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The B-58 Blunder: How The U.S. Abandoned Its Best Strategic Bomber

The B-58 Blunder

How the U.S. Abandoned its Best Strategic Bomber.



A technological marvel, years ahead of its time—until an outrageous blunder sent this aircraft to its early death.

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U.S. Air Force, Retired



Synopsis

Highly effective weapons of war that often cost millions of dollars can easily end up in a trash pile due to quick and uninformed decisions. This work is a case study on how the B-58 supersonic bomber came to a premature death in the U.S. military, largely because of infighting among military and civilian leaders, who failed to understand the value of this fantastic airplane. It was a technological marvel for its time and the very best pilots and navigators were chosen to fly this unique aircraft. At its maximum speed of 2.2 Mach (1,452 mph) it was 2 times faster than the muzzle velocity of a .45 caliber bullet. It could fly faster and out turn most fighters of its day and was also capable of flying close to tree top level just below the speed of sound. It was nearly undetectable by enemy radars due to its speed and low radar cross section and was better at flying through heavy turbulence due to its solid delta wing design. It had a highly accurate navigation and bombing system. It had a capsule ejection system for the safety of the aircrew and was capable of getting airborne in only half the time required by other bombers. Told for the first time, this is the inside story that dispels the unproven myths surrounding the demise of the B-58 and why this magnificent airplane should have been saved. Its loss from the nuclear armory was a severe blow to our "Cold War" deterrence strength. The B-58 was a bomber that set the standard for fear in the heart of an enemy. Its loss was a strategic mistake. The author provides lessons learned and recommendations for military and civilian leaders, going forward, to hopefully prevent future blunders like what happened to the B-58.

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Customer Reviews

I've always thought the B-58 to be a futuristic Beast. From its first flight in 1956 to its last in 1969, it always oozed sleekness, speed and sex. I was based at Davis-Monthan AFB when they started flying in to be stored at MASDC (AKA "the Boneyard") during late 1969. Eventually most of the remaining Fleet of 86 or so was there, in two lines in the In-processing area of MASDC. At the time I accepted the statement that they were being retired to free up funds for the forthcoming B-1. Over the next few years, whenever I saw them in deep storage, I was struck by the fact that they weren't fully pickled, and that security around them was fairly lax. I wondered if someone at HQ/USAF had a more personal reason to get rid of the Hustlers (the ghost of Curt LeMay's closing out the whole B-36 Fleet years earlier for no other reason than he wanted an all-jet fleet kept plucking at my thoughts). And now a retired Colonel who was part of the B-58 Crew Force and later at SAC and AFHQ has confirmed those lingering suspicions. Chapter 5 of this short (127 page) text gives the answer why the 58 was grounded so quickly. It turns out that a couple of Generals at SAC HQ colluded with Congress and the then-SECDEF (Robert Strange McNamara) to sacrifice the 58 in favor of retaining a couple of Wings of older B-52s and increasing the Minuteman ICBM Force. Using a variety of weak excuses, all documented and refuted in this book, the Hustler was shot down in mid-career by its own side. And for no good reason. The older B-52s in question were retired a few years later anyway and the Minuteman Force was capped at 1,000 missiles. The 58's did not linger long in retirement, but were cut up in the mid-late 70's. A few (8?

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