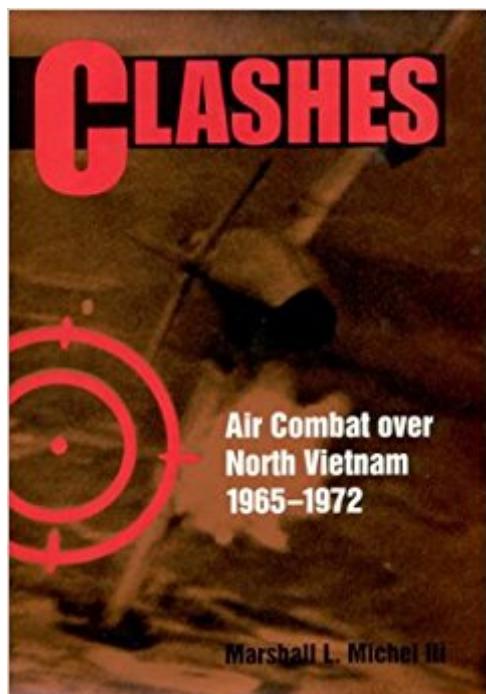


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# Clashes: Air Combat Over North Vietnam, 1965-1972



## Synopsis

A retired Air Force fighter pilot and Vietnam veteran makes full use of recently declassified U.S. documents in this first comprehensive study of fighter combat over North Vietnam. His balanced, exhaustive coverage describes and analyzes both Air Force and Navy engagements with North Vietnamese MiGs but also includes discussions of the SAM threat and U.S. countermeasures, laser-guided bombs, and U.S. attempts to counter the MiG threat with a variety of technological equipment. Accessible yet professional, the book is filled with valuable lessons learned that are as valid today as they were in the 1960s and 1970s. Some 15 photos and 45 drawings and maps, including diagrams of both American and North Vietnamese formations and tactics, are included. Beginning with the first air-to-air engagements of Operation Rolling Thunder in 1965, Marshall Michel describes the initial American successes against the MiGs and the stunning turn of events in late 1967 when the North Vietnamese began shooting down more U.S. aircraft than they lost. He explains how in 1968, at the end of Rolling Thunder, the U.S. Air Force ignored problems with their tactics, formations, and missiles, while the U.S. Navy undertook a complete reassessment of its air-to-air operations and formed its famous Topgun course. The second part of the book, covering Operation Linebacker in 1972, examines the results of these two approaches and how the Navy scored heavily against the MiGs while the Air Force continued to suffer losses to MiG-21s. Michel offers extraordinary insights into events that lead to this situation and the Air Force's efforts to reverse the trend. This combination of actual dogfight descriptions with authoritative analysis of the tactics, pilot skills, high-level decisionmaking, and short comings--over 57 percent of U.S. air-to-air missiles malfunctioned and less than 13 percent scored a kill--will prove indispensable to everyone with an interest in air combat, the war in Vietnam, and Navy and Air Force aviation in general.

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## Customer Reviews

### On the U.S. Marine Corps Reading List

A retired U.S. Air Force fighter pilot and Vietnam veteran makes full use of recently declassified U.S. documents in this first comprehensive study of fighter combat over North Vietnam. His balanced, exhaustive coverage describes and analyzes both Air Force and Navy engagements with North Vietnamese MiGs while simultaneously discussing the SAM threat and U.S. countermeasures, laser-guided bombs, and U.S. attempts to counter the MiG threat with a variety of technologies. Accessible yet professional, *Clashes* is filled with valuable lessons that are as valid today as they were in the 1960s and 1970s. Some sixty-five photographs, tables, pie charts, maps, and diagrams of American and North Vietnamese formations and tactics are included. Beginning with the first air-to-air engagements of Operation Rolling Thunder in 1965, Marshall Michel describes the initial American successes against the MiGs and the stunning turn of events in late 1967 when the North Vietnamese began shooting down more U.S. aircraft than they lost. He explains how in 1968, at the end of Rolling Thunder, the U.S. Air Force ignored problems with their tactics, formations, and missiles, while the U.S. Navy undertook a complete reassessment of its air-to-air operations and formed its famous Topgun course. The second part of the book, covering Operation Linebacker in 1972, examines the results of these two approaches and how the Navy scored heavily against the MiGs while the Air Force continued to suffer losses to MiG-21s. Michel offers extraordinary insights into events that led to this situation and the Air Force's efforts to reverse the trend. This combination of descriptions of actual dogfights with authoritative analysis of the tactics, pilot skills, high-level decision making, and shortcomings - more than 57 percent of U.S. air-to-air missiles malfunctioned and less than 13 percent scored a kill - will prove indispensable to everyone with an interest in air combat, the war in Vietnam, and Navy and Air Force aviation in general. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

