

BROKEN ARROW: AMERICA'S FIRST LOST NUCLEAR WEAPON



By Norman S. Leach

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Review by

Dr. Sean M. Maloney

Canada's involvement with nuclear weapons during the cold war is generally ignored either consciously or unconsciously by mainstream academic and media discourse. There are those who sought, and perhaps continue, to deny that this country played a significant and sometimes dramatic role in the cold war. Indeed, acceptance of the fact that Canada was deeply and positively engaged in the US-led deterrent system is diametrically opposed to the existing peacekeeping mythology that continues to be foisted on citizens and students in educational and media venues. As the author of the first comprehensive history of Canada's engagement with nuclear weapons, I am heartened to see the release of *Broken Arrow* by Norman Leach.

Leach focuses on the story of a United States Air Force (USAF) Strategic Air Command (SAC) B-36 heavy bomber, designated Ship 2075. This particular B-36 crashed in British Columbia in February 1950, with the loss of some of its crew and the dramatic rescue of the survivors. What differentiates this crash from the other two B-36 crashes in Canada in the 1950s is the fact that Ship 2075 was uploaded with a nuclear weapon. The fate of the bomber, its crew and the weapon constitutes the narrative of *Broken Arrow*, which is eponymous with a USAF code word for an accident involving a nuclear weapon.

Such accidents are as inherently interesting as they can be controversial. First, the secrecy which surrounds nuclear

weapons generates a healthy mystique for almost anything associated with them. Second, the disproportionate attention generated by those who are opposed to the existence of nuclear armament when focusing on accidents involving nuclear systems creates controversy, which draws attention and sells their message. The combination of both secrecy and controversy is a breeding ground for what non-professionals in the field lazily dub "conspiracy theory," which implies some malevolent, indiscernible organization is suppressing information for its own purposes. Parenthetically, conspiracy theory is coded language by some for an unproven hypothesis they are too lazy to work through and challenge. Conspiracy theory is really a particularly circular argument form whereby the evidence that proves there is a conspiracy is non-existent because the perpetrators of the conspiracy are suppressing that evidence.

These semantics become exceptionally important when examining Leach's book, which works through what a B-36 was, why these aircraft existed and the specifics of the incident in February 1950. Though Leach does not explicitly deal with them, a variety of entities, in this case anti-nuclear "peace" and environmental groups that ideologically overlap (particularly in British Columbia), have an interest in demonizing the activities of USAF during the cold war and using accidents like the crash of the B-36 as evidence to support their ideological agenda(s). It is not surprising that USAF was reticent to provide information that could be used to support such agendas, but more importantly, as Leach correctly points out, the detailed specific mechanisms by which nuclear weapons operate should not be proliferated, even 50-year old designs. As a result, *Broken Arrow* undercuts all of the assertions and hypothesis related to the loss of Ship 2075, its crew and the weapon that was on board. There is no conspiracy, just the actions of exhausted men under dangerous conditions during dangerous times.

Broken Arrow is accessible and well illustrated, so hats off to Red Deer Press for not scrimping as other publishers might have. Indeed, as the years pass, fewer and fewer people will know what SAC was, and it is always useful not to assume too much of the future readership. One issue I have is that there are declassified photographs of Mk IV weapons available, and these should have been used instead of the Second World War Fat Man weapon pictures. A section on the development of the Mk IV weapon and its employment by SAC would have nicely augmented the narrative. Contextually, it would also have been useful to add information on the other B-36 crashes in Canada.

That said, *Broken Arrow* is a welcome addition to the literature on Canada and nuclear weapons during the cold war. It is gratifying to see that there is increased interest in that era by Canadian authors, researchers and the publishing industry. 🇨🇦

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Abbreviations

SAC Strategic Air Command
 USAF United States Air Force

CLASHES: AIR COMBAT OVER NORTH VIETNAM 1965–1972



By Marshall L. Michel III

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Review by **Captain Richard Moulton**

While recently attending the Aggressor Threat Academic course, hosted by the United States Air Force's (USAF) 64th Aggressor Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base, the subject book was highly recommended as an in-depth, yet accessible, review of the air war over North Vietnam, which was fought by both USAF and the United States Navy (USN)—specifically the Rolling Thunder (1965–1968), Linebacker (May–October 1972) and Linebacker II (December 1972) strategic bombing campaigns.

As a veteran of the Linebacker campaigns with 321 combat missions in RF-4C (tactical reconnaissance) and F-4E Phantom aircraft to his name and a retired USAF colonel, the author has a lot of personal experience with the subject. He has also done extensive research, utilizing a USAF-sponsored analysis of air-to-air encounters in Southeast Asia (the Red Baron reports), contemporary tactics manuals and articles, end of tour reports as well as a score of books and magazine articles on the subject. While this amount of information could certainly be overwhelming, the author does a good job of ordering the information logically and highlighting the implications of each new development without assuming the reader has familiarity with the air forces of the era.

The book is presented in two parts; the first covers the Rolling Thunder campaign, and the second covers the Linebacker campaigns. The most interesting and most important sections of the book, however, discuss the period after each campaign where USAF and the USN attempt to analyse their respective performances and decide how to move forward. Although inherently less detailed, the analysis of the North Vietnamese responses to each development in the air war was also very informative, emphasizing how their integrated air defence system (IADS)—comprised of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), interceptor aircraft and very capable ground-controlled