

Book Reviews

Introduction by Wing Commander Chris Hunter

A contemporary view of the character of First Gulf War was that it was 'first and foremost an air power war and the RAF's contribution to the Allied air effort was significant and distinguished. The Service can take just pride in a remarkable feat of arms and a splendid professional achievement. However, that does not mean to say that we can learn nothing of significance from the conflict.' This statement could be viewed by some as a little contentious, but the Coalition's and UK's total losses were remarkably low (UK 45 deaths with 24 due to hostile action and 21 due to other causes), casualty figures that no one would have predicted on 16 Jan 91 the day prior to the start of the 42 day air and a 100 hr ground operation, also of significant scale, that both concluded on 28 Feb. The dominant, but not sole, factor that led to this result was the exploitation of air and space power.

However, prior to the start of air operations on 17 Jan 91 there was constant debate on how the War could and then, as forces built up, should be fought. Therefore, a deduction that the character of First Gulf War was an 'air power war' could only have been drawn after the event or at the earliest late during the planning process. The character of First Gulf War was not a pre-determined outcome with air operations planned and executed in glorious isolation, but the result of vigorous informed debate on the most appropriate means for winning the War within the available resources and capabilities.

First Gulf War represents a particularly useful case study of the planning and execution of such operations in support of a joint campaign. The books reviewed for this special edition of APR have been chosen to complement the ICBH Witness Seminar material and are a mix of academic and personal accounts. The personal accounts usefully provide the reader with an appreciation of the impact of 'friction', 'chance', and 'fog of war' throughout the conflict. The titles are broadly grouped into Strategic, Operational and Tactical perspectives and are listed in that order.

To set the Strategic context we have chosen: *Arab Storm*, *Desert Warrior*, and *The Generals' War*. *Arab Storm* is written from the privileged vantage point of the British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and *Desert Warrior* complements that narrative by providing a Saudi view, one that we can too often overlook, and insight into Arab traditions and ways of doing things. *The Generals' War* delivers a vivid, comprehensive and honest US perspective and assessment.

At the Operational Level, in *War with Iraq: Critical Lessons* by General Buster Glosson offers a candid account of his experience during the planning and execution phases and how critical the air war was in setting the conditions for a successful and critically short ground war. For those whose knowledge of First Gulf War and air planning is limited this is a good place to start to broaden your knowledge. The *Heart of the Storm's* strength is a similar graphic, first-hand account of the initial planning. With *Strategic Air Power in Desert Storm, On Target*, and *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution* providing the reader a deeper academic understanding of the key issues raised in the first 2 books.

At the Tactical Level, *Storm Command* is General Sir Peter De La Billiere's personal account. Apart from being an excellent overview of the war and highlighting 'the importance of human beings in modern warfare', when it was published a few eyebrows were raised due to the content of pages 220-227, until that point highly classified operations. The final book, *Thunder and Lightning*, is included to mitigate the 'Video Game War' perception. It focusses on the human experience and shows that, for those that took part in the War, it felt nothing like a video game with a ubiquitous Scud missile threat to most airbases and field locations and a very real anti-air threat for those who flew.

There is something here for everyone in the Whole Force and just 2 or 3 well-chosen titles would provide the reader with a broad understanding of the War.

The Service's contemporary operational experience is dominated by Iraq, since 2003, and Afghanistan and this influences Defence's perspective on the planning and execution of air and space power operations. However, neither experience should necessarily be viewed a template for future conflict. These titles provide a broader perspective on the use of air and space power, which is important. By example the fight against Daesh should not be viewed as a simple extrapolation of the UK's counter insurgency experience. The defeat of that organization should start with an analysis of the character of conflict leading to an appropriate use of military force including air and space power, which will only occur through well-informed debate.

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