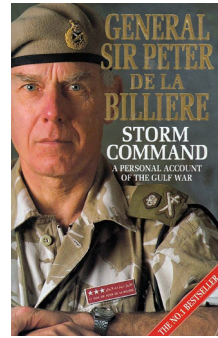


Book Reviews

Storm Command: A Personal Account of the Gulf War



By Sir Peter de la Billière

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Reviewed by Flying Officer Wayne Lovejoy

Biography: Flying Officer Wayne Lovejoy is an RAF Regiment officer with a background in Joint Tactical Air Control (JTAC). He is a CAS' Fellow and an active member of the RAF's Centre for Air Power Studies Advisory Group.

Introduction

Storm Command is General Sir Peter de la Billière's personal account of the first Gulf War in which he not only provides the reader with an excellent overview of the war but also uses it to highlight 'the importance of human beings in modern warfare'. He has an exceptional service record; gaining his commission into the British Army in 1952 he went on to serve in Japan, Korea, the Suez Canal Zone and Jordan. He then joined 22 SAS and saw subsequent service in Jebel Akhdar, Radfan and Borneo before commanding operations in Musandam and Dhofar. In 1981 he held overall military command during the hostage rescue at the Iranian Embassy in London. He has been awarded a Military Cross with an additional bar, CBE and KCB. His experience across all levels of warfare, combined with his position as Commander of British Forces in the Middle East during the First Gulf War, allows for an authoritative insight into the higher echelons of command during war.

In the preface the author states that the book is 'mainly for readers without a military background' however, it is equally pertinent for military personnel. A theme throughout the book is the emphasis placed on engaging with people. At one end of the spectrum he was meeting the rulers of Arab nations and at the other he was sleeping on the desert floor when visiting individual battalions. This approach allowed him to understand the situation from multiple perspectives, which resulted in extremely well informed decision making and an ability

to back brief Whitehall with a credible insight into the 'ground truth'. At the national operational level, he understood the need to be seen as the Commander of British forces and not simply as a high ranking Army officer and so he routinely visited all three services to engage with the senior leadership in theatre. By doing this he created a unity of effort for the forces under his command and this proved to be of the utmost importance as the war ensued.

This is not a book that attempts to lecture on any aspect of command or leadership and the early chapters that explain his thought processes in these areas quickly give way to tactical accounts of combat once the war begins. This is most noticeable in the chapter that recounts the ill-fated SAS patrol 'Bravo Two Zero' where the author's passion for his former unit is clear. When discussing tactical detail there is a slight shift in writing style as he talks of patrols being 'bounced' by enemy forces and troops 'bashing up'. The tales of individual and unit actions are numerous and some compelling examples of naval, ground and air combat are forged together to firmly illustrate the combined nature of this theatre of operations. It is undoubtedly due to the author's position during the war that he has such an insight to the actions of all three services, as well as special forces, which allows for the unique inclusion of finite detail originally captured in his letters home.

Other recurring themes are technology, the Press and cultural sensitivities. Technology is praised for the accuracy of the munitions, the ease of navigating with GPS and target acquisition using thermal sights. He acknowledges throughout that the effective employment of this technology is proportionate to the quality of training that individuals received in order to use it. He uses the fact that the Iraqis had some very good Soviet technology but were unable to use it due to lack of training to add weight to this argument. The Press had unprecedented access to events and they were able to report back to the UK in almost real-time, and this generated other concerns that had to be managed. By engaging with local leaders he identified the importance of cultural and religious sensitivities and ensured that commanders at all levels took responsibility for their troops' actions to avoid causing any offence. These issues are not over analysed, instead the book focuses on how he directed his subordinate commanders to deal with them. This gives further credibility to his original argument of 'the importance of human beings in modern warfare.' The now common idea that actions and decisions taken at the tactical level can have strategic consequences stems from these very issues. Other authors, such as General Charles Krulak, have analysed this concept of the 'Strategic Corporal' in much more detail, but that depth of analysis is not needed here. The actual significance of this book is that it provides many starting points for issues that would become extremely pertinent in future campaigns.

For younger military practitioners this book may seem a little aged as it was written in the language of the generation prior to the Global War on Terror. It refers to 'drones with cameras' and 'Iraqi kamikaze troops' and not the more modern terms of 'UAVs' and 'suicide bombers'. However, this language actually gives the book authenticity which is complemented with regular quotes from letters that he sent to his wife and gives the impression that he is writing from notes and not tainted memories. He often uses the terms 'our' and 'we' when talking about

British equipment or forces and this emphasises the fact that the book is a personal account rather than an academic analysis of events.

This book is one man's personal account of the first Gulf War but anyone interested in this era of warfare can take much away from it. With 45,000 British personnel deployed, it was the largest British military deployment since the Second World War and gives the reader a sense of the enormity of this operation. General Sir Peter de la Billière addresses the issues of technology, the Press and cultural sensitivities in war through stressing the importance of suitably preparing individuals. As a personal account it is easy follow, issues are not overly analysed and the human factor regularly comes across but, at the same time there are subtle lessons that can be taken away for operating in a conflict. To this end the book successfully achieves the author's aim and is certainly worth reading by people who either have an interest in the higher levels of warfare or want a general overview of this war.

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