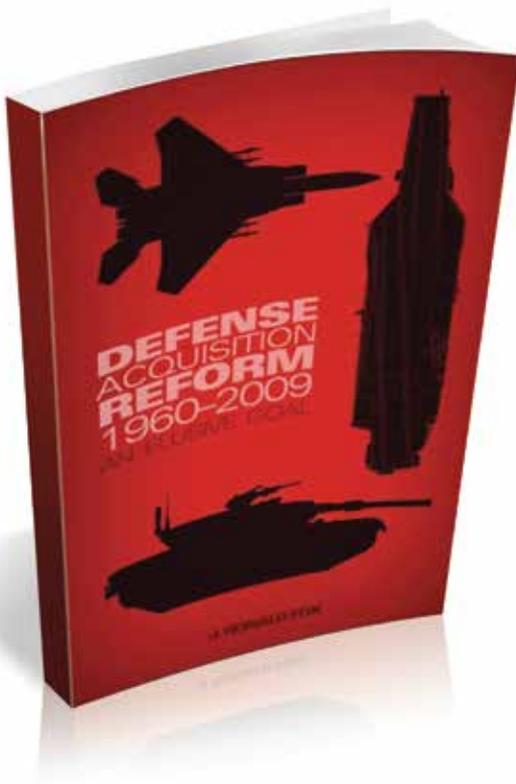


PROFESSIONAL READING LIST

The Defense Acquisition Professional Reading List is intended to enrich the knowledge and understanding of the civilian, military, contractor, and industrial workforce who participate in the entire defense acquisition enterprise. These book reviews/recommendations are designed to complement the education and training that are vital to developing the essential competencies and skills required of the Defense Acquisition Workforce. Each issue of the *Defense Acquisition Research Journal (ARJ)* will contain one or more reviews of suggested books, with more available on the *Defense ARJ* Web site.

We encourage *Defense ARJ* readers to submit reviews of books they believe should be required reading for the defense acquisition professional. The reviews should be 400 words or fewer, describe the book and its major ideas, and explain its relevance to defense acquisition. Please send your reviews to the Managing Editor, *Defense Acquisition Research Journal*: Norene.Fagan-Blanch@dau.mil.



Featured Book

*Defense Acquisition Reform, 1960–2009:
An Elusive Goal*

Author(s):

J. Ronald Fox

Publisher:

Center of Military History,
United States Army

Copyright Date:

2011

Available Online:

[http://www.history.army.mil/html/
books/051/51-3-1/index.html](http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/051/51-3-1/index.html)

Hard/Softcover:

PDF, 287 pages

Reviewed by:

John Alic, former staff member of the
congressional Office of Technology
Assessment

Review:

The Harvard Business School's J. Ronald Fox, a long-time student of acquisition, prepared this volume drawing on work by the other contributors. All five have been associated with the Defense Acquisition History Project. Although the book's front matter implies that the project ended in 2009, incomplete, in fact it is now housed in the Historical Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and further volumes can be expected. This is something to look forward to, since Fox's volume itself offers little that is new; as a review of past studies, it will be most useful to newcomers to the subject of acquisition reform.

There are some fresher sections. In one of these, Fox and his colleagues relate how the Air Force, Navy, and to a lesser extent the Army, sought, with considerable success, to circumvent or otherwise neutralize provisions of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act (see pp. 127–146). Mostly, however, and despite considerable use of oral histories and internal DoD documents, Defense Acquisition Reform adds only marginally to our understanding. This is not so much a criticism of the book as an acknowledgement of how many studies have gone over the ground reviewed, reaching many of the same conclusions.

What is needed most is analytical insight. Six decades of attempts at reform have largely failed. The message is plain in Defense Acquisition Reform, if largely implicit, soft-peddled even in the subtitle.

The book's treatment of workforce quality illustrates the unsatisfactory state of analysis. The subject is one that Fox has examined previously and mentions repeatedly here. It is well and good to urge more and better training of the acquisition workforce, stronger incentives for exemplary performance, and lengthier tenures, especially for program managers, to build capability through experience. But a quick glance at the private sector is enough to show that a skilled and experienced workforce is no assurance of organizational performance. For decades, U.S.-based firms like General Motors and IBM had their pick of the best graduates of the best schools. With the help of formal training and internal labor markets that rewarded experiential learning, they held onto many of these employees. IBM, after running into competitive difficulties some years ago, managed to revivify itself. But smart

and capable employees were not enough for GM to find its way out of the organizational routines that entrapped the firm beginning in the 1950s. Will GM finally make it this time? How about Hewlett-Packard? Sony? DoD would certainly benefit from a better qualified acquisition workforce. Yet how much difference would this actually make for major programs dominated by bureaucratic power politics? The audience for studies of acquisition, certainly the policy-making audience, would benefit from attempts to answer questions of this sort, no matter how tentative the answers might be.