



Singing the Vietnam Blues: Songs of the Air Force in Southeast Asia (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)

Joseph F. Tusso

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The songs of the U.S. Air Force flyers during the Vietnam War, written in the cryptic language of pilots and navigators, aloft in their "beasts" a dozen "angels" up in the sky, uniquely reflect the stark emotions and black humors of that ill-fated war.

Veteran navigator Joseph F. Tuso spent fifteen years collecting the lyrics for more than a hundred songs written or sung by U.S. Air Force flyers from about 1966 through 1969. Many of the songs' authors are unknown. But their lyrics, even such jarring lines as those of "Chocolate-covered Napalm," often are set to popular melodies, such as "The Wabash Cannonball." Some songs have original tunes as well. Twenty-five of the 148 songs whose lyrics are included here were written by Dick Jonas, the premier songwriter of the Vietnam era Air Force. Many other songs appear in print for the first time.

Singing the Vietnam Blues begins with a personal overture that sets the stage for a play of war-evoked emotions and lines that are less than sacred, more than profane, and sometimes poignant. Some songs, such as the "Phu Cat Alert Pad," are based on historical events, while others have their origins in popular myths, such as "Wolf Pack's Houseboy." Whatever the direct source of the songs, it is the daily combat, rescue, or transport missions; the possibility of death; and the fear, bravado, and competition between pilots, navigators, planes, and enemy flyers or "bandits" that generated the lyrics.

Most songs are preceded by Tuso's explanation of each song's origin, other versions, references to current events or "inside jokes," and sometimes personal insights and memories. A glossary is also included.

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