

Retired USAF colonel saw theories work in Gulf War

By JOHN GUERRIERO
Morning News staff reporter

Don't call retired U.S. Air Force Col. John Boyd an expert. Don't call him an analyst. And worst of all, don't call him an expert analyst.

He disdains those titles.

Boyd, an Erie native who resides in Delray Beach, Fla., is a self-described student of fighter tactics, airplane design and strategies for conflicts that run the gamut — whether it's war, business, relationships, or dealing with the hierarchies at the Pentagon.

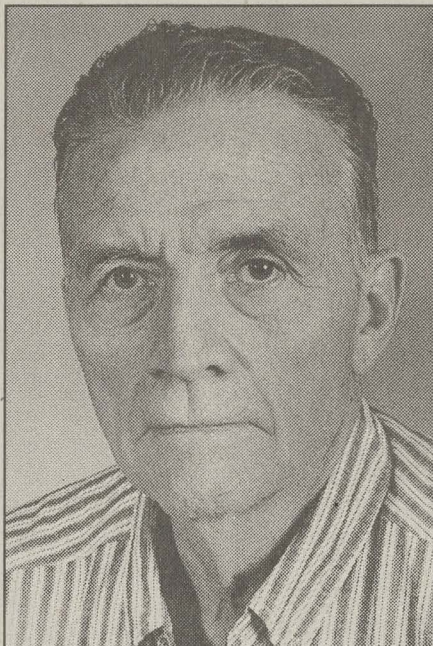
Boyd, 65, has returned to Erie to give the commencement address at Strong Vincent High School, his alma mater, and to visit old friends such as Frank Pettinato, the longtime chief lifeguard at Presque Isle State Park who is taking a leave this summer.

He was a lifeguard in the summers of 1943-44 and 1947-50. He was assistant chief lifeguard in 1947 and 1948.

Boyd says that while he was graduated from Strong Vincent in 1945, he never participated with his classmates in graduation ceremonies because he was called to the Army Air Force during World War II. Boyd had volunteered for the service and when he turned 18, the Army Air Force didn't hesitate to call his number.

"Now I'm going to attend my graduation 47 years later. You've got to be persistent," he says.

Boyd, in his address Wednesday



COL. JOHN BOYD

day night in the Strong Vincent auditorium, will tell the students that they must never stop learning. They must adapt to changing times and technologies.

"Just because you graduate doesn't mean you've graduated from not having to learn again. You learn until the day you die," says Boyd, who practices what he preaches.

Boyd didn't stop learning when he retired from the Air Force in 1975. He seems to thrive on knowledge and can spit back names, dates and places in rapid-fire fashion.

Boyd, a Korean War jet fighter pilot and instructor with college degrees in economics and industrial engineering, knows his sub-

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jects — from military strategy to economic recovery.

He was a key figure in developing new tactics for fighter pilots and in developing the F-16 Falcon fighter jet.

During his Air Force career he was often labeled a rebel for his views, frequently finding himself at odds with higher ranking officers.

He is a proponent of the new way of fighting wars that was so successful in Operation Desert Storm. Strategies that he has advanced were used in the Persian Gulf.

"We developed new strategies in not trying to take the guy head-on. It was a more oblique kind of strategy — not to try to take them on plane by plane, tank by tank, person by person," he says.

A key to success in the war was taking out Iraq's "critical centers, connections and activities that permitted them to operate as an organizational whole." That was accomplished both in the air campaign and the ground campaign that followed.

Knocked out were command and control centers, communications centers, supply and transportation networks, energy supplies.

"Now they can't function. Now they can't even play the game," says Boyd, who has been called one of the most inventive military

Strong Vincent's finest

When Col. John Boyd returns Wednesday to his alma mater, Strong Vincent High School, for his first appearance at a graduation there, he will receive the school's first distinguished alumni award.

The award says in part: "We at Strong Vincent are most proud and appreciative of his career, his call to be and fly smart, and his pursuit and achievement of excellence. Giving us particular pride is the recognition given to Colonel Boyd in many recent analyses of Desert Shield/Desert Storm that credit his pioneer approaches with saving thousands of American lives."

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to their apartments about one hour later, DeRosa said.

Col. Boyd

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strategists of this century. "Then you can roll over them."

