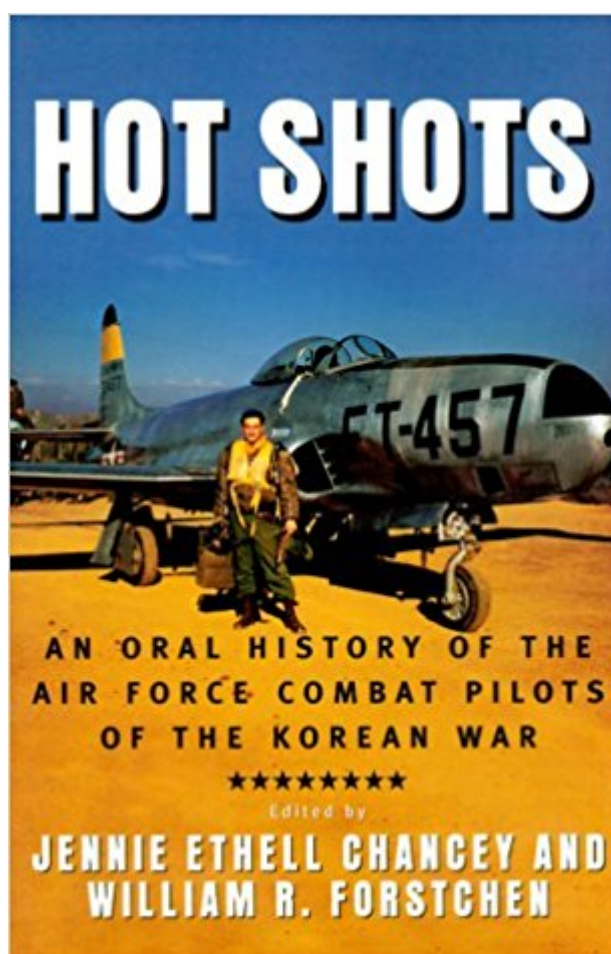


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Hot Shots: An Oral History Of The Air Force Combat Pilots Of The Korean War



Synopsis

Known as the "Forgotten War," the Korean War heralded a new era of warfare--one where countries from around the world struggled over the fate of a relatively small peninsula jutting into the Sea of Japan. Between 1950 and 1953, more than fifty thousand Americans gave their lives in pursuit of democracy for the Korean people. The Korean War was also the proving ground for post-World War II aviation, when the first generation of jet aircraft took to the skies to tangle in deadly combat. It was the battlefield of Sabres and MiGs, American Hot Shots and Communist Honchos. And more than ever before, control of the skies meant victory or failure in the ground war raging below. Now, fifty years after the war's outbreak, Hot Shots captures the voices of the original top guns, the pilots who flew Mustangs, Sabres, and Shooting Stars and confronted a superior number of enemy aircraft. Among the men who tell their stories are Lieutenant Colonel Duane E. "Bud" Biteman, one of the first fliers in the war; Lieutenant General Frederick "Boots" Blesse, double ace who led efforts to refine tactical training for the new jet pilots; Colonel Cecil Foster, who fought in one of the longest-running air-to-air jet encounters; and Colonel Harold Fischer, a double-ace flier who was captured behind enemy lines and held as a POW until 1955, two years after the official end of the war. Editors Chancey and Forstchen combine these compelling firsthand accounts with dozens of never-before-published photographs of air force pilots at work, as well as a history of the major events of the war. Hot Shots brings to vivid life the risk, dedication, and bravery of these forgotten heroes. May their sacrifice not be in vain.

Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: William Morrow; First Edition edition (March 8, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0688164552

ISBN-13: 978-0688164553

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.9 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,073,208 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #61 in Books > History > Military > Korean War > Personal Narratives #102 in Books > History > Military > Korean War > Aviation #747 in Books > History > Asia > Korea

Customer Reviews

The Korean War began 50 years ago this June. In this fine contribution to anniversary commemorations, Montreat College historian Forstchen and Chancey, the daughter of aviation historian Jeff Ethell, collate recollections from American pilots who saw combat over and around the 38th parallel. Military buffs will know that the air war in Korea was significant because it was the first time American aviators engaged in jet-to-jet dogfighting, thus ushering in the modern age of jet warfare. But few will be familiar with the dramatic tales of heroism, hardship and hope the coauthors have painstakingly gathered. Pilots discuss the evolution of air-combat tactics, the primitive field conditions, "the social caste system of the Air Force" and the incidental difficulties particular to the Korean War. But the absolute must-read section here is the riveting saga of Col. Harold Fischer, a "double ace" with 10 enemy kills to his credit, who relates his capture, transfer to China, harrowing escape, recapture and eventual release two years after Eisenhower's 1953 declaration that America's peacekeeping role was over. Anyone seeking to remember the Forgotten War will find the stories of Fischer and other pilots, along with the 40 b&w photos, an excellent starting point. Agent, Bill Fawcett Associates. (Apr.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

These Korean War pilots' recollections are presented under two broad categories: ground-attack operations in the war's desperate first phase in 1950 and jet-to-jet dogfighting during the war's ensuing stalemate through 1953. Vividness of detail characterizes a pilot's memory of both types of combat, which in the case of the ground attackers consisted of flying their leftovers from World War II against enemy trains, tanks, and troops that nearly threw the UN forces into the sea. This crisis context gives one pilot's account contemporary currency with allegations that Americans killed Korean civilians during the retreat. Duane Biteman describes a "consensus," not outright orders, to stop them from crossing the last natural defense line, the Naktong River, and admits firing his plane's guns to deter such crossings--letting it hang whether or not he hit civilians. Among the dogfighters, the best story--incongruously in this fighting book--is Harold Fischer's account of becoming a POW and propaganda prop of the Chinese communists. Curiosities about bravery in the first jet war will be amply satisfied by these eyewitness anecdotes. Gilbert Taylor

Real good book.

