

Sidewinder: The Creative Missile Development at China Lake



Sidewinder: Creative Missile Development at China Lake by Ron Westrum

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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In the annals of aviation history, the Sidewinder missile stands as a testament to the ingenuity and determination of American engineers. Developed at the Naval Ordnance Test Station at China Lake, California, during the height of the Cold War, the Sidewinder revolutionized air-to-air combat, giving the United States a decisive edge over the Soviet Union.

The story of the Sidewinder begins in the early 1950s, when the U.S. Air Force and Navy were desperately seeking a way to counter the threat of Soviet MiG-15 jet fighters. The MiG-15 was faster and more maneuverable than any American aircraft, and it had already proven its deadly effectiveness in the Korean War.

In response, the Navy turned to China Lake, a remote desert base in California where some of the nation's most brilliant scientists and engineers

were working on cutting-edge weapons technology. A team led by William B. McLean was tasked with developing a new air-to-air missile that could outmaneuver the MiG-15 and give American pilots a fighting chance.

McLean and his team faced a daunting challenge. They had to design a missile that was small, lightweight, and agile enough to track and hit a fast-moving target. They also had to develop a guidance system that could withstand the extreme heat and vibration of supersonic flight.

After years of painstaking research and development, the Sidewinder missile was born. It was a sleek, heat-seeking missile that could be fired from a variety of aircraft. The missile's guidance system used an infrared seeker to track the heat signature of an enemy aircraft, allowing it to home in on its target with deadly accuracy.

In 1956, the Sidewinder was finally ready for combat testing. In a series of tests over the China Lake desert, the missile proved to be remarkably effective, shooting down several drones and even a live MiG-15.

The Sidewinder was quickly adopted by the U.S. Navy and Air Force, and it soon became one of the most important weapons in the American arsenal. The missile saw action in the Vietnam War, where it helped to turn the tide in favor of the United States. The Sidewinder also played a key role in the 1991 Gulf War, where it was used to destroy Iraqi aircraft.

Today, the Sidewinder is still in service with the U.S. military and its allies around the world. It has been upgraded and improved over the years, but its basic design remains the same. The Sidewinder is a testament to the ingenuity and perseverance of the American engineers who created it, and

it continues to play a vital role in protecting the United States from its enemies.

The China Lake Legacy

The development of the Sidewinder missile is just one example of the groundbreaking work that has been done at China Lake over the years. The base has been home to some of the most important advances in aviation and weapons technology, including the development of the Tomahawk cruise missile, the Hellfire anti-tank missile, and the Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM).

China Lake is also home to the Naval Air Weapons Station, which is responsible for testing and evaluating new aircraft and weapons systems. The base has been the site of some of the most famous aviation feats in history, including the first supersonic flight in 1947 and the first space shuttle landing in 1981.

The legacy of China Lake is one of innovation, perseverance, and dedication. The base has played a vital role in the development of American military aviation, and it continues to be a center of excellence for weapons research and development.

The Sidewinder Book

The full story of the Sidewinder missile's development is told in the book *Sidewinder: Creative Missile Development at China Lake*. The book is written by Bill Gunston, a renowned aviation historian, and it is packed with fascinating details and insights into the people and technology behind the Sidewinder.

If you are interested in aviation history, military technology, or the Cold War, then you will want to read *Sidewinder: Creative Missile Development at China Lake*. The book is a gripping tale of innovation and perseverance that will leave you in awe of the ingenuity of the American engineers who created one of the most important weapons in history.

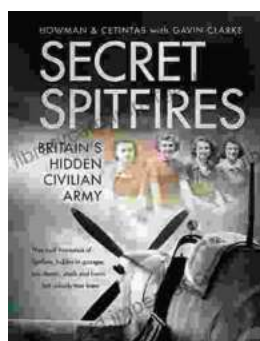
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