Another key to winning the war was getting inside what Boyd calls the enemy's "OODA loop" — operating at a faster rhythm or tempo than the adversary.

Boyd, who studied air combat in Korea, saw that pilots go through cycles of Observation, Orientation, Decision and Action, which he termed the OODA loop. He found that U.S. pilots, even when outnumbered, still won dog-fights by assessing the situation faster and reacting quicker.

According to a story in U.S. News & World Report, friends called Boyd to congratulate him when an American briefer in Saudi Arabia told reporters the allies had gotten inside Saddam Hussein's "decision-making cycle."

"If you can operate inside his loop, you're forcing him to deal with out-of-date information. His orientation becomes disorientation," he says.

Boyd likens it to a basketball team that goes on a run against its opponent. The other team can call a time out to get oriented again, but in war no time out may be available, he says.

"The guys who really deserve credit are the guys that were over there, who carried out this plan — the officers and the enlisted men and everyone else," he says.

"It's a credit to those people that they came up with something where we didn't have to have huge casualties. They did it differently this time than they've done it in the past."

All was not perfect in Operation Desert Storm, he says.

"In war, you're not going to get everything perfect. It's a very confused and disorderly process. The idea is to run up the other guy's confusion and keep yours lower" to gain leverage. "Then the game's over."

The military services, he says, are still assessing what went right and wrong in the war — the lessons to be learned.

"I don't care how good you are. You're not going to do everything right. Remember, the other guy's not going to cooperate in his own demise, at least not knowingly."

One thing that didn't go right was the ability of Iraq's elite Republican Guard to get out of traps and escape to safety. "It raises the question, 'Why did they get out the back door?'"

I'd phone and tell her.

Though many yellow-bellied sapsuckers migrate through our region in the spring, it is rare for them to remain. I phoned and left that encouraging message on her machine.

Here is the letter I received after my phone call:

"Dear Evelyn Anderson--

"At dusk today (5/6/92) I climbed the rock garden steps and removed the bamboo wood chimes, and cheesecloth and paper towels strategically placed around the spruce tree we talked about last week. Then down came the ladder nestled near the tree trunk.

"Tomorrow I watch. But I believe I can safely report that Mr. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker has moved on. The Cadillac blue spruce has suffered quite a nasty drilling. Sap oozing a lot. God willing it may recover.

"But I'm marking March 1993 in my book when I'll begin a vigil to prevent this from happening again."

(When I phoned for permission to print her letter, she said she was going to watch next year, in case the bird had stored up the location in his "little computer.")

"I'm a project kid," the letter continues. "My husband is retired. We find great comfort from nature. It's so good to look out and see the daily activities of the many birds (veery, cowbird, nuthatch, catbird, a once-in-a-while oriole) and animals that live around us."

(On the phone, she told me that several years ago she took a bird identification course from Tim Kimmel, and said, "He was inspirational. We learned a lot from him." I appreciated hearing that, and am sure Tim and his many friends will, too, for Tim was a science professor at Villa Maria College, was president of Presque Isle Audubon, and has recently completed his work for a Ph.D. at Penn State.)

The letter continues: "I wish every project kid could see what we see each day. Such a soothing effect. It might diminish the violence. Just takes one tree to start."

(On the phone, she told me her mother liked plants and had a saying: "Better a house without a roof than a house without a view." She enclosed a photo of her back yard. It is a peaceful scene of a rock garden, stepping stones and trees.)

"Thanks for the follow-up phone call.

"Sincerely, Ruth Malek"

The letter was written on a colorful note card with this printed on the front: "The earth can sustain our need, but not our greed."

Nice lady.

See what I mean about the perks I get with this job?

It must have been a gremlin who worked over my May 26 column.

In that column, I explained that I had asked Rice Avenue Middle School seventh graders about their favorite flowers, and said that their responses were interesting and precious, and that I'd quote them exactly as written.

When their comments were printed in the paper, they were not "exactly as written." Much of the charm was gone. "Highasents" had been changed to "hyacinths," and "Dandylion," "morning gloire," "butiful," "exsautic," and other delightful spelling errors had also been corrected.

The gremlin also changed something I had written: "There were (for "was") only one vote for each..."

Since the seventh graders' writing had been made to look better than mine, I've been wondering if those kids put the gremlin up to making those changes.

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