

## Book Reviews

Bowman, Martin W. *Lost Wings: Downed Airmen On the Western Front 1914-1918*. Yorkshire, England: Pen and Sword Aviation Press, 2016. Pp.236. \$44.95.

*Lost Wings: Downed Airmen On the Western Front 1914-1918*, by Martin W. Bowman is a collection of 24 narratives of British, French, Commonwealth, American, and German pilots -- Freddie West, Harry Beaumont, Raymond Collishaw, Marian C. Cooper, to name a few -- shot down during World War I. Bowman a prolific, popular military historian has written on a wide-range of topics in both aviation and military history. Bowman's book was written in conjunction with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War One and the first large scale employment of aircraft in a combat role.

The selections are based mainly on firsthand accounts, while other chapters are drawn from books and magazines such as the *RAF Flying Review*. The accounts reflect the harrowing careers of the first generation of combat pilots who flew over the Western front. The stories are fascinating and a joy to read. The chapters are short and range from six to 15 pages. *Lost Wings* is a good read, and certainly the book will interest World War I and aviation history enthusiasts.

Despite the excellent selection of narratives there are some caveats. *Lost Wings* has problems – it is uneven in a variety of ways. The book is deficient in design and layout. Bowman does not provide an introduction, which could have laid the thematic groundwork and purpose of the book. In many ways, the reader is left to fend for themselves. Chapter “footnotes” are actually endnotes. Some chapter explanatory notes are extensive and quite helpful, while other chapters do not have any notes. The book does not have a bibliography. The index is limited.

Though *Lost Wings* is a nice collection of aerial combat tales, the author does not place the narratives in proper historical context and there is no analytical framework. Even as a sourcebook, *Lost Wings* comes up short. If one is looking for an academic history on this intriguing topic from any perspective (military or social history), they will not find it in *Lost Wings*. The book is aimed at enthusiasts. The reviewer enjoyed the war stories, but the book's lack of purpose leaves one frustrated.

Erik D. Carlson

Florida Gulf Coast University

Dorn, A. Walter, ed. *Air Power in UN Operations: wings for peace*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. 350. Price \$49.95.

In this highly informative book detailing United Nations' (UN) aerial operations in conflict zones around the world, readers will gain a sense of how the UN, since its early Cold War inception, functioned in capacities beyond diplomacy. As volume editor A. Walter Dorn, professor at the Royal Military College of Canada, explains, many previous studies of the UN's military missions focused on ground operations. With contributors ranging from military personnel (active and retired) and historians to psychologists, corporate executives, and UN strategists, *Air Power in UN Operations: wings for peace* stands as the first volume to examine how aerial missions for transportation, observation, and firepower complimented UN ground operations and served as vital adjuncts for the organization's broader peacekeeping efforts.

The book's six parts each focus on different historical periods and various locations. In the "UN's first 'air force,'" Dorn, William K. Carr, and Kevin A. Spooner examine what was until the 1990s the UN's largest and most significant aerial operation: the crisis in post-colonial Congo and its breakaway Katanga Province. Carr focuses on the planning and strategic

aspects of UN involvement, specifically the roles that Canada's RCAF played in leading the air operations. Dorn details how fighter jets, provided to the UN by the U.S., Canada, and Sweden, were utilized to weaken Moïse Tshombé's air capabilities and minimize the fragile nation's civil war. Spooner also turns his attention to Canada, explaining how prime ministers Diefenbaker and Pearson, shaped by the politics of the early Cold War, weighed policy decisions regarding their roles in the Congo crisis. "Airlift: lifeline for UN missions" centers on how various countries contributed aircraft and logistical support to UN aerial operations. Matthew Trudgen discusses nearly fifty years of Canadian missions for the UN's military observer group in the disputed Kashmir region straddling India and Pakistan. A site of contention since Pakistan's inception in 1947, Canada often vacillated between increasing and decreasing their peacekeeping efforts, reflecting the nation's "international ambitions" (76) amidst the Cold War. More recently, Robert C. Owen details the joint U.S. Air Force-UN 2010 relief missions in earthquake-rattled Haiti; dubbed "Operation Unified Response," he demonstrates that the two groups, despite their long association, "cooperated to a greater degree than they had in years." Finally, Dorn, along with Ryan W. Cross, uses case studies in 21<sup>st</sup> century Sudan, Haiti, and Libya to illustrate that while the UN is "often rightly criticized" (101) for its lack of cooperation with other agencies, the UN Humanitarian Air Service stands as an understudied counterexample.

