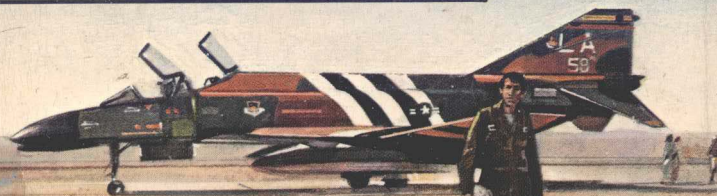


THE SOARING NATIONAL BESTSELLER!

THE WILD BLUE

The Novel of the U.S. Air Force



Walter J. Boyne
Steven L. Thompson



BOOKS 0149-3/\$4.95

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The Novel of the U.S. Air Force

**Walter J. Boyne and
Steven L. Thompson**

Ivy Books

Published by Ballantine Books

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 86-2636

ISBN 0-8041-0149-3

This edition published by arrangement with Crown Publishers, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Ivy Books Edition: August 1987

The men and women of
THE WILD BLUE



ED NOVACK—Holding on to hope in a Hanoi prison camp, he faced his torturers, not knowing if rescue would ever come.

KATHY KELLY—She waited years for her man to satisfy her . . . then wondered where he had learned how.

MICHAEL McMANUS KELLY—A good Irish Catholic, he prayed to God to get his wings, then met his destiny not in Korea but in California.

(more)

The men and women of
THE WILD BLUE



DON PICARD—A man who loved machines above all things and planes above all machines.

JOAN BROWN—A woman of many longings, one flyboy wasn't enough for her.

JIM GARVEY—They said he went nuts and shot up a Korean airfield . . . so they knew he was the right man for an even crazier mission.

Praise for

THE WILD BLUE



“Impressive . . . tells of the great challenges and sacrifices faced by those in the Air Force—the men who maintained discipline and honor, the strength of families raised with an understanding that everyone owed service to their country. A wonderfully American story wonderfully told.”

Hon. Barry Goldwater, Senator

“Impressive . . . after reading this novel, never will you look up and watch one of their jets fly overhead without remembering something of this poignant American story.”

Rave Reviews

The men and women of
THE WILD BLUE



LARRY WHITE—He flew for the sheer thrill of it, and no one thought he'd ever live to collect his pension.

RACHEL GARVEY—Her father said it wasn't feminine to fly . . . which made her want to soar all the more.

MILLARD WASHINGTON—A black man whose mother wanted him to preach, he chose instead to break the barriers of sound—and race.

Praise for

THE WILD BLUE



“Boyne and Thompson . . . write with candid authority and considerable finesse about the most elite and glamorous branch of the military.”

Booklist

“**THE WILD BLUE** is as big as its locale. It's a tremendous work, exciting and provocative, and is an absolute must-read for anyone who has longed to wear wings.”

Ernest K. Gann

FOR THOSE WHO SERVED

Millions of American men and women have donned Air Force blue since 1947. To them and their families we dedicate *The Wild Blue*, in the certain knowledge that no written testament to their patriotism, courage, and skill can describe adequately their sacrifices and service to the nation. Our freedom is their monument.

Walter J. Boyne

Steven L. Thompson

**January 1986
Washington, D.C.**

The Language of the Air Force

ADF: *automatic direction finder radio*

AFTT: *Air Force Institute of Technology*

AFR: *Air Force Regulation*

AFSC: *Air Force Systems Command*

AGL: *above ground level (measure of altitude)*

ASD: *Aeronautical System Division*

back seater: *designation for copilot or weapon systems officer in F-4*

Big Belly: *the modification to carry more conventional bombs in a B-52*

BOQ: *Bachelor Officer's Quarters*

BUFF: *nickname for the B-52 stands for Big Ugly Fat Fucker, or in polite society Big Ugly Fat Fellow*

BX: *Base Exchange*

CEP: *circular error probable: the average distance a bomb misses a target*

CinCSAC: *Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command*

C.O.: *Commanding Officer*

C.P.: *Command Post*

DCA: *Federal Aviation Administration designator for Washington National Airport*

DCO: *Deputy Chief of Operations*

DFC: *Distinguished Flying Cross: Air Force decoration*

DOD: *Department of Defense*

ECM: *Electronic countermeasures*

ER: *Efficiency Report—a fitness rating*

FAA: *Federal Aviation Agency/Administration*

FAC: *Forward Air Controller*

FFF: *made-up acronym for fictitious automatic data processing system, the fast fault finder*