I was very disappointed in the coverage of the USAF role in Korea. This was the first time that jet battled jet in armed combat... and yet at least a third of the book centered on the P-51's role. F-84's were mentioned, but not one '84 pilot was included. And the final third of the book was focused on a

pilot who was shot down and held captive 'til long after hostilities ended. It was a story of bravery and loneliness, but it wasn't the way to end the book and could have benefitted from a great deal of editing.

Fascinating stories of first person accounts.

Chancey has found some brilliant gems and placed them on display for us. It's always interesting to hear the straight skinny from the guys who were there. Some of the pilots, though obscure to the general public, are nominally famous to students of air combat. Boots Blesse and Ralph Parr are moderately well known names and Robby Risner is very well known. Most of the rest you have never heard before, but they all have something worthwhile to say. For those of us who flew in the Air Force in the 1980s when it was fat and happy, it is a shock to read of the Air Force caught unprepared in Korea, poorly trained and poorly supplied and poorly equipped. It is depressing to discover that all the tactical lessons learned in WWII were forgotten and had to be relearned in Korea only to be forgotten again to be relearned in Vietnam. We were reinventing the wheel every war until the Fighter Weapons School came along to preserve and disseminate the tactical lessons. Chancey's transitions between the oral histories of the fliers are interesting, though their focus tends to drift from the Korean War. The last story on our guy sitting it out in a Chinese POW camp is well worth reading for any jet jock who is likely to catch a golden BB over enemy territory. He covers all the issues a POW encounters. It was also something of a shock to read that the US Navy brushed off an attack by Russkie fighters that was hushed up. The Russian pilots who flew for the North Koreans now openly acknowledge their role. I wonder what they know about our pilots who were taken into Russian as POWs, never to be seen again in the civilized world.

This is one of those books where you applaud the effort but deplore the execution. The need for more air war histories certainly exists, particularly as the participants are being removed by time, before first hand accounts fade. The trend in history books now seems to be "editing" such oral accounts, but as seems to be the case here it is done by those having little real knowledge of the subject matter. The Korean air war is important for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the development of air combat tactics with jet aircraft, and was a time when the warriors of the last war were side by side with the new breed, some of whom would fly in Vietnam. This book does not do the subject justice. Take the photos: they are poorly reproduced and often mis-captioned (F-80's labeled F-84's, F-94's labeled F-84's, etc.) It also appears that when one of the interviewees used

an acronym (RTU) the editors didn't know -- or ask, apparently -- what it meant, so they made something up. "Reconnaissance Technical Unit" indeed! Try "Replacement Training Unit." Further, a lot of time is spent on the exploits of the ground supporting F-51's and that's okay, but this was the first jet war. The Mig Alley battles are given short shrift and it's almost like 1952 didn't occur at all! However, I think that the story of double ace Hal Fischer's shoot down and imprisonment is worth a book in itself (hopefully by someone else) and takes up the last quarter of this book. There are precious few books out there about the Korean air war, but all of them are better than this one. Give it a pass.

As a former Department of the Air Force historian, I know full well the values and dangers of oral history. The supreme value of oral history is that it comes straight from primary sources: those who actually witnessed historical events. The supreme danger is that these accounts sometimes can involve faulty recollections or a lack of understanding of broader events. Yet, actually having written accounts based from oral interviews, I know that with proper editing and a broad scope of interview subjects, you can come up with a fascinating account. Sadly, *Hot Shots* by Chancey and Forstchen falls short of the mark. This book is marketed as being "An Oral History of Air Force Combat Pilots of the Korean War." However, it is apparent from the accounts in the book that the editors interviewed a limited number and scope of pilots. The book is far too slanted towards the accounts of F-51 Mustang pilots for it to be considered a comprehensive oral history of ALL Air Force combat pilots. For instance, F-84 fighter-bombers were heavily engaged in Korea, but they get scant mention in this book. The editors do a good job of introducing individual points of the war with background information. Sadly, however, several background chapters do not include any interviews from those periods! In addition, the editors continue to make points over and over: the horrific UN withdrawal after the Chinese invasion; American POWs being left behind at war's end. These points are valid, but they need not be repeated after their first mention. Instead of an oral history, the book seemed to become the editors' take on the Korean War. The book itself is at its strongest when the actual pilots give their accounts. *Hot Shots* is a good book for the general public with a passing interest in military history, but professional military historians will probably find little new here. Revelations of Soviet pilots flying over Mig Alley and the U.S. Navy's air combat against the Russians near Vladivostok were common knowledge amongst the Air Force historical community, at least as far back as 1996. C. Husing ex-historian, HQ AFRES and HQ SMC, USAF

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