Parts three and four emphasize aerial surveillance and the history of creating "no-fly zones," respectively. Dorn, who penned two additional chapters in part three, shows how reconnaissance missions (manned and unmanned) have been advantageous in certain operations by minimizing risk to ground troops and as the "eye in the sky" in locations from Lebanon and Congo to Bosnia and Afghanistan, have also proven controversial when missions employ armed unmanned vehicles. David Neil, employed by the MDA Corporation's unmanned vehicle team, provides a comparison of U.S. and Canadian missions from the later Cold War through the present.

James McKay and F. Roy Thomas discuss the history, strategies, and enforcement of no-fly zones (NFZs). Ranging from the first (created by the U.S. during the 1991 Gulf War) through the 2011 UN-imposed NFZ over Libya (in an effort to curtail the Qaddafi regime's attacking of Arab Spring protesters), they show how these designations are crucial applications of UN airpower. Thomas, who partook in missions over a besieged Sarajevo in the early 1990s, offers his personal recollections of his work with the UN's Military Observers.

Though rare over their history, UN aerial missions have required the use of force. In "Combat: enforcing the peace," the authors explore various cases of force, which were alternately judged as excessive, as with Somalia's infamous "Black Hawk Down" episode in 1993, or not aggressive enough to halt ground-level atrocities, as during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. More, the authors note that such employments of force align with the just war cause and have been necessary to the missions' mandates, civilians, and keeping the "tenuous peace" (213). Finally, in "Evolving Capabilities," Kevin Shelton Smith and Robert David Steele offer their assessments of future roles for UN aerial missions. Smith maintains that while UN aviation is a "far cry" (295) from the early Cold War, progress in terms of safety and aircraft modernization remains to be made. To minimize dangers to personnel, he states that the greatest changes likely will be in the form of unmanned vehicles. Steele compares old, or "state," with new, or "hybrid" mandates for future aerial operations around the globe; while Cold War concerns included Third World civil wars and refugees, hybrid examples include infectious disease, environmental degradation, and transnational crime.

*Air Power in UN Operations*, while at points technically written and containing numerous acronymic designations, is a very well-researched and ambitious contribution to not only military history and the history of aviation but will surely interest historians and other specialists interested in the Global South, the Cold War, the history of the U.S. and Canada, foreign policy, and the logistics of navigating and operating in conflict zones of various size and scope. The book is aided by

the impressive assemblage of authors, each of whom provides introductions and conclusions to lend their work greater context.

Stephen Nepa

Temple University

Ganson, Barbara. *Texas Takes Wing: A Century of Flight in the Lone Star State*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014. Pp. 294. Price \$29.95

In *Texas Takes Wing; A Century of Flight in the Lone Star State*, author Barbara Ganson explains how the state of Texas was central to the development of aviation technology since 1910. She creates her history based on aeronautical collections of early aviation and oral histories of more contemporary aviators. In creating this history, Ganson accurately depicts Texas as critical to the development of civilian and military flight technology. (Ganson, ix-xi) In the brief stories of dozens of aviators throughout the work, Ganson shows how the climate and geography of Texas aided the development of aviation, and in doing so exhibits how non Texans as well as native Texans were able to use these elements to their advantage.

Ganson does her best in *Texas Takes Wing* when showing that military necessity was the backbone of aeronautical innovation in Texas. She begins her work with the infancy of flight in Texas, when short flights over empty fields were great entertainment for local crowds, and explains that flight development was slow until the first World War created a demand for military air power. At first, Texans trained allied and American fliers for military operations at airfields throughout Texas during the first World War, but Ganson explains that the military operations for planes during the First World War were limited, and that the true usefulness of air power in war was not realized until the Second World War. (Ganson, 33, 37.)

Between the World Wars, Ganson describes how members of different socioeconomic backgrounds were able to participate in the innovations taking place within aviation. Aviation developed with the development of commercial flights by business people. Wealthy entrepreneurs in Texas founded regional airlines, some of which would eventually become international carriers (Ganson, 78-94). Others who did not have wealth before flying became wealthy by either barnstorming or attempting to create speed, distance, and stamina records. The novelty of flight, plus the entertainment involved with attempting aerial stunts, made barnstormers instantly famous throughout Texas, generating wealth for those involved (Ganson, 38-43).

World War II brought the fastest increase in aviation technology and it affected the state greatly. Texas was critical to the innovation and training for success in the skies during the war. Gadsden focuses on the innovations of Colonel William Ocker. His improvements on instrument only flying technology, also referred to as blind flying, improved safety for World War II fliers. Several inventions to make military planes safer and more reliable were created in Texas airfields and on Texas Military bases.

