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Melvin G. Deaile. *Always at War: Organizational Culture in Strategic Air Command, 1946-62.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018. 328 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-68247-248-4.

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In *Always at War* Melvin Deaile argues that even though the Strategic Air Command (SAC) no longer exists as such, it “left an indelible imprint on the Air Force because the organization developed a strong, distinctive culture that for a time dominated the Air Force and that continues influencing it today” (p. 3). He intends to define the elements that “constituted SAC’s organizational culture and explore the circumstances that brought them to fruition,” asserting that “leaders do matter” and “ideology and organizational assumptions played a significant role” in the development of that culture. Deaile examines the formulation of SAC’s culture through two categories of culture: invisible or ideational, which focuses on the influence of SAC leadership; and visible or material, which considers the physical manifestation of culture through “symbols, objects, and ritualized practices” (p. 8). Other points are also considered, such as the influence of a distinctive Air Force culture upon the development of SAC, and how Air Force assumptions in regard to strategic bombing influenced SAC culture. Ultimately Deaile presents an evolutionary argument regarding the development of SAC culture, observing that the “role of technology, the symbolism of that technology, and Air Force views regarding advanced technology—specifically missiles—played a significant role in bringing SAC culture from the ideational realm to the material form (pp. 17-18).

Deaile then proceeds chronologically. In the first chapter he observes how strategic bombing during World War II came to represent “shared values” for most pilots, who considered themselves “special” and “different” from the organization to which they belonged—the US

Army. The Air Corps also endorsed strategic bombing as a doctrine, which enabled aviators to believe they could achieve victory without the assistance of land or naval forces, and also provided a catalyst for this subculture to break away from the “dominant culture” of the Army and ultimately create an organization that “expressed its own values” (pp. 22, 44-45). The second chapter illustrates how strategic bombing in World War II helped to create a shared experience for many airmen that would become initial components of a SAC culture, including the responses of future SAC leaders—notably Curtis Lemay—to challenges that wartime strategic bombing campaigns faced. Lemay worked to standardize procedures and development checklists and instituted a lead crew system that enabled strategic bombing efforts to perform more effectively. However, the first administration of SAC did not have this past shared experience, leading the command to develop in a different direction initially.

Deaile highlights three areas of influence in the early development of SAC after the war: the internal influence of the Army Air Forces (AAF) and burgeoning Air Force (AF); the external Cold War environment that SAC developed to fit; and the influence of SAC’s first commander, George Kenney. The results were significant—through wartime experience and long-held beliefs regarding the role of airpower, SAC became a manifestation of airpower’s value in a post-Pearl Harbor environment, a centralized organization responsible for all US strategic bombing. Also, the pressures of the early Cold War spurred investment in nuclear capability as a deterrent for future aggression, in place of large-scale conventional forces. Finally, although George Kenney was an

outspoken proponent of the command, his leadership did not effectively prepare SAC to go to war—an error Curtis Lemay would correct.

For the next several chapters Deaile explores how Lemay accomplished the changes that would make SAC battle-ready but also continued building layers of a distinctive command culture. In his time as SAC commander, Lemay created the backbone of SAC’s organizational culture by emphasizing training, readiness, efficiency, and standardization, to the point that the command could be described as an “air force within an air force.” Independent and self-sufficient in many ways—operating its own airlift aircraft and fighters, for example—SAC also differentiated itself from other commands through the treatment of its personnel. Hobby shops, clubs, recreational activities, and even family life were all heavily influenced by the SAC leadership and culture, providing an environment that was distinctive within the larger Air Force structure. Finally, Deaile examines the incorporation of missiles into SAC culture following the *Sputnik* episode in 1957. Missiles introduced an element of fear into SAC culture, as SAC crews were obliged to sit on alert, primed to launch an attack on the Soviet Union in fifteen minutes. Also, rather than emerging from the dominant pilot

culture and establishing a separate organization, as aviators had done from the US Army during and after World War II, “missileers” were “indoctrinated” into the “SAC mentality” and became part, if still in stepchild fashion, of SAC culture (pp. 181-82, 222).

Overall Deaile provides a thoughtful narrative that is well supported by archival research and effectively organized. He follows through on claims and purposes outlined in the book’s outset, charting the course of SAC’s evolution through a variety of internal and external changes that each exerted a unique influence on the development of a culture that embodied deeply held assumptions about military strategy and the Cold War conflict, yet continues to be positively remembered by its former members. Deaile’s coverage of the material and symbolic aspects of SAC culture could have been strengthened, although these connections are explored in the discussion of the atomic bomb, the SAC patch, bombers, and the “Peace Is Our Profession” slogan. But this is a minor point when considered with the accomplishment of his larger purposes. In short, the book is a valuable read for those exploring the history of US airpower, air atomic strategy, and military culture.

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