“Nobody dislikes war more than warriors, but we value the causes of peace so highly that we will not duck a war in an effort to get a lasting peace.”

Gen Daniel “Chappie” James, Jr, USAF
You’ve already read about the aces of World War I—brave men such as Eddie Rickenbacker. The Korean War, which began in 1950, introduced a new kind of ace: the jet ace. The name changed for a simple reason: most fighter aircraft flown in Korea had jet engines. Jet aces, like the earlier aces, had to score five kills to earn the title.

Col James Jabara was the first jet ace in history. He earned that record in the Korean War. The Oklahoma-born pilot’s parents were from Lebanon. By the time the Korean War began, he was an experienced fighter pilot. He’d flown a P-51 in Europe during World War II. He went on 108 combat missions. He shot down one enemy aircraft and shared credit for a second kill.

In Korea, Jabara piloted an F-86 Sabrejet. These fighters flew about 670 miles per hour (mph). In his first tour of duty, Jabara scored six kills. During his second tour, he shot down nine more enemy aircraft. All 15 kills were MiG-15s, which were very tough and quick Soviet-built planes. Only one pilot shot down more MiGs than Jabara. He earned many medals in Korea and World War II, including a Distinguished Service Cross and two Silver Stars.

Sadly, Jabara died in a car accident in 1966 as he was preparing for his first tour in Vietnam. He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery along with his daughter, who also died as a result of the crash. The Colonel James Jabara Airport outside Wichita, Kansas, is named for him.
The Creation of an Independent Air Force in 1947

As you read in Chapter 5, air power was vital to the Allies’ victory in World War II. Between 1941 and 1945, the Army Air Forces developed new strategies and tactics. Engineers built more-powerful bombers and fighters. US planes delivered the atomic bombs on Japan that ended the war in 1945. US air power grew up fast, and the atomic bomb made it mature even faster. By 1947, most people were convinced it was time for the Air Forces to gain independence from the Army.

The National Security Act of 1947

The size of the military shrank after World War II, just as it had after World War I. The Army Air Forces ended the war in 1945 with 2.3 million Airmen and 72,000 aircraft. By 1947 they had only 300,000 Airmen and 10,000 planes. Yet even as the government was reducing the size of all military branches, it was rethinking how to fight wars. The atomic bomb had drastically changed warfare. And Congress wanted to correct the poor coordination between the branches of the military that helped lead to the disaster at Pearl Harbor.

Vocabulary

- nuclear deterrence
- arms
- United Nations
- Marshall Plan
- Strategic Triad
- missiles
- satellite
- Mach
- Western Allies
- airlift
- colony
- 38th parallel
- latitude
- limited war
In July 1947 President Harry S. Truman signed into law the National Security Act of 1947. This act set the stage for military development in the years to come. It authorized the founding of the National Military Establishment (today’s Department of Defense). The law created the post of secretary of defense, who would answer to the president of the United States. It created the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency. It established three branches within the National Military Establishment: the Department of the Navy, the Department of the Army, and the Department of the Air Force. This last change marked the creation of an independent United States Air Force. The first secretary of the Air Force, Stuart Symington, was appointed in September 1947. But it would take two years for all responsibility to shift from the Army to the Air Force.

The First Air Force Chief of Staff

Gen Carl Spaatz was the first US Air Force chief of staff. He had commanded many World War II operations in the European and Pacific theaters. As chief of staff, Gen Spaatz was in charge of military operations for the Air Force. Secretary Symington was in charge of administrative matters.

Spaatz oversaw three major operating commands created in 1946: the Strategic Air Command (SAC), the Tactical Air Command (TAC), and the Air Defense Command (ADC). SAC was the atomic-weapons command. It was the best-funded command of the three. TAC was in charge of tactical, or smaller, air operations. ADC’s role was to defend the country from air strikes.

The Implications of a Separate Air Force

As the creation of SAC showed, the atomic bomb would shape the mission of the Air Force. Today there are many means of delivering atomic bombs, including submarines. But just after World War II, only airplanes could do this job.

Military and civilian leaders thought the atomic bomb would protect the United States from aggression. They called this protection nuclear deterrence, or prevention of war by convincing an enemy that if he attacks, he will be destroyed by nuclear weapons. The main duty of the Air Force at that time was to deliver the atomic bomb. SAC was the command within the Air Force that would fulfill the mission. Its bombers would drop the bombs if need be.

