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Basic Airman To General: The Secret War & Other Conflicts: Lessons In Leadership & Life



Synopsis

"This book covers the remarkable success of a second-generation Polish kid who, at the age of eighteen, enlisted in the United States Air Force during the Korean War. He was one of less than a handful of basic airmen who rose to the rank of four-star general. More importantly, it covers the reincarnation of WW II Air Commandos under the code name of Jungle Jim, as well as US combat air operations from 1961 through 1967 flying obsolete B-26s and the newest jet fighter, the F-4D."--Book jacket.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fellow Aviators ... did you ever wonder why the NVA seemed to know that we were coming? Well they did! The Johnson-Robert Strange-Rusk cabal told the North Vietnam 24-hours ahead the targets that we were going to hit. This great read tells of the General's life in the Air Force. It also tells that former Secretary of State Dean Rusk was being interviewed by Peter Arnett on a CBS documentary called *The Ten Thousand Day War*. Mr. Arnett asked of M. Rusk, "It has been rumored that the United States provided the North Vietnamese government the names of the targets that would be bombed the following day. Is there any truth to that allegation?" To my astonishment and absolute disgust, the book reads that former Secretary responded, "Yes. We didn't want to harm the North Vietnamese people, so we passed the targets to the Swiss embassy in Washington with instructions to pass them to the NVN government through their embassy in Hanoi." In the book, General Piotrowski also said former Secretary of State Dean Rusk said, "All we wanted to do is demonstrate to the North Vietnamese

leadership that we could strike targets at will, but we didn't want to kill innocent people. By giving the North Vietnamese advanced warning of the targets to be attacked, we thought they would tell the workers to go home. With this notice the NVA were able to move AAA and missile batteries to provide maximum damage to US airmen. I wonder how many KIA and POWs were on Secretary Rusk's hands. I wonder how many KIA and POWs were on the Johnson-Robert Strange-Rusk cabal's hands? This disclosure made me sick about that war all over again.

This is a compelling narrative that tells it as it was. General Pete doesn't hold back, and candidly tells of his successes, and his mistakes (like when he inadvertently, and innocently, used the word "boys" while talking to a black airman). And he doesn't shrink from naming names, the good and the bad. As an Air Force pilot who served in PACAF, SAC, TAC and MAC during part of the time frame encapsulated in the book, I can totally agree with General Pete's assessment of MAC. I really enjoyed hearing about his relationship to many individuals I had met during my own time in the Air Force, and I could really identify with the narrative of his time as a company-grade officer. I found it fascinating that, as a 20-year Colonel, he had planned to retire! The best part, though, was the peek into the rarefied atmosphere of flag rank. I often wondered what a general's day-to-day life was like, and now I have a greater understanding, and respect, for what it takes to serve at that level. The book really opened my eyes to the short-notice TDYs, PCS moves and family separations and sacrifices that go with the rank. The most significant thread that weaves throughout the book is the demonstration of real leadership at every level the author served. He often had to perform unpleasant tasks, and was always guided by his personal ethics and dedication to the mission. He hired people, he fired people, and every unit he commanded improved while he was in charge. I met the author once, some thirty years ago, when I was a Captain at Patrick AFB and he was a Lieutenant General, the Commander of Ninth Air Force. It would have been great if I could have read this book back then so I could have truly appreciated our meeting!

Some memoirs are grotesquely self-serving. They numb the mind and cite material, say, in the area of growing up, intuitible by most readers. Not so with General John L. "Pete" Piotrowski's outstanding book on going from bottom to top in the U.S. Air Force. Similar rare ascents have occurred in the other Branches (Navy, Marine Corps, Army) but the process takes extraordinary

character, skill and determination, which Piotrowski exhibits in abundance. His technical skills (flying, munitions, electronics) are clearly superior; his management and leadership skills are remarkable. His ability to rise above setbacks and take the correct path is a stirring example to the young, military or civilian. This book deserves wide readership, including the parents of talented and ambitious offspring who want to make a difference in the world or who doubt Service opportunities, a vital adjunct to readers of official U.S. Air Force histories. He starts slowly but the pace escalates and includes many significant U.S. Air Force activities from the 1950s to 1990, worldwide. In the process he identifies many Air Force achievements and inevitable miscues. His aviation insights include comments about the aircraft he flew (35 types, 7,500 hours) that will intrigue those who flew them. Thoughtfully, he names individuals who performed well and except for egregiously bad behavior avoids naming others (those who served with him, some of whom have reviewed this book, know many of those individuals from the inside). His combat tours and global experiences are highly informative. Chilling revelations abound, including political effects, within the Air Force and outside it, with which he had to contend. In commenting on his tours in Vietnam, Piotrowski cites Peter Arnett of CBS interviewing Dean Rusk, Secretary of State under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, also quoted by other reviewers – a truly appalling dialog worth repeating: Arnett: “It has been rumored that the U.S. gave the North Vietnamese the names of targets that would be bombed the following day. Is there any truth to that allegation?” Rusk: “Yes. We didn’t want to harm the North Vietnamese people so we passed the targets to the Swiss embassy in Washington with instructions to pass them to the NVN Government through their embassy in Hanoi. All we wanted was to demonstrate to the North Vietnamese leadership that we could strike targets at will, but we didn’t want to kill innocent people. In giving [them] advance warning of the attacks we thought they would tell the workers to stay home. In reality the NVN focused their defenses on the known targets, killing many U.S. aircrew and putting many more into POW camps. Another absurd Vietnam example: Rules of Engagement, dictated from Washington, prohibited attacks on airfields where MiGs were lined up, ready to kill more Americans. Treason, Piotrowski speculates, at the highest levels? You decide. One mystery in the book resists understanding: if the technical and financial review process for Branch budgets and similar analysis of new weapons systems is so stringent, as the author describes in detail, how could the disastrous, trillion-dollar F-35 program, the costliest in the nation’s military history, have been approved and still (2016) apparently resist control or cancellation? Note: this project was initiated in 1996, long after Piotrowski’s 1990 retirement. It gives this reviewer no pleasure to

cite the book *Œœs grammatical, syntactical and spelling errors (editing and proofreading are merciless disciplines akin to coding software). A few examples: tenet is not Œœtenant; Œœ heads roll and donŒœt Œœrole; Œœ waive is not Œœwave; Œœ (was he thinking of Edgar Allan?); a criterion is, criteria are; formerly is not Œœformally; Œœ South KoreaŒœs capital is Seoul, not ŒœSoul; Œœ itŒœs Œœpeople whoŒœ (not Œœpeople thatŒœ); and ŒœrobustŒœ is not a verb. These errors are but a few of many, avoidable had an editor/proofreader been engaged. But this problem is now common, even from Œœbig nameŒœ publishers, as editing and proofreading are ignored and writers are expected to deliver flawless copy. The lame excuse that Œœ“we know what he meansŒœ wonŒœt wash. The errors detract from the power and quality of the story, indeed any story. In summary, Piotrowski sank his teeth into the flanks of the career beast early and never let go. He is an example to us all. He proves beyond doubt that high-intensity work environments are relentlessly demanding, that imagination and creativity are powerful, can be cultivated and can become habitual, and that the penalty for mistakes (procedural errors or personal flaws) may destroy careers. This is a long and detailed book but itŒœs well worth the investment of time to read and understand/*

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