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Air Warfare and Air Base Air Defense 1914-1973

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Base, Alabama: Air Univ., 1988. 198pp.

This book is filled with interesting historical data, but is singularly depressing in a most fundamental way. It demonstrates again that the American military has a hard time learning from its wartime experiences — both in tactics and in force planning. For example, the minimum bombing altitudes used early during the Korean conflict ignored the wealth of data from World War II, with substantial aircraft losses as a result. Likewise, over Vietnam during the late 1960s, “America fought a conventional air war with tactics and aircraft designed for nuclear war.” Sadly, Werrell’s book offers no indication that we have become wiser. Instead, our leaders appear to be following the paths of their predecessors. Up to now, leadership assumptions about future conflicts have proven to be in error (at least relative to ground-based air defense), and airmen have failed to appreciate the impact of ground-based air defense until it was too late. (In every conflict this century except World War I, the U. S. lost more aircraft to ground-based air defense systems than to hostile aircraft, with no indication that the future will be different).

Werrell touches on a few instances of artillery fire against balloons during the 19th century and notes that the first aircraft downed in combat fell during the Italo-Turkish War of 1912. He then describes ground-based air defense during the First and Second World Wars, the

Korean War, Vietnam, the Arab-Israeli wars, the American air strikes in the Middle East (1983-86), the Indian-Pakistani wars, and the Falklands conflict in 1982; and he concludes with a few recent aspects of air defense. The author’s treatment offers many insights. He addresses the crucial technical and operational factors of ground-based air defense, their effectiveness, and the counters to them. His look to the future is very cautious—he does not allow himself to speculate very much.

This is an important book. It offers in concrete form a challenge to break our historical pattern of preparing for the wrong war. Careful examination of how and why this happened in the past in the narrow field of ground-based air defense may give insights about how to avoid a continuing repetition of folly.

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Kreis, John F. *Air Warfare and Air Base Air Defense 1914-1973*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1988. 407pp.

Projection of air power in contemporary warfare is a complex endeavor. Unfortunately, American defense analysts have not fully explored the insights of combat history relative to these activities, including air base air defense. Consequently, some of America’s past approaches to air power appli-

cations have been less than the best. This book was written at the request of the Air Force Director of Plans. It is a one-volume condensation of insights from the experiences of the air forces of various nations in defending air bases against attacks from the air. As a result, Air Force planners now have a sounder basis for their decisions about air base structures, command and security arrangements, locations of defensive systems, repair and support services, and base personnel training. Their challenge will be to effectively use the insights this book offers.

Air base air defense has four basic facets: 1) active defense using AA guns, SAMs, and fighter aircraft; 2) passive defense with camouflage, decoys, revetments, and hardened facilities; 3) dispersal over a wide area at a single base or over several bases; and 4) rapid repair capabilities. Kreis examines all of these in his book. He selects a large number of cases with varied geographic and operational circumstances to provide a broad basis of experience, both good and bad, for his observations. From the material presented, it is possible to trace the origins of air base air defense in the British and American air forces as well as those of the Soviet Union, Israel, Egypt, and other nations.

Kreis avoids being blinded by the mass of detailed information available and adroitly places air base air defense in its larger campaign context. The result is his discussion of command structures, resource allocations of guns and other mate-

rials among various air bases and other units, and a number of other factors such as geographical influences and technical capabilities of aircraft and other weapons. Some readers will be frustrated by the absence of some details in the descriptions of individual attacks on air bases, but all will find that the material presented is most pertinent and well illustrates the ideas set forth by the author. Of particular importance is the way that Kreis shows the devastating potential for disaster from bickering within and among the military services in regard to air base air defense.

I gained much from this book. I had not realized that Soviet factories produced 140,000 aircraft in 1941-1945 (about half as many as built in the U. S. during that period and almost as many as both Japan and Germany combined). That industrial capacity had a major impact on World War II's progress on the Eastern Front. Nor had I been aware of the secret German-Russian cooperation on aircraft design and testing during the 1920s, an effort which allowed Germany to skirt Versailles Treaty restrictions and which gave Russia much-needed technical capabilities. Likewise, I had not realized how large an impact Japan's failure to develop radar more fully in the late 1930s had on its air defense capabilities. No doubt other readers will also find many gems in this book.

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