In her well-rounded approach, Ganson excels in illustrating the role women have played in the growth of air travel in Texas since the beginning of the twentieth century. Ganson shows how women from Texas achieved several aviation firsts, such as a Texas woman becoming the first woman to fly in Asia (Ganson, 25). During peacetime, women were stewardesses that were trained at various Texas stewardess colleges including those created by American Airlines and Braniff Air (Ganson 83, 96). They also earned money by taking part in barnstorming activities as well, but generally had difficulty obtaining employment as pilots during peacetime because of the availability of male pilots with wartime flying experience. During the World Wars, however, Ganson shows that Texan women played integral parts in the success of flight for the United States. Female aviators would routinely fly in non-combat missions during the Second World War after

completing training at the airbase in Houston, Texas. One female aviator in particular, Marjorie Stinson, was taught to fly by the Wright Brothers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and would go on to teach American and Canadian cadets how to fly in preparation for the first World War.

Barbara Ganson concludes *Texas Takes Wing* with an extensive epilogue explaining that Texas aviation is not only important because of the innovators and circumstances that made advancement possible, but for the Texans that are currently keeping aviation history alive in the state. Ganson believes that Texans have fully embraced the history of flight within the state as it embodies the spirit of the Texan to take risks and exhibit courage. She also briefly touches on space travel, calling it the future of Texas aviation, as well as late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century innovations in aviation.

With large appendices and a topical approach that makes the book read more like a reference work than a linear history, *Texas Takes Wing: A Century of Flight in the Lone Star State* still achieves its purpose of offering a comprehensive view of the individuals who shaped aviation in Texas by depicting a wide array of great minds who advanced flight in the state.

Dominic Longo

Monmouth University

Molkentin, Michael. *Centenary History of Australia and the Great War*. Volume 1. *Australia and the War in the Air*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. x, 284. Price \$59.95 (AUD).

The centenary of the Great War, or World War I, has seen a surge in interest in this conflict. It also inspired a publishing “blitz”. We have seen a fair number of fine scholarly works appearing but, on the other hand, too many books perpetuating the legends, myths and tall tales of the Great War. *Australia and the War in the Air* is most definitely not one the latter. It is an

example of impressive scholarship and furthers our knowledge of air forces history.

The Australian Flying Corps (AFC) was formed in 1912 as a small-scale version of Great Britain's Royal Flying Corps (RFC). At the start of the Great War, the AFC had two instructors, a small ground staff, and five aircraft. Its Central Flying School commenced the first course of instruction a month after the war began. As the air war on the Western Front heated up, there was increased demand for pilots, observers, and air mechanics. While the British Empire's other dominions agreed to contribute men to the RFC and Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS), Australia preferred to deploy its own squadrons. A few dozen Australian men made their own way to Britain to enlist in the RFC or RNAS, and in 1916 some 200 soldiers transferred to the RFC. However, the majority of Australians to serve in the air war did so as members of the AFC. The 1st Squadron was dispatched to Egypt in early 1916 and served in the Middle East until the war's end. During 1916-17, the AFC formed three more operational squadrons that were deployed to the Western Front by the end of 1917, and four training squadrons based in England.

Michael Molkentin has established himself as a leading scholar of the AFC. His earlier book, *Fire in the Sky: The Australian Flying Corps in the First World War*, published in 2010, was well received. It was the first substantial study of the AFC since F. M. Cutlack's official history, *The Australian Flying Corps*, appeared in 1923. While Molkentin's first book focused particularly on the experiences of pilots and observers, the book under review examines the formation, equipping and training of the AFC, with further development of his analysis of aerial combat. The two books are sufficiently different that readers could acquire both and not be disappointed.

*Australia in the War in the Air* is based on Molkentin's PhD at the University of New South Wales Canberra but having been further refined it does not read as a dissertation. It was chosen as the first volume of the five-volume Centenary History of Australia and the Great War. Molkentin approaches the subject logically, starting with the origins of military



aeronautics, and continuing with chapters on AFC organization and administration and then recruitment and training. He then explains air war developments on the Western Front and in the Middle East, incorporating within this chapter the service of Australians in the RFC and RNAS. Finally, Molkentin presents several chapters exploring the challenges facing squadrons deployed operationally. These are separated by location (Middle East and Western Front) and further by role (fighter and reconnaissance). The author is at all times mindful of the broader picture, appreciating that the Australians were a distinct minority, and possibly something of an oddity. With one squadron in the Middle East and three on the Western Front, the AFC made “a modest contribution to the air war”.

