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The ideas of US Air Force Colonel John Boyd have transformed American military policy and practice. A first-rate fighter pilot and a self-taught scholar, he wrote the first manual on jet aerial combat; spearheaded the design of both of the Air Force's premier fighters, the F-15 and the F-16; and shaped the tactics that saved lives during the Vietnam War and the strategies that won the Gulf War. Many of America's best-known military and political leaders consulted Boyd on matters of technology, strategy, and theory.

In *The Mind of War*, Grant T. Hammond offers the first complete portrait of John Boyd, his groundbreaking ideas, and his enduring legacy. Based on extensive interviews with Boyd and those who knew him as well as on a close analysis of Boyd's briefings, this intellectual biography brings the work of an extraordinary thinker to a broader public.

The Mind of War: John Boyd and American Security Details

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From Reader Review The Mind of War: John Boyd and American Security for online ebook

Ryan Holiday says

John Boyd is one of the most underappreciated military thinkers in history. Of the last half-century, it's probably also fair to say that he was one of the only strategic thinkers of any position of power in the United States.

When it comes to this book, there are two problems. 1) Boyd didn't do himself justice. He hardly wrote anything down, he shunned attention and was highly combative. 2) Hammond hardly does Boyd justice either. This book is dry, dull and uninspired.

I'm sure the first problem exacerbated the second but there is no excuse for a lifeless book on such fascinating subject. There is no comparison between Mind of War and Robert Coram's "Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War."

In short, skip this book unless you're using it as a supplement for Coram's biography or for research purposes. If you're considering learning about Boyd for the first time, this is not the place to start.

The Warfighting Society says

While lacking the journalistic flair of Robert Coram's "Boyd," Hammond's work is documented much more thoroughly. In my mind, this alone makes it a more valuable book for those looking to dig deeper into John Boyd's ideas, as readers of Coram's work are left with little idea of what materials Coram used to frame his arguments. Furthermore, Coram gets a few historical details flatly wrong, yet the reader has no way of knowing this because of the absence of footnotes. Hammond's work can be checked, and while Hammond does not explore Boyd's personal life as extensively as Coram, his summary of Boyd's professional ideas is more academically sound and that makes this book a better general reference on Boyd as a whole.

Roberto Rigolin F Lopes says

Here you can taste a bit of Boyd's intellectual intensity together with his numerous accomplishments in all US military echelons. This man managed to change how to fight and design fighters but also described the intellectual tools he used to do his contributions. This is priceless and is mainly related to his ability to do creative synthesis + voracious curiosity. He end up realizing that schools teach us how to do analysis leaving synthesis behind, but synthesis is the key skill to adapt therefore to thrive in life.

Josh says

Very disappointing. I am a Boyd enthusiast and have read several books about him ("Boyd", "Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd", "Pentagon Wars", "Pentagon Paradox", and most of

his papers), but I have tried to read this book twice and haven't been able to make it through. Instead of outlining Boyd's life and his contributions and demonstrating that he is a modern Sun Tzu, he simply states that he is a modern Sun Tzu and then quotes other people saying he is a modern Sun Tzu while leaving out the whole story.

Christopher Brennan says

This book has been on my shelf for years. I finally got to it in doing research for a current project. That Coram's Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War is a more popular book is not surprising. Hammond's work is deeper in its exploration, but, it seems to me, requires a degree of familiarity with Boyd's briefings to digest fully. As a supporting text, a secondary source, for the reader endeavoring to work through the voluminous briefing slides of John Boyd it is the best thing in print.

Rick says

“The Mind of War” by Grant T. Hammond (Smithsonian Books, 2001) is one more in a series of books that tries to explain the life and times of John R. Boyd, a man who did no less than change the way we fight our wars. Boyd joined the Air Force and worked his way up to colonel, but his abrasive attitude prevented him from ever progressing past field grade in the service. Boyd was a deep thinker who did his part to revolutionize warfare but he rankled a lot of senior people on the way up. The difference between a General Petraeus and a Colonel Boyd is that the former achieved an unassailable rank before he started rankling the military, while the latter was only a junior officer and thus easily marginalized and prevented from achieving flag rank credibility. This was my second book on Boyd.

My first book was by Robert Coram who wrote “Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War”...which is generally viewed as a more wide-ranging but less in-depth investigation of Boyd. “The Mind of War” is a bit more academic with helpful notes, but still not a wholly-satisfying narrative. Boyd was just that hard to pin down.

