



Barren SEAD: USAF Suppression of Enemy Air Defense Doctrine, 1953-1972

James L. Young Jr.

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Since 1972, the United States Air Force has argued that its operations against North Vietnam were unsuccessful primarily through a combination of civilian interference and poor strategic choices. Often citing the “success” of Operation Linebacker II as an example of what might have been had its leaders been given free rein, for almost forty years the Air Force has maintained that its proper employment is the key to winning America’s wars. In *Barren SEAD*, award winning historian James L. Young Jr. propagates a different theory: Instead of being a sign of what the Air Force was capable of, Linebacker II was a bitter failure that starkly outlined the USAF’s limitations. Furthermore, instead of the meddling of the Johnson and Nixon Administrations, this defeat was brought about by Air Force leaders’ refusal to develop a Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD) doctrine from 1953-1972. Relying primarily on Air Force archival documents, memoirs, and contemporary doctrinal publications, Young illustrates just how dangerous the Air Force’s failure to nurture its SEAD capability was during this period of the Cold War.

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