Australian popular memory of the war is heavily influenced by the “Anzac legend”—a notion that in this war Australians showed they were naturally great fighters (and that successive generations have lived up to the legend). While Molkentin never tackles the legend directly, like any Australian scholar he is mindful of it. At one point, while explaining the re-equipping of the 4th Squadron with Sopwith Snipes in late 1918, he notes that only two squadrons (one RFC and one AFC) were equipped with these aircraft before the war’s end and that: “Major-General John Salmond (GOC RFC in 1918) allocated the second batch to the 4th Squadron at the beginning of October, believing it to be one of his best fighter units and, being deployed on the Fifth Army’s front (where no major offensives were in progress), able to refit without disrupting operations.” It is refreshing to see an Australian historian not tempted to stop at the first reason.

One of the strengths of this book is that it is not strictly Australian history that is presented. Molkentin states in the preface that “this book describes and evaluates the Australian contribution to the first major war in the air”, but he succeeds in doing something more. Molkentin successfully presents his study of the AFC to an international audience. He acknowledges that virtually everything the Australian airmen did they did as part of the British Empire war effort. Their equipment came from British stocks, they were trained to

British standards, and their tactics were those developed in the RFC and RNAS. A test of any work is whether it contains passages one can imagine quoting. This book contains a fair number, including the following, the selection of which serves to demonstrate that this is really a study of air power in the Great War using the AFC as the case study:

“... it is anachronistic to judge the efficacy of air power by its level of decisiveness or its ability to change the course of a battle. This is a post-1918 idea, developed in connection with strategic air power. The British Army’s leadership never intended the aeroplane to assume a decisive role in the strategic, operational or tactical spheres. From the earliest official expositions on the role of aviation through to staff-level discussions in late 1918 anticipating the following year’s campaigns, the aeroplane remained a tool for supporting the army’s principal fighting arms—the cavalry, infantry and artillery (and increasingly the tanks). From first to last the empire’s airmen worked to increase the efficacy of these arms by providing them intelligence, correcting their fire (and supplementing it with bombing and strafing), maintaining communications between them and protecting them from enemy aircraft. As intended, air power helped Britain and her empire win battles; it neither won them alone nor attempted to do so.”

This reviewer’s only quibble is a minor one regarding the ground staff of the AFC. Although their recruitment is discussed and some of their challenges are dealt with, there was perhaps scope for a chapter discussing their experience.

Molkentin’s study of the AFC is based on impressive research and it is both well written and well edited—as, indeed, can be said of the editing of every volume so far of the Centenary History of Australia and the Great War. Its photographs, diagrams and maps are, like the prose, clear and

effective. This book warrants a place on the bookshelves of any scholar or serious collector of air forces and air power history, anywhere.

John Moremon

Massey University

Willbanks, James H. *A Raid Too Far: Operation Lam Son 719 and Vietnamization in Laos*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014. Pp. 270. Price \$35.00.

James Willbank's *A Raid Too Far* is a carefully researched study that allows its geopolitical lessons to percolate up from the nitty-gritty of its operational details. The book recounts the U.S. supported South Vietnamese invasion of southeastern Laos in early 1971. Despite the operation's large scale and its strategic and political importance, Lam Son is not well-known to most Americans. Compared to the Tet Offensive, the Cambodian Incursion, or the Fall of Saigon, it has received less media and scholarly attention. Perhaps this is because Americans did almost none of the fighting and dying on the ground; or perhaps the battle happened at precisely the moment when most Americans began to disengage emotionally from the long and painful Asian conflict in the wake of Richard Nixon's promise of Vietnamization. Besides, the military outcome of the invasion only served to reinforce the misunderstandings, lost opportunities, and disappointments of the larger war—hardly reasons to hold fast to its memory.

As a means of filling the gap in military historiography, as well as an attempt at setting the record straight, Willbank's account (which is one of only two books on the subject) is a worthy undertaking. It belongs to that always-welcome category of Vietnam War books that does not passionately subscribe to either the "bad war" school of interpretation (in which U.S. intervention was a misguided effort to impose its will on an unwinnable situation) or the alternative "right war,

wrong approach” school (in which U.S. involvement was a noble cause undermined by lack of commitment and poor execution). Instead, readers of *A Raid Too Far* may well conclude that in Vietnam nothing—including Lam Son which served as a microcosm of the greater struggle—was ever as simple as American military and civilian leaders hoped it could be. Readers will also be treated to a valuable case study demonstrating that superior airpower alone is usually incapable of achieving victory.