Boyd retired from the Air Force in 1975 and continued his work in the Pentagon for over a decade more. He died in 1997 at the age of 70. During his time in the Air Force and in the Pentagon Boyd developed novel principles of air combat, unique characteristics of decision making that could be applied to business or military matters, and fought for and achieved new designs in modern jet fighter aircraft. He presented his theories and concepts in briefings (overhead slides) – the military version of Powerpoint presentations in those days. He briefed just about any and all comers, and that is where he showed evidence of his abrasive attitude in response to those who didn't like hearing the facts. Speaking truth to power has its risks and Boyd was penalized often for doing so.

As an example - Boyd had the opportunity to help shape the design of 4th generation fighter aircraft, most visibly demonstrated in the F-15 and F-16. With the F-15 Boyd fought the constant battle with superiors who wanted to place more and duplicative and needless extras on the airframe, rendering it less than optimal. He surreptitiously worked on the F-16 before superior officers had a chance to alter performance concepts and the result was one of the most successful fighter designs ever built. He went around people and over their heads, and achieved what was necessary but paid with career advancement. But he was a patriot first, and willing to do what was necessary.

Hammond's book is a bit more detailed on Boyd's concepts but still isn't able to really get to the man. He mentions all the theories and hypotheses but doesn't delve into them very deeply. Part of this goes to the fact Boyd left nothing published on his ideas...just lifeless briefing slides. My research into John R. Boyd continues...Jim Burton's "Pentagon Wars" on military reform is my next approach into Boyd.

Kevin says

Just finished the copy I borrowed from the library. Aaaaaand just bought a copy of my own online. This book demands a permanent place on my shelf. Definitely in the top five most important reads of my lifetime so far.

Boyd was a military genius only because he chose to channel much of his genius into the military. He was, in fact, a genius in all respects -- a thinker who wasn't merely comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, but who thrived on them. He was a maverick's maverick. Nobody has mattered more to the way the U.S. military approaches warfare today, but his ideas are applicable across every variety of human interaction.

Parts of the book are extremely difficult to read. I found myself losing focus in some spots. Forcing myself to go back and reread, as slowly and as many times as it took to gain an understanding, was worthwhile. Other parts of the book -- the biographical parts -- are very accessible. All of it is worthwhile.

Full credit to author Hammond for taking on the hard parts that endeavor to explain how Boyd arrived at his insights and then sought to work his way backward, chasing the question that some item of intuitive discovery might answer. And full credit for diligently persevering in the effort to explain the scientific and moral principles that underlay Boyd's methods and explorations. It's hard to imagine a thornier challenge for an author than to translate the intricate thinking of a genius -- with a most unusual approach to thought itself -- into something accessible to far more pedestrian thinkers. To an admirable extent, Hammond has succeeded. But the parts of this book that matter the most place significant demands on the reader. Read those parts when you're wide awake and safe from distractions. Give Boyd your full attention. Re-read as necessary. Put the book down if you're losing focus. I can't recall having read a book more worth the immersion "The Mind of War" requires.

And if you're wiser than I, you won't borrow it from the library. Just buy it at the outset. Then you can highlight sentences and make margin notes to your heart's (mind's?) content. It's that kind of book, and I guarantee you will want to refer to it repeatedly once it's on your shelf.

Dave says

Worth reading alongside of complimentary book by Coram (also on Boyd). A tough subject to research and lay out in terms of the impact of this military genius whose impact was felt initially at Fighter Weapons School before moving to develop breakthrough process of describing air combat and aircraft capability (Energy Maneuverability) after which he could have still been credited with a singular achievement with far reaching impact without peer, but he then implemented it into influencing design of two of the most successful fighters ever built (F-15 and F-16) and leading the so-called Fighter Mafia in the Pentagon clashing with all levels of senior leadership. Yet, he still broke new ground in thinking about warfare as he moved beyond the province of Air Combat into nature of all conflict and breaking strategy/tactics into his now well-known OODA Loop....a must read!!

Jack says

The Mind Of War is about the mind of one man...Colonel John Boyd. One of the finest pilots, jet designers, OODA loop inventor, and creator of maneuver warfare. A maverick. A buck the system type guy. A genius. A theory guy. An engineer. Yeah. I like this dude. Mind Of War discusses how this one single man and his merry band of fellows forced the Air Force to take the F-16. I did not know the F-4 Phantom was a Navy design forced upon the Air Force. The F-15 and A-10 were from Boyd's and others mind...the first of true Air Force designed aircraft. The F-16 was from the Fighter Mafia alone. A cheaper and sleeker alternative to the F-15. It almost trebled the Air Force fighter inventory. Later, Boyd in his retirement started lecturing about warfare and time. How to develop forces and assaults that would happen so fast that the enemy could not react fast enough. Getting within the opponents decision cycle was the game...and is now the US military's hallmark in maneuver warfare. Gulf War I and II (the initial assault) were spectacular examples of maneuver warfare. Guderian, the inventor of Blitzkrieg would have had tears in his eyes if he would have been able to witness the American assaults. The Mind Of War is a spectacular read and a must for understanding current Joint Warfare.