The invention and use of the atomic bomb during World War II finally led to the Air Force getting its independence from the Army. The Air Force could now perform a function that no other branch of the military could carry out.
Most Americans expected a long period of peace after World War II. But that didn’t happen. The country was about to enter a new kind of war. It wouldn’t be another world war. It would be fought in smaller theaters. It would include a huge buildup of arms—weapons—including atomic weapons.

The United States would wage this war against a powerful country that had been one of its major allies in World War II: the Soviet Union.

**What the Cold War Was**

The Cold War, as it came to be called, lasted for more than four decades—roughly from 1948 until 1989. The primary players were the United States and the Soviet Union. (The Soviet Union was the country formed from the old Russian empire after the Communists took over in 1917.) The two countries disagreed on how the world should run in the postwar years. The Cold War was their political, economic, and military rivalry. But both also had something in common. They wanted to avoid another worldwide war, a “hot” war.

The Cold War got its name from Bernard Baruch, an American delegate to the United Nations. The United Nations (UN) is a worldwide organization first formed in 1945 by the victorious Allies to maintain international peace. In a 1947 speech, Baruch said, “Let us not be deceived—today we are in the midst of a cold war.”

The Soviets were putting Communist governments in place in the countries along their borders in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Army had occupied these countries at the end of World War II. The Soviets’ greatest fear was another war with Germany. They hoped a Communist Eastern Europe might buffer them from Germany. But they were afraid that America’s powerful new atomic bomb would threaten their plan. The Soviets were still trying to develop the bomb.

The Communists believed that the state should own all means of production. They permitted no private ownership of land, factories, or businesses. They also supported dictatorship by a single party—the Communist Party—and did not permit free elections or respect human rights such as a free press, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, or freedom of association.

Most Communist governments collapsed as the Cold War ended. At the end of 2006, Cambodia, China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam were the only surviving Communist governments.
The United States had other priorities. It wanted to preserve freedom in Europe. After all, Americans had fought hard for it in World War II. In addition, Europe was in bad shape after the war. The economies of European countries were suffering. American leaders feared that if Western Europe remained weak, it would fall into the Communist camp. The United States wanted to help Europe get back on its feet. So Congress enacted the **Marshall Plan**, a strategy for rebuilding the countries of Europe and repelling communism after World War II. The initiative was named for US Secretary of State George Marshall, who proposed it. The Soviets refused to allow the countries they occupied to participate in the plan.

The United States was confident it could keep the Soviets out of Western Europe because America alone had the atomic bomb. It developed a three-pronged method of delivering nuclear weapons called the Strategic Triad. (A *triad* is a group of three.) The **Strategic Triad** consisted of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and long-range bombers. In other words, it consisted of land-, sea-, and air-based nuclear weapons.

The purpose of multiple methods for delivering nuclear weapons is to ensure that the United States can retaliate if it is attacked. If one type of weapon becomes vulnerable to an enemy (for example, because of an enemy’s technological breakthrough), the other types would still be protected—and the United States would remain safe.

Then in 1949 the Soviets tested their first atomic weapon. Tensions increased between the two nations. Each side worried that the other might use its atomic bombs, with dreadful results. Yet it was this threat of total destruction that each side hoped would prevent the other from ever striking.

In a way, that fear had a preventive effect. But some serious face-offs did take place. Among them were the Berlin Airlift (1948–1949) and the Korean War (1950–1953), which you’ll read about later in this lesson.

**The Creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**

Eleven Western European countries and the United States formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. NATO nations promised to defend one another from Communist aggression. They agreed that “an armed attack against one or more of them shall be considered an attack against them all.” NATO headquarters was in Paris.

Some people wondered why the United States joined NATO. After all, America tended to be an isolationist nation. So why did it join a military pact in a time of peace? The reason was simple: the United States was intent on keeping communism from spreading around the globe. NATO seemed a good way to bond countries with a similar goal. As another indication of its support, the United States agreed to keep US troops in Western Europe in case any of its allies needed help.
In 1955 the Soviets responded to NATO’s creation. They drew up the Warsaw Pact—named for the capital of Poland—with the Communist allies that they dominated. In this pact, or treaty, the Soviet leaders promised to safeguard any of their friends who came under attack.

