

Appomattox in the Civil War, and the Washita to the Little Big Horn in the Indian Wars. They explain how Custer deliberately sought assistance and mentorship from many generals, including Winfield Scott, George McClellan, Alfred Pleasanton, and Phil Sheridan, as he sought promotion and influence during his military career, though they could have thrown more light on why he failed to gain acceptance from William Tecumseh Sherman and Ulysses S. Grant, even making an enemy of the 18<sup>th</sup> U.S. President.

Behncke and Bloomfield note that initial impression Custer had on many fellow soldiers, because of his longish curly hair and uniquely designed uniforms was not always favorable, but that his style of fighting and the results won him acceptance by many, but not all generals, fellow officers, and common soldiers.

They offer a very effectively look at Custer's relationship with his wife, Libby, to the point where early in their marriage his devotion to her led him to make some critical errors, leading to a court martial.

As they tell the story of Custer's life and death, Behncke and Bloomfield examine his personal views. While he felt strongly about his southern friends, he fought ferociously to help end slavery, yet did not completely understand the people whom he had helped free from slavery. Similarly, although he admired Native Americans in many ways, he fought them, often brutally, to crush their resistance, in accordance with his orders.

In preparing this volume, the authors perused, letters between Custer and his Libby, official correspondence between numerous military officers, and many other sources, making for a full bibliography, but the book lacks footnotes, and there are some errors that better editing might have caught.

While very devoted students of Custer will not find a great deal of new information, for those less familiar with the subject, *Custer* will prove a useful, even challenging read.

***Custer: From the Civil War's Boy General to the Battle of the Little Bighorn***, by Ted Behncke and Gary L. Bloomfield. Philadelphia & Oxford: Casemate, 2020. Pp. xvi, 250. Illus., biblio., index. \$34.95, 978-1-6120-0889-9; e-editions available. –David Marshall

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***Modern South Korean Air Power:***  
***The Republic of Korea Air Force Today***,  
 by Robin Polderman.

Years ago, at an otherwise dull embassy reception in Washington, I found myself refilling

my glass of ginger ale at the bar alongside the air attaché from an Asian country. When he sensed that there was no one more significant around and that I constituted a potential audience, he launched into a diatribe that, unlike most delivered in Washington, demonstrated a command of English, a knowledge of history, and a darkly sardonic sense of humor. Among the many, many things he was unhappy about was the absence of writing in English about air arms such as his own, whose capabilities and achievements were unfairly little known outside his home country.

He had a point. Airpower history misses out when it focusses just on the major players. The Italians, Ottomans and Mexicans all had cadres of combat-experienced pilots before 1914, years ahead of the US. Both sides' air arms in the Spanish Civil War had to adapt to become innovators in military aviation in the heat of combat, using access provided by foreign patrons. It is not always the big air arms that are the significant ones.

Wherever this colonel is now, I hope his pension runs to a copy of this book. While it is not a history, nor is it about his air arm, it is the sort of book he wanted to see written. Issued by Harpia, an Austria-based English-language publisher specializing in aircraft and aviation subjects and distributed by Casemate in the US, *Modern South Korean Air Power*, *The Republic of Korea Air Force Today* is not primarily a history, which is mainly summarized in an introductory chapter. Nor is it a study of airpower's significant role in either the Korean peninsula's balance of forces or the Republic of Korea's (deepening) national security challenges. The threats the Republic of Korea Air Force (ROKAF) faces – mainly asymmetric rather than from high-technology airpower like its own – require their own book-length treatments. This treatment of current capabilities of the Korean aerospace industry, capable of overhauling fighters for the US Air Force and offering trainer designs for US competitions, does not show how it struggled to achieve this, nor its overall place in the national economy and the changing political picture (South Korean voters do not appreciate jet noise any more than their foreign counterparts).

Its subtitle provides an accurate description of the subject matter. The text is organized around individual chapters, each providing descriptions of an aircraft or missile, describing their role and how and when they entered service. The book is extensively illustrated with 175 color photographs, well printed on glossy paper. Every type of aircraft or missile currently (or recently) in service with the ROKAF gets at least one photograph, and most receive several, and these

are supplemented by many illustrations of unit insignias.

