



The Cold War: A Military History

Robert Cowley (editor) , Stephen E. Ambrose , Caleb Carr , Thomas J. Fleming , Victor Davis Hanson , David McCullough

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Even fifteen years after the end of the Cold War, it is still hard to grasp that we no longer live under its immense specter. For nearly half a century, from the end of World War II to the early 1990s, all world events hung in the balance of a simmering dispute between two of the greatest military powers in history. Hundreds of millions of people held their collective breath as the United States and the Soviet Union, two national ideological entities, waged proxy wars to determine spheres of influence—and millions of others perished in places like Korea, Vietnam, and Angola, where this cold war flared hot.

Such a consideration of the Cold War—as a military event with sociopolitical and economic overtones—is the crux of this stellar collection of twenty-six essays compiled and edited by Robert Cowley, the longtime editor of *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*. Befitting such a complex and far-ranging period, the volume’s contributing writers cover myriad angles. John Prados, in “The War Scare of 1983,” shows just how close we were to escalating a war of words into a nuclear holocaust. Victor Davis Hanson offers “The Right Man,” his pungent reassessment of the bellicose air-power zealot Curtis LeMay as a man whose words were judged more critically than his actions.

The secret war also gets its due in George Feiffer’s “The Berlin Tunnel,” which details the charismatic C.I.A. operative “Big Bill” Harvey’s effort to tunnel under East Berlin and tap Soviet phone lines—and the Soviets’ equally audacious reaction to the plan; while “The Truth About Overflights,” by R. Cargill Hall, sheds light on some of the Cold War’s best-kept secrets.

The often overlooked human cost of fighting the Cold War finds a clear voice in “MIA” by Marilyn Elkins, the widow of a Navy airman, who details the struggle to learn the truth about her husband, Lt. Frank C. Elkins, whose A-4 Skyhawk disappeared over Vietnam in 1966. In addition there are profiles of the war’s “front lines”—Dien Bien Phu, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs—as well as of prominent military and civil leaders from both sides, including Harry S. Truman, Nikita Khrushchev, Dean Acheson, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Richard M. Nixon, Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, and others.

Encompassing so many perspectives and events, **The Cold War** succeeds at an impossible task: illuminating and explaining the history of an undeclared shadow war that threatened the very existence of humankind.

From the Hardcover edition.

The Cold War: A Military History Details

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Ryan Wulfsohn says

Excellent anthology covering various subjects and events of the Cold War, such as the Berlin airlift, the Korean war, reconnaissance overflights by the US and UK of the Soviet Union, certain aspects of Vietnam, and the development of nuclear weapons and missile technology.

Elizabeth says

I understand why they gave this book the elaborative title of "A Military History" but I wish they hadn't. Yes, every chapter does illustrate a military action of the Cold War, however I felt that the title seems much more ominous than it is. The only base knowledge you need to read this book is very general, an idea of names and dates...maybe access to an atlas. I actually would recommend this book most highly to someone who lived through and took an active interest in the Cold War as many of the stories don't recount statistically relevant occurrences but rather unique and interesting happenings throughout the non-conflict. Also the stories don't have any sort of flow and reading it straight through is not only not necessary but a little difficult. I found it much easier to read chapter by chapter, selecting each story as I went.

Joe says

This one is very, very good as far as it goes, but it does not go nearly far enough.

It is a collection of essays that trace the cold war from the ear confrontations between spy services in post-WW2 Austria through material gained from the former Soviet Union after the fall. Every essay covers its subject well, and each is entertaining to read.

However, there is little to link them together, save for a few words in the introduction to the next piece. The thread that would connect the story of the entire Cold War into a single narrative is absent. It is rather like examining a diamond necklace with very fine gemstones connected by a setting that is darned hard to see.

Michele says

I very much enjoyed this collection of Cold War essays. Beginning with the Korean War, this collection takes you through the pertinent events of the Cold War, each essay written by an eyewitness or expert in the field. From the spies in Berlin to the Vietnam War, there is something for everyone who is interested in this era. It's one of the better books I've read on the subject for giving new perspectives.

Mike says

U.S. & Soviet exploits during the cold war were vast. This book touches on some of the major themes.

Allison Archer says

This was an assigned read in a class about the Cold War. It was an interesting collection of essays that gave unique, "insider" perspectives.

Michael says

Good book. Slow at times, but some worthwhile information that you wouldn't normally read or hear about.

Peter says

(entered this years later; read it before Goodreads)

Probably enjoyed it.

Aurora library.

Elisa says**3.5**

I would recommend this book to people for no other reason than the two excerpts on the Vietnam War POWs, *MIA* by Marilyn Elkins (the only woman in the who collection) and "That's Ookay XX Time Is On Our Side" by Geoffrey Norman. Both of these pieces paint a tragic and touching picture of these poor American men used as political pawns by their own country. The collections on early Berlin were also interesting, in my opinion. The rest, although informative, became tedious at times with all the throwing around of armory and jet and other war matériel names I didn't know and didn't particularly care about.

This is a well rounded collection and covers a good panorama of Cold War issues and wars.