FNG: *Fucking New Guy: a recent arrival in Southeast Asia*

formate: *to fly in formation*

GAO: *Government Accounting Office*

GCA: *ground controlled approach: radar control from the ground*

GIB: *Guy in the back seat—the F-4 copilot/weapon systems officer*

Gooney Bird: *Affectionate name for C-47 aircraft*

G.S.: *Government Service, the civil service rating*

GUMP check: *Standard preflight check for gas, undercarriage, mixture, prop*

ICBM: *an intercontinental ballistic missile*

I.G.: *the Inspector General*
ILS: *an instrument landing system*
IRAN: *Inspect and Repair as Necessary: a maintenance system*
JAG: *the Judge Advocate General*
Jolly Green: *the large helicopters used for air-sea rescue*
MARS: *Military Auxiliary Radio Service*
MATS: *Military Air Transport Service*
MiGCAP: *MiG Combat Air Patrol: a formation designed to prevent MiGs from attacking*
NCO: *noncommissioned officer*
NCOIC: *the noncommissioned officer in charge*
O.D.: *olive drab, standard Air Force color for fatigues*
OER: *Officer Efficiency Report*
OMB: *Office of Management and Budget*
OSI: *Office of Special Investigation*
OWC: *Officers Wives' Club*
PACAF: *Pacific Air Force*
PCS: *permanent change of station: a move to another base*
PDI: *an instrument the bombardier uses to guide the pilot on a bomb run*
pipper: *the illuminated crosshairs found in gun sights*
POL: *Petroleum, oil, and lubricants: anything dealing with fuel, etc.*
PSP: *pierced-steel planking used to make runways and taxi-ways*
PX: *Post Exchange: an army term that survived in the Air Force for years*
R&D: *Research and Development*
R&R: *Rest and Rehabilitation—a G.I. vacation*
RIF: *Reduction in Force*
RPV: *remote piloted vehicles, drones*
SAC: *Strategic Air Command*
SAM: *Surface to Air missile*
SOS: *Squadron Officer's School*
TAC: *Tactical Air Command: light bomber equivalent of SAC*
TDY: *temporary duty: usually a detail away from home station*
TIC: *Troops in Contact: forces actually engaged with enemy*
TISEO: *a television electro-optical device for identifying enemy aircraft at a distance*
TMTS: *a fictional acronym for a Tri-Mission Tri-Service aircraft*
TWX: *a military telegram system*
VMI: *Virginia Military Institute*
VNAF: *Vietnam Air Force*
WSO: *weapon systems officer—the GIB in the F-4*

Prologue



THE MISSING MAN

0915 LOCAL
8 September 1978
Arlington, Virginia
USA

The sun burned through the morning haze, transforming the bronze statues guarding the Memorial Bridge to gold and dappling the waters of the tidal basin. The funeral procession moved slowly along the bridge toward the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, the shiny black hearse leading the procession glowing eerily in the diffused orange sunlight.

In the limousine immediately behind the hearse, Kathy Kelly turned to her left, glancing down the span of the bridge toward the Lincoln Memorial. "At least it's warm," she said evenly. "Remember how cold it was at John Kennedy's funeral?"

Next to her, Joan nodded, grateful to discuss the weather. The weather was always a safe topic. "It seems like yesterday. Where were you stationed then?"

Kathy squeezed her hand warmly. "You remember. We were at Edwards. Mike and Duke were working on some dumb bomber project. I think that was their second or third big fight."

The cortege moved up Memorial Drive, toward the Eternal Flame flickering by Kennedy's grave. The procession wound around the corner in a long arc behind the hearse, ants following a big black beetle.

On the opposite side of the drive, separated by the carefully tended parkway, a smaller procession was leaving. Arlington Cemetery was always busy.

Kathy leaned forward and touched Louise's gloved hand. Sitting in the limo's rear-facing seat, Louise had been staring out the window to the right, looking worse with every passing minute. She started slightly at Kathy's touch.

"Louise. Are you all right?" Kathy's concern was evident.

Louise always seemed the strongest of them all. She patted Kathy's hand and smiled thinly. "I'm okay. I was just thinking how many times we've done this."

Joan Brown shook her head. "Too many times," she said slowly. "Do you remember how you helped me at Castle? I'll never forget it."