This approach brings home to the reader that, while US designs still predominate in the ROKAF, as they have since its inception, it flies an increasing number of indigenous designs (some of which are proving competitive on the world markets) as well as aircraft acquired from Russia, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The ROKAF is a high technology air arm. Its Boeing E-7As represent next-generation technology compared with the US Air Force E-3G AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) flying the same missions. The ROKAF is putting F-35A Joint Strike Fighters into service at the same time as the US Air Force; no more second-hand fighters. Ongoing projects for a sixth-generation fighter design and aircraft carriers capable of operating F-35Bs show Korea's commitment to producing and projecting world-class airpower. However, the focus on the aircraft and missiles rather than the larger picture obscures that the ROKAF is, and remains, a Korean force that does things in Korean ways (which are themselves rapidly changing).

The focus remains on the ROKAF. General reference material on performance and systems is limited unless it distinguishes Korean versions; a wise approach to avoid padding the book with material that may be available in multiple current sources. Over half the book, however, is devoted to putting the aircraft and missiles in context. History, camouflage and markings, order of battle and organization (including organization charts), training, the (highly ambitious) current modernization program, the aerospace industry and the ROKAF's threats (North Korea and China) and friends (US) are each treated in their own well-illustrated chapter. Two color maps show airbase locations in Korea and throughout northeast Asia. The only disappointment is the limited bibliography, two pages of English language sources. South Korea's Army, Navy and Coast Guard aviation are not within the author's scope of coverage, unfortunate as they are unlikely to merit their own in-depth book-length treatment.

This book represents a good first step for writing about the ROKAF and a worthwhile – even if not comprehensive -- model for writing about other air arms. Harpia has already published additional books in the same series. I think the long-ago air attaché would have (sardonically) approved and looked forward to one on his own air force.

**Modern South Korean Air Power: The Republic of Korea Air Force Today**, by Robin Polderman. Vienna and Philadelphia: Harpia /

CaseMate, 2021. Pp. 253. Illus., appends, biblio., index. \$59.95 paper, ISBN 978-1-950394-07-4,

--David C. Isby

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**¡Vamos a avanzar!  
The Chaco War and Bolivia's Political Transformation, 1899–1952,**

by Robert Niebuhr.

Although the Chaco War, between Paraguay and Bolivia was the largest international conflict in South America since the nineteenth century, the literature on it in English is rather slender. In this essentially “war and society” account Prof. Niebuhr (Arizona State) gives us a look at the Bolivian side of the struggle.

Niebuhr opens by examining the trends in Bolivian society that led the country to undertake a war over the enormous but largely unexplored Chaco, with its promise of potentially vast natural resources. He makes the case that in the decades before the war, a degree of common “national” identity had begun to emerge in Bolivia, spurred by some political initiatives and economic trends, shared even by part of the Indigenous population, so that the war was widely popular.

Niebuhr's account of the war is adequate, covering operations and their consequences, both on the fighting front and at the home front. He demonstrates that despite their confidence in their preparations for war, the Bolivian armed forces were in fact outclassed, and out-generated, by the Paraguayans, leading to a costly defeat.

This defeat set in motion significant changes in Bolivian society, driven to a great extent by the veterans, including those of Indigenous origins, terming the war “the most influential revolutionary event in modern Bolivian history”.

**¡Vamos a avanzar! The Chaco War and Bolivia's Political Transformation, 1899–1952**, by Robert Niebuhr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021. Pp. xii, 260+. Illus., map, table, notes, biblio., index. \$60.00, 978-1-4962-0778-4; e- editions available. – A. A. Nofi

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**Passing Through the Fire:  
Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain  
in the Civil War,**

by Brian F. Swartz

Joshua Chamberlain, hero of Little Round Top on the second day of Gettysburg, was relatively unknown until Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize novel, *Killer Angels* was published in 1974, and Ken Burn's PBS series, *The Civil War* that first aired in 1990, and the film adaptation of the novel that appeared in 1993. From virtual obscurity he became one of the most well-known heroes of the Civil War, a cult figure to many enthusiasts.