Rich says

A very detailed biography of a vastly misunderstood man. Where Coram's description is mostly of the man himself, rather than his ideas; Hammond spends most of his time digging into Boyd's ideas. Boyd was an extremely flawed husband, father, and yes even officer. But despite his lumps he was a morally courageous officer and brilliant thinker.

Where Coram only gives you a basic overview of his theories (of which his *minor* theory is the oft-quoted mostly misunderstood OODA loop), but really this is only enough to pique your interest. Hammond's "The Mind of War" is more effective at describing Boyd's theories. Hammond spends most of his time focusing upon the operational art of Boyd's effects upon the tactical and grand-tactical levels, so if you prefer to focus upon these areas then Hammond's text is for you. But Osinga's "Science, Strategy and War" is most exhaustive at providing the reader with Boyd's intellectual context and foundations.

Boyd's most important and novel addition to humankind is his theories on learning in within uncertainty, adaptation, and synthesis of new novel strategies, theories, and concepts for application in the future. This goes well beyond the OODA-loop! For those readers who desire further insight in how successful learners overcome and adapt to change these texts are must-reads!

Practitioner MG says

If you want detailed biography of the man read Coram's book Boyd. But if you want introduction to Boyd's idea this book may be the answer. But supplement the same by reading John Boyd's materials. There is no greater material on John Boyd's thinking than his materials.

Jason Orthman says

Anything written about John Boyd the 'maverick thinker' is worth the commitment. This book discusses some of his core theories such as winning in war. John Boyd's character and thought processes are worth studying. (Kindle).

Mike Hankins says

This is mostly a hagiography of John Boyd, a pilot who developed "Energy Maneuverability Theory" as a way of measuring fighter plane effectiveness. He is more famous for the creation of his OODA loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) which was first developed for air-to-air combat, but has since been adapted to all sorts of activities and become popular in the business world. Boyd also became one of the forces behind the design of the F-15 Eagle, which he felt was a bad translation of his ideas. His concept for a true, dedicated air-superiority fighter was more accurately reflected in the F-16, which he worked on more extensively.

Clearly, Boyd is a key figure in the history of the US Air Force, but in this book, Hammond treats him like too much of a hero and ignores many of the other forces at work, never questioning Boyd's ideas or practices. Despite the analytical flaws, the book is still a great read, Hammond's prose is exciting and engaging, and brief. This short book can be plowed through fairly quickly. Not a bad work, but much remains to be written on this period of USAF history.

Michael Burnam-Fink says

Hammond's book is probably the strongest general introduction to Boyd, so it'd be just like me to read the introduction last, after the general biography (Coram's *Boyd*), the academic analysis of OODA loop theory (Osinga's *Science, Strategy, and War*), and the application to business (Richard's *Certain to Win*). This book is an intellectual biography, tracing the development of Boyd's career from fighter pilot and the author of the *Aerial Attack Study*, to formulator of Energy-Maneuverability and one of the inspirations behind the F-15 and F-16, to the last third of his career, and the search for a grand strategic synthesis via the OODA loop and an unpublished presentation, *A Discourse on Winning and Losing*, along with the reform a hopelessly gold plated military procurement system.

Hammond was one of Boyd's confidants in the latter part of Boyd's life, a partner in long late-night phone conversations, a bouncing board for ideas, and a reviewer of scientific concepts. He paints a loving, almost hagiographic portrait of a brilliant unconventional thinker, the very antithesis of a USAF company man who won again and again by having the data and facts, against the politics of mediocrity. However, Boyd suffered greatly for his efforts: He retired on a colonel's pension and refused more than a token paycheck, and that only so he could maintain his Pentagon access. The military reform movement broke down in political disarray with the end of the Cold War. Modern strategists talk about the OODA loop all over the place, largely due to Hammond's book, but real strategic thinking is a rare bird.

Kurt says

This guy fought the military bureaucracy to create better training systems for pilots and better strategic thinking. The beginning of the book is mostly history (US, military, and John Boyd). Looking forward to more about what he did...