Neither Kathy nor Louise answered. There was no answer. They sat and waited.

The procession moved slowly, a long line of headlights reaching back toward Fort Meyer. A car passed the line, honking furiously at being delayed. The driver looked dismayed when he realized it was a funeral.

0917 LOCAL
8 September 1978
National Airport
Alexandria, Virginia
USA

"Good morning, General."

"Larry. Good to see you."

"And you, sir. It's been a long time."

"Too long, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, *tempus fugit*. And so should we. This your bird?"

"One of 'em, General. Our first, actually, and it will get us to Nashville in a hurry."

"I saw your ad in *Trade-A-Plane*; recognized your name right away. McNaughton has two corporate jets, but one was in Europe and one was on hold to go to Brazil, and I had to be in Nashville. Glad I could call you."

"Rog. Worked out well. We come to DCA a lot on charter, mostly for the real-estate association. Those guys need to be at all the hearings."

"Yes, well, what time is wheels up?"

"We're slated for ten o'clock, sir."

"Good. Say, Larry. Do you get much flying time?" Larry smiled inwardly. Old habits die hard. The query was couched in casual terms, but the old Air Force concern with flight currency was there. No old pilot wanted to trust his ass to somebody who wasn't current.

"Oh, a hundred, maybe one twenty hours a month. But it sure beats working."

"Yeah. I'd give my left nut for your job, Larry."

"Can't see it, General. You're the one who turned the Air Force into a paying proposition. I'm still just an airplane driver."

"Flying's what it's all about, Larry. Always was, always will be."

"Yeah. Maybe." Larry flushed with pride. The general might be simply stroking him, but still, a compliment from this man was worth a dozen fat corporate charters to Bermuda. "Well, I gotta talk to clearance delivery. Good talking with you, General. And thanks again for calling us."

"What are friends for, Larry?"

Larry White smiled and went forward between the leather-covered seats of his Lear 24F. The general was right. But then he was always right. That's why he was a retired general, and Larry was a retired lieutenant colonel. White settled himself into the snug seat on the left side of the dazzling blue-and-white Lear and nodded to Rick Thomas, his young copilot.

"All set?"

"Yeah, Larry. But we got a delay on the takeoff; they've got a flight of four F-4s making a pass over Arlington Cemetery in five minutes. Missing Man formation."

White swore under his breath. He hated late takeoffs, especially when he had a VIP on board. Maybe this particular VIP would know who was being buried, and he'd understand.

White slipped out of the seat and went back to the small cabin, where the general was reading a pile of typewritten notes. He was already belted into his swivel chair.

"Sir?"

"Yes."

"We've got a departure hold. Traffic's backed up because of a flyover. Some F-4s doing a Missing Man for a funeral at Arlington."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. You know anything about it?"

"A little." The general glanced at his watch. "It would be going off about now."

White glanced out the small cabin window, up into the clouds. It was a typical Washington summer morning, mostly haze, some low scud. Ignoring the activity on the ramp where his Lear was parked, engines running at ground idle, he scanned the sky, back toward Arlington, only a mile away. The F-4s would probably come from up the river.

"You know the guy they're burying?"

The general peeled off his reading glasses. He blinked slowly and looked out the window.

"Yeah," he said, "I knew him."

0930 LOCAL
8 September 1978
Arlington, Virginia
USA

They reached the grave site, one blank spot among acres of white crosses. People spilled out of the cars to move in a strange, weaving, practiced pattern which ensured that the family could reach their seats first, surrounded by a sea of supportive looks.

The widow went forward and sat down. On either side of her sat general officers, ramrod straight. About half the crowd was in uniform. Most were flyers.

The two other women held back.

Louise looked at the row of people at the graveside, their heads bowed, waiting for the chaplain to begin. Joan's head was bowed too. Her hands were clasped so tightly that her nails dug into her palms, almost drawing blood.

She had promised herself she would not cry. She did anyway. And she'd promised herself she would not lean on Kathy. She did anyway. The jets on approach to National howled low overhead—God, how she hated that sound, that awful spine-chilling hollow moan!—and the tears simply came, of their own accord. She'd done this more times than she could remember, for friends, squadron mates. And she'd never, ever cried. But earlier, as she'd slowly dressed, alone in Kathy's guest room, she'd looked at herself, gaunt, tired, and red-eyed, and known that this time, all those years were going to come crashing down in unstoppable tears. She cried not just for him, but them all. All those young men they'd lived with all those years. Tall, short, thin, fat, some no more than kids when they died in their damned mistress airplanes, others almost as old as the blackened remains of the man who lay in front of them. She knew it was somehow the effect of the booze and the detox process, the long, terrible drying-out, but she couldn't stop. She leaned on Kathy—Kathy, of all people!—and sobbed uncontrollably.

