



Cold War Controller: Air Force Shenanigans

David N. Penley

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With a good dash of humor, this down-to-earth military memoir is a refreshing addition to the genre.

Memoirs of military or war experiences often revel in hell-on-earth carnage, sentimental frat house-type memories, or heavy-handed political overtones. It's rare to find one that deals more in humor, unpretentious recollection, and yet still stands as a nonjudgmental view of life in uniform. David N. Penley's *Cold War Controller* is such a memoir as the Canadian veteran looks back on a career filled with mischief, hard work, and personal struggle

Less a linear narrative than a chronological collection of incidents, this book details the retired Canadian Air Force officer's rise through military ranks, from boot camp in 1970 to his training in radar technology to his retirement. Along the way, the author highlights well-detailed military training, adventure, and drama.

There's no denying that Penley loves his career path. Born to a military family, he seems almost tailor-made for the service from birth. Yet his notes on having exotic dancers at base parties, his friend's run-in with a Military Police officer demanding identification, and on being hung over while grudgingly operating radar in Greenland for a so-called Cold War operation also designate Penley as someone who stands out while still in uniform.

In fact, it's when Penley writes at length on military hijinks, particularly those of a picaresque nature while he dutifully served the Crown and country, that *Cold War Controller* comes to life. The author is not afraid to go into detail about how he used to steal food from service parties or dish about how a group of Military Air Movements Systems (MAMS) servicemen stole a piano from a sergeant's mess room only to be chased down by police, noting, "we all love to party, but those Traffic Techs are a little crazy." This healthy amount of irony and tragicomedy brings real believability to *Cold War Controller* without pushing messages or ideology.

Moreover, the sections about partying and constant boozing Penley and his cohorts engaged in that led to his realization he was becoming an alcoholic—i.e. "I was at the point of dependency that partying was about basic survival"—his subsequent treatment, and his desire to help his fellow servicemen by studying social work later in life undercut and balance funny anecdotes with serious drama.

Penley's writing is clear and edited. *Cold War Controller* is a down-to-earth account of a long, colorful stretch in the ranks.

JAMES BURT (August 20, 2015)

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