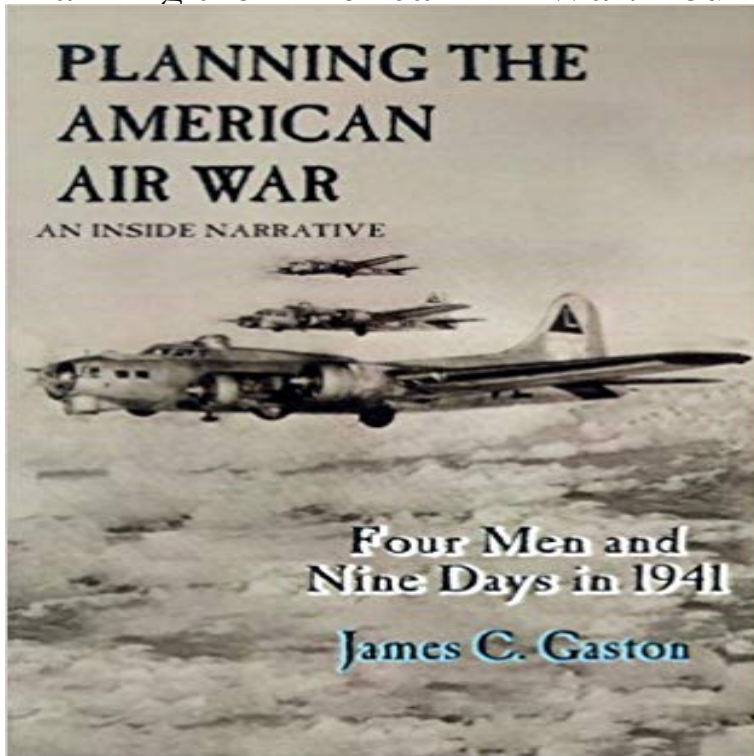


## Planning the American Air War: Four Men and Nine Days in 1941



Even if it hadn't been used, the United States air war plan for World War II would have been uniquely significant. It marked the first time that airmen in the Army Air Forces were permitted to do their own planning; thus it was a crucially important step in their move toward independence. Further, it raised seriously the question of whether a major industrial nation could be defeated solely through air bombardment. For these reasons and others, the plan deserves attention from all who concern themselves with strategies for national defense. But plans don't write themselves, and the planning process, rather than the finished document, is the focal point of this study. The author uses the plan as a lens for studying that process. He looks through the document to follow events on the floor of the planners' arena. What he finds is that the arena is far from an impersonal, purely intellectual environment. Intellect counts there, he says, but so does the political savvy of a Hal George, the abrasive intransigence of a Ken Walker, the icy persistence of a Laurence Kuter, and the quiet urgency and forethought of a Haywood Hansell. Even a noisy hallway or a foggy bay in Newfoundland can sometimes influence the process. Life isn't always quiet and clear while planners make national choices that shape world history. Though the people and events in this narrative were important to the development of the Air Force, this isn't merely an Air Force story. It's a unique look at the characteristically human process of planning. All who concern themselves with national defense can learn from what four men did in nine days in 1941. James C. Gaston refers to his book as an inside narrative. His reason is that he is watching the planners from inside the planning room. He is also trying to narrate a story in a way that reveals the human context of an event, much as Herman Melville was doing when he called

Billy Budd an inside narrative. Lieutenant Colonel Jim Gaston learned about war plans in Southeast Asia in 1969-1970. After flying more than 130 combat missions, he was chosen In-Country Fighter Representative for Headquarters Seventh Air Force War Plans. He was responsible for various contingency plans, and he assisted in the massive planning effort for withdrawing U.S. Air Force units from their Vietnamese bases. Since then he has earned a masters degree at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and a doctorate at the University of Oklahoma. In addition to flying and teaching, he has published two books (dealing with such diverse topics as airpower and eighteenth-century literature) and contributed to several others. When he wrote this narrative, he was a student at the National War College and a Senior Fellow and Associate Professor of Research at the National Defense University. In 1982 Colonel Gaston was (Acting) Head of the Department of English, U.S. Air Force Academy.

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