Kathy Kelly wore black; it suited her coloring more than most women's. The humid Potomac wind moved her veil sluggishly. A veil was a nice accessory, she thought. It should be worn more often. It shielded you, kept people from seeing your face. But no one tried to look. Like Joan, all the Air Force men and women around her were plunged into their own thoughts.

It was just as well. He'd want it that way. She knew that, and

so did Joan and Louise. Kathy glanced at Louise. She was still beautiful, as she had been the day they'd met almost twenty years ago.

Louise Washington seemed not have aged at all, despite the wisps of gray in her hair and the tiny wrinkles in her skin. She did not look up to search for the airplane that Millard was flying. She knew he was there. That was enough for her. Somewhere inside the usual tiny, tense knot of fear coiled tighter as she realized that even this flight could be dangerous. They all were. There had never been a flight without tension; each time he climbed into a B-52 she was terrified, and she was never permitted to admit it. His leaves were precious things, for she could lie beside him, watching him sleep, and know that he was not going to get up at some godawful hour to fly. So often she had watched him slip out of her bed, quickly bathe and shave and step into a flight suit at an hour when most men were still sound asleep. He would kiss her lightly—almost absently, his mind already on the mission—and grab his flight bag to clump out of the house in the combat boots that left black heel marks on the tiles, perhaps never to return. She wanted it over. So she did not look up.

The service was brief. The Air Force honor guard went through its rifle drill, and the three traditional nerve-jarring volleys faded into the mournful brass sound of Taps.

From the north there came the rumble of a flight of four McDonnell Douglas F-4s, with their strangely angled wing and tail sharply defined against the eight trails of smoke streaming from their engines.

Before they reached the cemetery boundary, the number-two F-4 pulled up and out, leaving a vacant spot—the missing man—in the formation as it thundered over Arlington.

The pilots among the mourners looked up instinctively, even in these surroundings checking the formation, the airplanes, the pilots who flew them. The women winced as the fighters shook the ground. Kathy squeezed her eyes shut and allowed the thunder to wash over her. Louise simply shut it out. Joan balled her fists tighter and made no attempt to stop the tears.

Suddenly it was over. The F-4s were gone, the casket ready to be lowered into the grave and the flag that had honored it folded and presented to the widow. She sat for a moment clutching the flag while people came together near her, spoke meaningless words softly and touched her hand. She knew she ought to be praying for him, but her thoughts were about all of them, about Millard and Duke and Mike, Garvey and the rest.

So many, she thought, dear God, so terribly many. When the news had come, she'd been stunned. The others could die in flaming balls of fire, but him? It had not seemed possible. And after retirement, to boot. She had learned long ago that nothing in the Air Force was "fair." But it had not seemed fair. The crash had driven Joan, Louise, and Kathy together, as they had been driven so many times in the past to seek out one another for comfort. She had often thought it ironic, because the three of them had little in common except the Air Force, and what it demanded of them.

Now it demanded this of them.

How had it come to this? Why?

0941 LOCAL

8 September 1978

"Alpha Two"

12,700 ft. AGL

Arlington, Virginia

USA

In the rear cockpit of the number-two F-4, Maj. Gen. Millard Washington looked down at the dot of Arlington Cemetery, and at the smoke trails from the rest of the formation drawing away to the south. The intercom broke into his thoughts.

"General?"

"Roger, Captain."

"I'm going to stay high and go well south around the airport traffic to land at Andrews; no point in chasing the formation."

"Roger, okay by me."

"General?"

"Go ahead."

"How did you get permission to have a fly-by? He was retired, wasn't he?"

"Yeah, officially, but you know, you never really retire. Besides, he had a lot of friends. I TWX'd the Chief of Staff, and he arranged it. Probably had to go to the White House, or at least to the head of the FAA. The chief had orders cut for me to fly, this one time. Hope I haven't scared you."

The captain chuckled, said nothing. A diplomat.

Washington looked back; he wondered how Louise was taking it. She'd grown ever less fond of the Air Force. And she hated