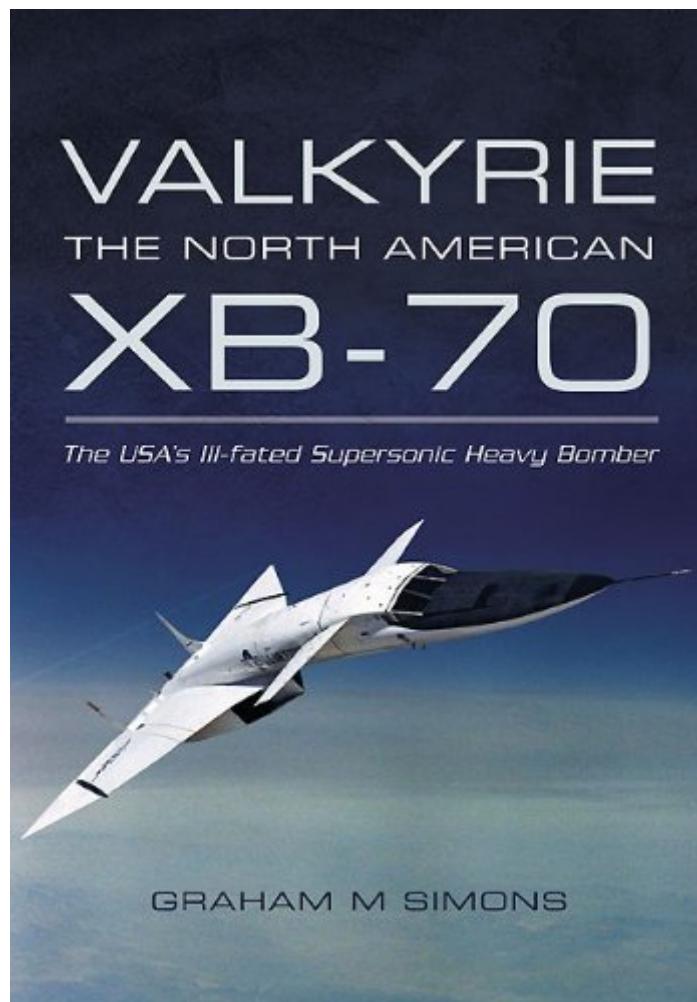


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Valkyrie: The North American XB-70 : The USA's Ill-fated Supersonic Heavy Bomber



Synopsis

During the 1950s, at the time Elvis Presley was rocking the world with Hound Dog and the USA was aiming to become the world's only superpower, plans were being drawn at North American Aviation in Southern California for an incredible Mach-3 strategic bomber. The concept was born as a result of General Curtis LeMay's desire for a heavy bomber with the weapon load and range of the subsonic B-52 and a top speed in excess of the supersonic medium bomber, the B-58 Hustler. If LeMay's plans came to fruition there would be 250 Valkyries in the air; it would be the pinnacle of his quest for the ultimate strategic bomber operated by America's Strategic Air Command. The design was a leap into the future that pushed the envelope in terms of exotic materials, avionics and power plants. However, in April 1961, Defense Secretary McNamara stopped the production go-ahead for the B-70 because of rapid cost escalation and the USSR's newfound ability to destroy aircraft at extremely high altitude using either missiles or the new MiG-25 fighter. Nevertheless, in 1963 plans for the production of three high-speed research aircraft were approved and construction proceeded. In September 1964 the first Valkyrie, now re-coded A/V-1 took to the air for the first time and in October went supersonic. This book is the most detailed description of the design, engineering and research that went into this astounding aircraft. It is full of unpublished details, photographs and firsthand accounts from those closely associated with the project. Although never put into full production, this giant six-engined aircraft became famous for its breakthrough technology, and the spectacular images captured on a fatal air-to-air photo shoot when an observing Starfighter collided with Valkyrie A/V-2 which crashed into the Mojave Desert. The loss of the \$750 million aircraft and two lives stopped future development, although there were several attempts to redesign it as an airliner to compete against the European Concorde.

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Customer Reviews

North American Aviation's Mach 3 "Valkyrie" holds a place of special significance in the annals of aerospace history, and Graham M. Simons details its whole fascinating story in this superb volume. I intend it as high praise indeed when I say "Valkyrie: The North American XB-70" is a typical British aviation book. It's well-written, exhaustively researched, comprehensive in scope and filled from cover to cover with nearly 300 excellent photographs and drawings. The photos, although typically only two or three inches on a side, are exceptionally sharp and crisp, revealing detail belied by their relatively small size. As far as I know, many are previously unpublished, including numerous shots of the two aircraft under construction at the North American factory and Mr. Simons own photos of Air Vehicle 1 at the Museum of the U.S. Air Force in Dayton, Ohio. The XB-70 story is one of technological advancement, military brinksmanship, contractual legerdemain and partisan politics. Although the program's original objective was to produce hundreds of sleek, nuclear-armed supersonic bombers to replace the Air Force's Boeing B-52 "Stratofortresses," it ultimately produced just two high-tech, expensive and exotic aircraft that served purely for flight testing in the multi-sonic regime. Mr. Simons traces the complex history of the program and its many twists and turns in great detail, quoting extensively from the participants and from primary source documents. Techno-geeks will savor his descriptions of the design and construction of the aircraft down to the nuts-and-bolts level in a 45-page, profusely illustrated chapter.

First off, I'll say this book does have its moments. There are some interesting stories here, including a rather apocryphal one linking the B-70's cancellation with the development of a bomber version of the Lockheed A-12. The excerpts from the pilots' manual were rather interesting, and gave some detailed functional insight into how the aircraft operated. There are also some interesting asides on the American SST program, the Soviet T-4, and the proposal to modify the unbuilt third XB-70 into a

prototype reconnaissance aircraft. Unfortunately, much of this book reads like a rehash of Dennis Jenkins' and Tony Landis' vastly superior Valkyrie: North American's Mach 3 Superbomber. Many of the photographs and diagrams are the same, although none are in color, and the reproduction isn't as good. While Jenkins' and Landis' tome devoted large portions to the Boeing and North American designs and their evolution, the Mach 3 interceptor designs of the period, the atomic bomber program, and the High Energy Fuel project, this book largely skims over those subjects. While "Superbomber" includes a pretty substantial chapter devoted to the offensive and defensive systems proposed for the B-70, this book breezes over them in about a page and a half. The F-108 Raptor, which was designed from the beginning to use many of the same components as the B-70, and whose cancellation adversely effected the B-70's development, is hardly even mentioned. I suppose if you're a Valkyrie fanatic who has to own every book on the plane, you'll want this book.

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