How the USAF Was Organized to Fight the Cold War

SAC was one of the most crucial commands in the Air Force. To deliver the atomic bomb, SAC had hundreds of B-52 bombers and KC-135 tankers. The tankers refueled the bombers in mid-air.

SAC’s role eventually expanded to running aerial reconnaissance. It used planes equipped with the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS). In addition, spy planes, like the U-2, allowed SAC to spot Soviet missiles—rocket-propelled vehicles that carry a weapon or warhead.

Finally, as technology further improved, each side launched satellites into space. A satellite is an object that orbits another object in space, such as a planet. The satellites could check for missiles on the ground of an enemy nation. The US military built underground bunkers from which to keep track of its satellites. But SAC found that enemy atomic bombs could target its bunkers. So it created flying command centers called “Looking Glass.” These planes flew 24/7 for more than 29 years.
The US-Soviet rivalry and the atomic bomb drove decisions in aviation development. The B-52 bomber, with its 10,000-mile range, became SAC’s main bomber. But it wasn’t the first or last.

Before the B-52 was the Boeing B-47. It had jet engines and straight wings. To improve it, the company changed to a sweptback wing designed by the Germans during World War II. A sweptback wing—a wing angled rearward from the point of attachment—is more efficient at higher speeds than a straight wing. The wind can flow more easily over it. The Air Force adopted this improved Boeing B-47 in 1947. But this plane could fly only 3,000 miles without refueling. That prompted Boeing to build its longer-range B-52 in 1952.

Decades later, in 1988, another major bomber joined SAC’s arsenal—the B-2 stealth bomber. The missile was another breakthrough in bomb delivery. You’ll read more about these in the next lessons.

For a while, achieving faster speeds remained a challenge. In the 1950s the government, universities, and private industry all wanted to build faster fighters. But whenever such planes approached what came to be known as the “sound barrier”—the speed of sound—they shook badly. Sometimes they fell apart. Test pilots sometimes died.
The breakthrough occurred on 14 October 1947. Capt Charles “Chuck” Yeager broke the sound barrier with the Bell X-1. He reached 670 mph at 42,000 feet. Supersonic flight was born.

Yeager’s feat brought a new word into the aviation dictionary—Mach. **Mach** (pronounced “mock”) is the speed of sound. That is about 670 miles per hour.

After this breakthrough, aircraft got faster and faster. In 1956 a test pilot flew the experimental Bell X-2 at 2,094 miles per hour. That is three times the speed of sound, or Mach 3. Today’s fighters are built on ideas first applied in these speedy aircraft.

**Brig Gen Charles Yeager, Test Pilot**

Brig Gen Charles “Chuck” Yeager is best known for breaking the sound barrier in 1947. But he already had a long record of service by that time.

In 1941, at age 18, Yeager joined the Army Air Forces. He worked as an aircraft mechanic and pilot. Later, he fought during World War II. After the war he trained to be a test pilot. That’s how he got to fly the X-1. Yeager beat out 125 other pilots to get the job.

Yeager also served in the Vietnam War. He was a wing commander in 1966 and flew more than 120 combat missions. Yeager retired from the US Air Force in 1973.
The USAF Role in the Berlin Airlift

Before the end of World War II, the Allies were already talking about what to do with Germany when it surrendered. Based on the lessons they learned after World War I (see Chapter 4, Lesson 2), the United States, Britain, and France wanted Germany to prosper. That way it wouldn’t drag Europe into yet another world war. But the Soviet Union had a different view. It wanted to dominate Germany so the Germans would never again invade Soviet borders.
The Allies’ solution was to divide Germany in two parts. Each side could rule its part as it wished. The Soviets controlled East Germany, where they set up a Communist dictatorship. The Western Allies—the United States, Britain, and France—controlled West Germany, where they set up a democracy.