We have here an excellent history of the air-to-air combat that took place in the Vietnam War. This is not a book that looks at individuals, but rather it looks at what we should call systems - particularly how the Air Force and the Navy addressed such matters as training, personnel deployments, weapons testing, equipment, and tactics. Michell pulls no punches. He demonstrates that Air Force

personnel policies opened the door for potential disaster by sending aircrews into combat without proper air combat training, how the Navy was running its aircrews ragged (and could NOT quickly increase the number of aircrews), why the testing of air-to-air missiles was not relevant to what was actually happening over North Vietnam, and how the North Vietnamese Air Force was able stand and fight against the Americans. Michell shows how the issue of an unacceptable combat loss ratio between F-4s and MiG-21s led to two very different responses. For the Air Force, the focus was on trying to get the pilots better informed about where the enemy was. For the Navy, the result was Top Gun. After the Vietnam War was over, there were other changes - improved tactics for the Air Force, new fighters for both services, and a deeper focus on realistic training for both services, to name but a few. Those whose profession is to fly combat fighters should buy this book and read it well. For someone whose bent is historical, this book will put you there to see how it really was, as Michell uses the After-Action reports to spin the story. Well worth buying and reading.

An amazingly detailed book that walks you through the evolution of the air war and escalating capabilities and tactics, successes and failures of the participants - USAF, USN, and to a lesser extent, Vietnam. It's scandalous how unprepared the US was to execute the air war, judging from Michell's book, with appallingly poor performance of air-to-air missiles, few aircraft with guns, and the general state of US training and readiness. Throughout there are detailed descriptions of dogfights, SAM encounters, and strike missions in almost day-to-day and blow-by-blow narratives that sometimes becomes a grind and get a little depressing because of the surprisingly poor US performance and outcomes, but they are never uninteresting. The book excels, however, at describing the evolution of dogfighting, the ever-changing composition of strike packages, Ground Control Intercepts (GCI), Combat Air Patrols, SAM engagement, electronic warfare and countermeasures, strengths and weaknesses of different aircraft weapons systems, training and tactics of all sides, and performance characteristics of each of the relevant forces' aircraft and systems in an approachable but sophisticated way. Michell also shows how the US military aviation continued to apply what it learned to become the more successful, cutting-edge force we've seen since 1991. This book is a primer for modern air combat that anyone interested in air warfare should own. It's approachable enough for those with only casual interest in air warfare and deep enough for professionals to learn quite a bit. A fundamental book for understanding not only current modern capabilities, but also those of the many countries with less advanced militaries.

This book is an incredibly well researched over view of the successes and failures of air combat

particularly over Laos and North Vietnam. It is highly technical but very compelling in its analysis of both U.S. Navy and U.S.A.F. tactics, performance of certain missile and bombing systems and electronic counter measures. The book also exposes the unimaginable failures of policy makers in Washington (particularly the Johnson Administration) and "strategists" at the Pentagon in micro, and miss managing target selection, routes, and tactics. If only this incompetence had been uncovered during the war, the U.S. might have had a chance of actually winning it.

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