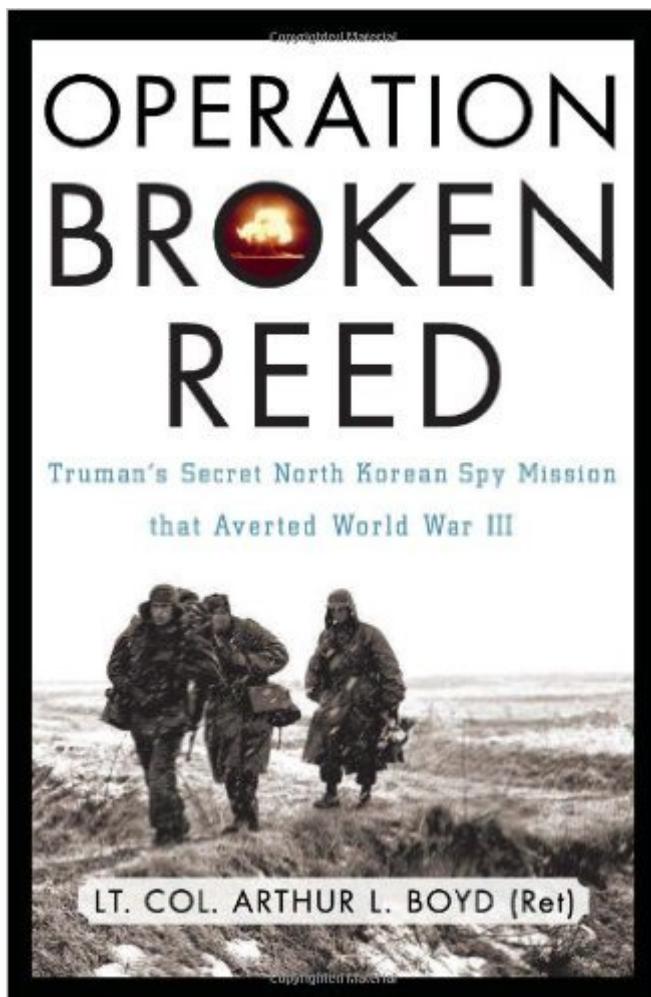


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Operation Broken Reed: Truman's Secret North Korean Spy Mission That Averted World War III



Synopsis

At the height of the Korean War, President Truman launched one of the most important intelligence-gathering operations in history. So valuable were the mission's findings about the North Korean-Soviet-Chinese alliance that it is no stretch to say they prevented World War III. Only one man, sworn to secrecy for a half-century, survived Operation Broken Reed. Arthur Boyd recalls his role as cryptographer on a team of Army Rangers, Navy Frogmen, Air Force officers, and CIA operatives that posed as the captured crew of a B-29 bomber in January 1952. Given cover names and cyanide capsules in case of discovery, the men were transported by Chinese Nationalists wearing Communist uniforms across North Korea, where undercover allies delivered information about troop strengths, weaponry, and intention. Fraught with danger, the mission came apart on its last day when the Americans came under fire from Chinese forces wise to the operation. The members of Broken Reed supplied Truman with proof of massive Chinese and Soviet buildups and a heavy Soviet bomber group in Manchuria, fully loaded with atomic weapons. With the potential destruction of the world outlined in front of him, Truman chose not to escalate the Korean War, saving millions of lives.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Four-five years back I read a terrific book, "The Secrets of Inchon: The Untold Story of the Most Daring Covert Mission of the Korean War," by Eugene Franklin Clark. I blogged about it Sept. 15 of last year. It is the first-person account of a secret, commando-like mission at Inchon that helped turn the tide of the war in favor of the U.N. side. Clark at the time was a Navy lieutenant who at 39 was

"getting a little old for the commando game." The book is the record of his two-week adventure--a hair-raising reconnaissance strikes, night raids, firefights, a blazing naval battle between Chinese sailing junks--among the islands and mudflats of the communist-held Seoul-Inchon harbor area. Clark wrote it in the 1950s, intending it not for publication but as a keepsake for his wife and children and as a personal memorial to the Korean men and women who fought and in many cases died to help him accomplish his mission. The manuscript lay in a safe deposit box for decades and only came to light because historian and novelist Thomas Fleming happened to come across it in doing research for an article about Clark's exploits. Now I have found another such book, "Operation Broken Reed: Truman's Secret North Korean Spy Mission That Averted World War III" (Carroll & Graf), similar to it in secretiveness and amazing events. Written (extremely well) by its central character, Lt. Col. Arthur L. Boyd (Ret.), and published in October 2007, it is the story of Boyd's participation as a 20-something Army Signal Corps lieutenant in a super-secret mission in North Korea in January 1952. Written as a compelling narrative rather than as a journal-like chronicle, there is so much about it that I like.

I have been quite conflicted over this book, from the basic issue of whether such an operation took place to the less fraught question of whether everything happened as described by LTC Boyd, and whether it had the crucial significance he attributes to it. I want to believe that the story of this astonishingly bold and dangerous mission in early 1952 is completely authentic. As described in the book, LTC Boyd and those with him, American and Nationalist Chinese, were among the bravest men in the Korean War. He and nine others were to impersonate a downed B-29 crew (infiltrated into North Korea by an unidentified US sub) being moved across the peninsula by their Chinese captors (actually Nationalists in Peoples' Volunteers uniforms). Along the way then-LT Boyd was to encrypt and transmit, by Morse code, reports from other Nationalist teams on enemy strength and intentions, reports that bypassed the intelligence and operational chain of command and went directly to President Truman. (Unlike some reviewers, I didn't think the use of Nationalist soldiers was improbable; the US used Japanese-crewed minesweepers to clear Inchon harbor, an incendiary fact that was long kept secret.) At the end, Boyd and two other wounded US survivors were picked up off North Korea's west coast by a Royal Navy surface vessel, also unnamed. One of the oddities in this story is the selection of Boyd himself, plucked from a tour as a Signal Corps officer in Germany, to disappear for who knew how long. In the entire Pacific area, were there no Signal Corps lieutenants with the requisite clearances and crypto skills?

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