Germany’s capital, Berlin, posed a problem. It was in East Germany. The four Allies split Berlin into four sectors, too. The Soviets got one sector—East Berlin. The three sectors of West Berlin were controlled by the Western Allies. But by June 1948 the Soviets decided they wanted all of Berlin. After all, it was in the Soviet-run part of Germany. The Soviets decreed that the Western Allies could no longer use roads, railroads, or canals to enter East Germany to deliver goods to Berlin. The first big clash of the Cold War and the first test of the new independent Air Force had begun.
According to a 1945 agreement, the United States, Britain, and France could use three air routes over Soviet-controlled East Germany to enter Berlin.

Courtesy of Maps.com
How the USAF Broke the Berlin Blockade

The Western Allies had to get goods such as coal and food to their sectors in Berlin. Otherwise, more than 2 million West Berliners could freeze in winter and starve. If the Western Allies couldn’t get into Berlin by ground transport, what about the air? A previous agreement between the four former Allies in 1945 gave the United States, Britain, and France the right to three 20-mile-wide air corridors that ended in Berlin.

Gen Lucius Clay, US commander in Europe, took action. The Western Allies would prevent the Soviet takeover of West Berlin through a massive airlift—the transportation of personnel or material by air. Thus the Berlin Airlift began. (It was also called “Operation Vittles.”)

While war usually calls for bombers and fighters, this was to be a bloodless battle conducted by cargo aircraft. Clay ordered Lt Gen Curtis LeMay, then commander of US Air Forces in Europe, to make available as many cargo planes as possible. Clay asked Maj Gen William Tunner, the transport expert from World War II, to command the airlift into West Berlin. The airlift began in June 1948, the same month in which the Soviets set up the blockade.

The Cargo Plane

Lt Gen LeMay gathered more than 100 C-47 cargo planes for Maj Gen Tunner (see Chapter 3, Lesson 3). The Gooney Birds, as they were nicknamed, could each lug two to three tons of goods. But West Berliners needed 4,500 tons of food, coal, oil, and other supplies each day.

So LeMay got an even larger, faster transport plane into service—the C-54. It carried about 10 tons of cargo. By October 1948 200 C-54s were shuttling cargo to the city. Some days, almost one cargo plane a minute landed in Berlin.

By May 1949 the Soviets caved. They realized that the US, Britain, and France would not give up their airlift, no matter the cost. By that time, the Allies had airlifted 1.75 million tons of goods into the blockaded city.

The C-54 was the primary cargo plane of the Berlin Airlift.

Courtesy of the US Air Force
Lt Gen William Tunner: Cargo Commander

Lt Gen William Tunner (1906–1982) was a West Point graduate. He spent his career with the Army Air Corps and the Air Force.

Tunner’s specialty was transport planes. During World War II he was chief of the Air Transport Command Ferrying Division. While in that post, he asked Nancy Love to form the Women’s Auxiliary Ferry Squadron. Also during that war, he figured out how to safely transport supplies across the Himalayan Mountains to China. China was one of the Allies at that time.

Because of Tunner’s success in China, Gen Lucius Clay tapped him to head the Berlin Airlift. Tunner was a very organized person. He knew that for any transport mission to succeed, it must run in an orderly manner. Tunner demanded schedules for flights, schedules for crews, and weather reports. As a result, the airlift had an excellent safety record. And the amount of cargo ferried to Berlin rocketed between 1948 and 1949.

Tunner recognized the importance of cargo planes to any Air Force operation. He also knew how undervalued they were. With the triumph of the Berlin Airlift, Tunner showed the world how to command transport missions.
Lessons the USAF Learned From the Berlin Airlift

The Berlin airlift helped convince American leaders of the need to build a stronger Air Force. The cargo plane came into its own during the airlift. It wasn’t as flashy as bombers or fighters, but it saved a city from a Communist takeover. These workhorse transports formed the critical element in the American response to the Soviet blockade of Berlin.

The intensity of the airlift also taught cargo crews a lot about what they could achieve. They had daily chances to perfect air support. One year later, transports, bombers, and fighters would all be called on to fight the next stage of the Cold War: the Korean War.

1st Lt Gail Halvorsen: The Candy Bomber

1st Lt Gail Halvorsen was one of the US pilots picked to fly C-54s during the Berlin Airlift. These pilots often had little to do while waiting for their cargo aircraft to be unloaded. One day, trying to pass the time, he talked with some German children who were peering through the airport fence. They asked if he had any candy. He told them that the next time he flew in, he’d wiggle the wings of his plane and then drop small packages of candy to them.