The military objective of operation Lam Son 719 (Lam Son was the birthplace of a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Vietnamese patriot; 71 was the current year and 9 was the invasion zone’s principal highway) was to disrupt communist infiltration of men and materiel via the Ho Chi Minh Trail, thus diminishing Hanoi’s ability to project its power into South Vietnam at a time when U.S. combat forces were rapidly leaving the country. On this score Willbanks succeeds in delivering a description of the battle that is factual and clear. Based on American military records and the later testimony of participants as well as recently released Vietnamese documents, he explains the planning, implementation, and aftermath of the operation. He not only tallies the numbers: casualties, armored vehicles and artillery pieces deployed, disabled, lost, or destroyed, sorties flown, aircraft attrition, tons of supplies captured, numbers of friendly and hostile troops committed (broken down by functional groups), and so forth, but he intersperses his numerical reckoning with brief, often emotionally riveting vignettes of personal heroism or fortitude. He also supplies several maps that are useful for enabling readers to visualize the operation, along with twenty or so photos that are helpful if not particularly dramatic. Most important, *A Raid Too Far* documents a specific event—limited in location, duration, and objectives—that revealed the crucial flaws in overall U.S. intervention policy: underestimation of enemy capability and commitment, weakness of South Vietnamese political leadership, ineptitude of senior SVN officers who were political appointments, inability of SVN forces to successfully prosecute major operations without direct (and massive) American ground

support, the expectation that superior weaponry or a superabundance of materiel could compensate for too many SVN political, social, motivational, and military disadvantages, and finally, that Communist adversaries would react to signals of resolve by yielding ground rather than by redoubling effort.

If Americans do recall anything about the ill-fated Lam Son mission, it is pictures of South Vietnamese troops clinging to U.S. helicopter skids in a desperate effort to flee the routing of their units (curiously, no such picture is included in this book). Willbanks makes an aggressive effort to debunk that particular myth of SVN cowardice, explaining (I think, convincingly) that poor planning and leadership were the real culprits of the operation; cowardice was the exception rather than the rule, and in that famous example (which involved few troops in especially harrowing circumstances), latching onto chopper skids was a sensible method of extraction in the face of overwhelming enemy ground fire. In fact, those iconic images of Lam Son might better be viewed as an example of the way American helicopters—and airpower in general—were asked to accomplish the impossible. Since the U.S. Congress had prohibited American ground troops from entering Laos as combatants or advisors, the sole major contribution Americans could make to the actual fighting was air power. And it was brought to bear in abundance.

On the initial day of the operation American fixed-wing tactical aircraft flew 52 sorties while B-52s added another eleven; U.S. helicopter gunships flew 468 missions and helicopter transports each flew as many as fifteen roundtrips into Laos; seven were shot down. Unfortunately the first tactical-air friendly fire incident occurred the next day, as a U.S. Navy jet mistakenly bombed a South Vietnamese taskforce, killing six and wounding 51; this contributed to mistrust between allied ground forces and American tactical air units. During the 45 days of the operation, American helicopters logged over 160,000 sorties; tactical aircraft over 9,000 and B-52s more than 1,300; Military Airlift Command flew over 2,000 support missions. But airpower proved indecisive for several reasons. Prolonged bad weather seriously hampered visibility;

moreover, the North Vietnamese often took the initiative under cover of night. Enemy forces intentionally positioned themselves so near to SVN forces that close air support became too risky. Poor communication (partly because of language differences, partly from lack of experience) between South Vietnamese spotters and American air controllers limited tactical effectiveness. Finally, enemy units deployed tremendous anti-aircraft resources—for instance machine guns were pre-positioned in cross-fire alignments at likely helicopter landing zones—that severely restricted logistical mobility. Despite the professionalism, commitment, and even heroic actions of pilots, the best they could accomplish in the end was to prevent a South Vietnamese defeat from snowballing into an even worse disaster.

In Willbank's final judgment—and it is hard to dispute his findings—top American and South Vietnamese political and military leadership should be held responsible for the flawed planning and sub-par implementation of Operation Lam Son 719. Richard Nixon and (Defense Secretary) Melvin Laird wanted to quiet domestic opposition to the war more than they wanted to win it. SVN president Thieu wanted to preserve his regime (and his “palace guard” army) rather than take the risks needed to defeat the enemy; his generals were likewise complicit. American theater commander Creighton Abrams was guilty of up-beat assessments no matter the realities of events. The fighting men on the ground and in the air could only make the best of an exceedingly difficult military challenge spawned by political self-deception.

Drew Maciag

Rochester, N.Y.