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Officers In Flight Suits: The Story Of American Air Force Fighter Pilots In The Korean War



Synopsis

The United States Air Force fought as a truly independent service for the first time during the Korean War. Ruling the skies in many celebrated aerial battles, even against the advanced Soviet MiG-15, American fighter pilots reigned supreme. Yet they also destroyed virtually every major town and city in North Korea, demolished its entire crop irrigation system and killed close to one million civilians. The self-confidence and willingness to take risks which defined the lives of these men became a trademark of the fighter pilot culture, what author John Darrell Sherwood here refers to as the flight suit attitude. In *Officers in Flight Suits*, John Darrell Sherwood takes a closer look at the flight suit officer's life by drawing on memoirs, diaries, letters, novels, unit records, and personal papers as well as interviews with over fifty veterans who served in the Air Force in Korea. Tracing their lives from their training to the flight suit culture they developed, the author demonstrates how their unique lifestyle affected their performance in battle and their attitudes toward others, particularly women, in their off-duty activities.

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Customer Reviews

When the Korean War began in the summer of 1950, the United States Air Force was the youngest branch of the American military, having been created as a service coequal to the Army and Navy less than three years earlier. Although the operational history of the USAF and the experience of many of its officers stretched back into the time when it was a branch of the Army known as the United States Army Air Force, the USAF hadn't yet made its mark as a separate service. The Korean War came at a propitious time, giving the USAF a vehicle in which to shape itself as an institution.

The fighter pilots who fought in the Korean War would become the leaders of the new Air Force. Their attitudes toward flying and toward the military in general would come to shape Air Force thinking over the next several decades. In this book John Sherwood has provided the reader with a close look at the pilots who flew fighters during the Korean War--pilots who, by their skills and attitudes, would establish a style for those who followed. This style is defined by the author as "flight suit attitude." He writes: Flight suit attitude ... was a sense of self-confidence and pride that verged on arrogance ... the aircraft of preference was the high-performance, single-seat fighter ... This culture placed a premium on cockiness and informality. A flight suit officer spent more time in a flight suit than in a uniform. In his world, status was based upon flying ability, not degrees, rank, or "officer" skills (p. 6). Where did this flight suit attitude develop? The author begins by examining the backgrounds of Air Force fighter pilots in this fledgling branch of the United States' military services.

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