Halvorsen kept his promise. Soon many other pilots wanted to help. Many German children who didn’t live near the airport wrote Halvorsen asking for candy to be dropped in their neighborhoods. They called him “Uncle Wiggly Wings.” He was also known as the “Candy Bomber.”

1st LT GAIL HALVORSEN

1st LT Gail Halvorsen, USAF, became famous for “Operation Little Vittles.” He rigged miniature parachutes with American candy bars and gum and then dropped them over Berlin for German children to retrieve.

Courtesy of the US Air Force
FIGURE 1.4

The 38th parallel divided Korea into North Korea and South Korea.
The Role of Air Power in the Korean War

Korea was a Japanese colony from 1910 until 1945, when Japan surrendered to the Allies. A colony is a region under the political control of a distant country. After Japan surrendered, the Soviets and Western Allies needed to decide what to do with the Japanese troops stationed in Korea. They agreed that all troops north of Korea’s 38th parallel would give up their arms to the Soviets. The United States would handle all Japanese soldiers south of the 38th parallel. The 38th parallel is a line marking the original boundary between North and South Korea. It refers to the boundary’s latitude—a line north or south from Earth’s equator and parallel to it.

But things didn’t go according to plan. The Soviets set up Korean Communist Kim Il-Sung as North Korea’s new leader. They wanted to spread communism not only throughout Europe but also through their neighboring countries in Asia. China had become a Communist country in 1949. If North Korea became a Communist country, the Soviets could protect their border along Asia much as they were doing along their border with the countries of Eastern Europe.

On 25 June 1950 North Korean military forces crossed the 38th parallel in a move to take over South Korea. Two days later, the United Nations agreed to go to South Korea’s aid. Here was a chance for the United Nations to prevent a third worldwide conflict. American Gen Douglas MacArthur was the first commander of UN troops in this effort.

The United States entered the Korean War for much the same reason it conducted the Berlin Airlift. It wanted to stop the spread of communism. The Soviets and Americans weren’t fighting with each other directly. Korea was the scene of the action. But they were fighting. They were engaged in a limited war—a war in which opposing sides try to avoid a worldwide war and the possible use of atomic bombs by fighting with each other outside their own lands and sometimes through troops who aren’t their own. The Korean War was the first military action of the Cold War.

Aircraft Used by the USAF During the Korean War

Rather than using long-range strategic bombing as it had in World War II, the US Air Force often conducted tactical air operations in Korea. The fighter plane was the weapon of choice. It dropped bombs to soften enemy positions and disrupt supply routes. It strafed North Korean troops to support UN forces. The Air Force used some B-29 bombers, however, to destroy roads and bridges.
At first US Air Force fighters took off from bases in Japan. Later the Air Force set up bases in South Korea. The most widely used US Air Force fighters were the F-80 Shooting Star, F-51, F-84 Thunderjet, and F-86 Sabrejet. The F-51 was formerly known as the P-51 Mustang of World War II fame. (By the time of the Korean War, fighters carried the designation of “F” for “fighter” rather than the old “P” for “pursuit.”)

The F-51 saw heavy use at the start of the Korean War because it had a longer range than the F-80 jet. This longer range was especially important when US fighters had to take off from Japan. The F-86 that pilots flew later in the war was the best American fighter jet of the time.

The US Navy also provided fighters. The F-9F Pantherjet, AD/A-1 Skyraiders, and the F-4U Corsair took off from aircraft carriers. Among the F-9F pilots was Maj John H. Glenn of the US Marine Corps. He also flew the Air Force F-86 and scored three kills. Glenn became an astronaut in 1959.

The helicopter saw lots of use in Korea. It flew troops and supplies to the front lines. The Air Force used it to evacuate wounded troops, too.
Ways the United States Used Air Power in the Korean War

Fighting between Soviet-supported Communist forces and UN forces moved back and forth across the 38th parallel throughout the three-year Korean War. Air power played a big part in these frequent swings. In the summer of 1950 the North Koreans drove the UN forces all the way to Pusan, a coastal city in the southeast corner of South Korea. US fighter planes, stationed in Japan and on aircraft carriers, managed to gain time for UN ground forces to dig in. A few months later, in September 1950, the UN landed troops at Inchon, a town on the west coast of South Korea. These new UN forces, along with those still in Pusan, drove the North Koreans almost back to the 38th parallel. UN aircraft supported the ground troops.

Up to this point, the North Koreans hadn’t offered much resistance from the air. Their air force was weak: it consisted of about 120 old Russian planes. But on 25 November 1950 things changed. Gen MacArthur led troops across the 38th parallel to the edge of China. The UN wanted to eliminate communism from all of Korea, not just from South Korea.

China didn’t want the UN pushing along its borders. It entered the war on North Korea’s side with 850,000 soldiers and 1,000 Soviet-made MiG-15 fighter jets. The MiG-15 was better than any plane the Americans had initially. In January 1951, with Chinese help, the North Koreans recrossed the 38th parallel and grabbed the South Korean capital, Seoul, a second time.

The United States and the UN wouldn’t give up. Tough air battles took place. Although flying inferior fighters, US pilots received better training. They shot down nine MiG-15s for every one US fighter destroyed. Air power proved once again it was a crucial part of modern war. The UN forces under MacArthur took Seoul yet again in March 1951. They drove the North Koreans back across the 38th parallel.

At this point both sides realized they couldn’t win. They began negotiating and finally signed a cease-fire agreement on 27 July 1953. The two Koreas remained divided.
Figure 1.5
Korea as it was divided after the Korean War
Lessons the USAF Learned From the Korean War

The US Air Force learned a number of important lessons from the Korean War. First, it realized it had been putting too much emphasis on the atomic bomb. The military had diverted too many funds from fighter development to bombers. The Korean experience made US planners understand that there were now two types of war: total war, like World War II, and limited war, like the Korean War. In a limited war, atomic bombs aren’t used. The purpose of a limited war is to prevent an all-out war in which atomic bombs might be used.

Capt Manuel Fernandez: Jet Ace

Capt Manuel “Pete” Fernandez (1925–1980) was the third jet ace of the Korean War. He took part in 124 combat missions. He shot down 14 MiG-15s and shared credit for a 15th kill. He was an F-86 Sabrejet pilot.

Fernandez didn’t stop flying after the war. In 1956 he raced a new jet called the F-100C Super Sabre from California to Oklahoma. He averaged 666 mph. He set a record with this speed and won a Bendix Trophy. He also joined the Mach Riders of Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada. This group performed stunts as the barnstormers had done in the 1920s and 1930s. He retired in 1963.
A second lesson was simply a reminder of one learned in World War II—the importance of air superiority. UN air power took control of air space over Korea early in the war. This helped UN forces drive the North Koreans back across the 38th parallel. The MiG-15s may have been as good as any US planes, but the better-trained American pilots more than made up for that. US pilots controlled the air.

Third, all branches of the military learned the importance of flexibility. They had to be prepared for all-out war as well as limited war. Each war demands different strategies and tactics. Each war needs different kinds of equipment. Therefore, fighters, bombers, helicopters, and training must be maintained for all options in warfare.

As the Cold War continued, those lessons would be put to severe tests.
CHECKPOINTS

Lesson 1 Review

Using complete sentences, answer the following questions on a sheet of paper.

1. What is the name of the law that created the independent United States Air Force?
2. Who was the first chief of staff of the USAF?
3. Which command was responsible for delivering the atomic bomb in the post-World War II years?
4. Define “nuclear deterrence.”
5. Which were the two main countries involved in the Cold War?
6. The Cold War involved the threatened use of which weapon?
7. What was the name of the organization formed by the United States and 11 European countries with a promise to defend one another from Communist aggression?
8. Name three bombers used by Strategic Air Command.
9. Since the Western Allies weren’t allowed to use ground-transportation routes to deliver goods to Berlin, how did they get supplies to that German city?
10. Which were the two main cargo aircraft of the Berlin Airlift, and how many tons could each carry?
11. What did the North Koreans do that set off the Korean War?
12. Define “limited war.”
13. Which was the main type of aircraft—fighter or bomber—used during the Korean War?

Applying Your Learning

14. How important do you think it is for the United States to maintain air superiority today?