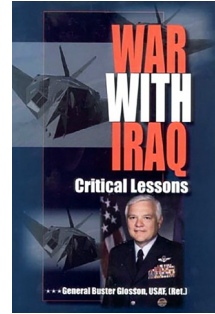


Book Reviews

War with Iraq: Critical Lessons



By General Buster Blosson, USAF (Retd)

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Reviewed by Flight Lieutenant Alexander McKenzie

Biography: Flight Lieutenant Alexander McKenzie completed 9 years' service as an Intelligence Officer serving in various appointments with multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is now a reservist on 602 Squadron and Intelligence Manager with the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Introduction

General Buster Glosson offers a candid account of his experience during the planning and execution phases of operation DESERT STORM. Glosson, a Brigadier General during the war, was the architect-in-chief of the air campaign plan on behalf of the JFACC, General Chuck Horner. The account, published in 2003, frequently refers to his war diary and loses no impact from its retrospective perspective. The book offers specific insight into the 1991 campaign from the air components perspective and deliberately avoids any wider consideration of pre-war context or post-war choices. This narrow focus helps to illuminate a number of key themes that this reviewer believes are ubiquitous in the field of conflict. The importance of command relationships, strength of character and fierce leadership, innovation and the exploitation of technological edge are prominent throughout the story. So too is the inherent friction in war, generated by attempts to exert operational control from distant capitals (mainly Washington), unpredictable weather and old fashioned human error.

Glosson was clearly driven by his experiences as a young fighter pilot in Vietnam and sought to do all he could to avoid a repeat performance in the middle east. Throughout the book you get the sense that he truly believed the combination of superior coalition technology, advantageous battlefield terrain and an inferior military adversary allowed him to unleash air power in a manner never before attempted. Glosson regularly refers to Billy Mitchell, whom he

believed captured the essence of air power, and detested old-fashioned 'attritional' thinking about using the air component to 'roll back' Iraqi forces. Glosson also reveals a profound dislike of war, no doubt another insight into his Vietnam experience, and viewed air power as the means to achieve national objectives in the most efficacious manner with the minimum loss of American life.

This approach contrasted with that of his contemporary, the well know theorist Col John Warden whose detached analysis and methodological approach to targeting and campaign planning did not sit well with Glosson. As a proponent of the fundamentally human nature of warfare, Glosson assessed the Warden approach as being oblivious to the catastrophic psychological effects he sought to deliver on the Iraqi leadership. Indeed Glosson was responsible for sending Warden back to Washington and relying instead on a team of planners who themselves would go on to 2 and 3 star appointments in future years, David Deptula being the most notable. Glosson's summarised his approach with the maxim that 'mass is the past, we live in a precision world'. This mentality allowed him to exploit the capability of stealth and precision targeting, embodied in the F117, to simultaneously combine time and space in a strategic air campaign that satisfied the objectives of Commander in Chief, General 'Stormin Norman' Shwartzkopf.

The relationship between the CinC and Glosson is prominent throughout and it is clear that the relationship was both well defined and mutually clear. General Colin Powell's role as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is painted in a less complimentary manner and Glosson repeatedly criticises attempts to control the air campaign, specifically target selection, from Washington. The importance of leadership is another theme that appears regularly. Glosson advocated that the American-led coalition outperformed Iraqi counterparts as leaders at every level, from the President down to flight leaders. Glosson himself noted the importance of 'pressing the flesh' with commanders and ensuring that squadrons understood both their mission and how that fitted into the larger campaign picture. Contemporary military commanders clearly respected Glosson's firm grip on the air campaign and it is interesting to note that he is well regarded in the memoirs of General Sir Peter de la Billière and others.

Whilst the air campaign was undoubtedly a huge success (he notes the first night went beyond the expectations of anything imagined by commanders in previous wars, de la Billière called it 'a masterpiece of human planning and computer-controller aggression'), Glosson also casts light on numerous problems and points of friction that frustrated his command of the 14th Air Division. The in-theatre intelligence machinery was regularly castigated from conceptual and technical angles. However Rear Admiral Mike McConnell, the Pentagon J2 is described as a saviour whose staff provided vital reach-back capability. The unpredictability and immovable reality of weather also features as a concern for Glosson, blunting the technological edge he wished to wield. Operational distractions are described with regularity, from concerns about disproportionate efforts allocated to scud-hunting to problems surrounding tactical execution of the ATO. Glosson regularly worried about being dominated by an activity cycle and felt that generating 'time to think' was vital to the successful resolution of these issues. This theme

perhaps resonated most strongly, along with his demand that key planning staff were given the latitude to come up with innovative ideas in order to avoid the pitfalls of complacency.

Overall the book offers a unique insight into the challenges of operational command and the process of planning and executing a conventional air campaign. Glosson's account highlights how critical the air war was in setting the conditions for a successful and short ground war. It also sheds light on inter-service rivalry and the importance of command relationships at the most senior levels of a war fighting military. It would have been interesting for Glosson to provide deeper reflection on the ethical considerations that affected him, particularly in relation to the decimation of retreating Iraqi forces on the 'Basra Road', and his perception of the wider effects of the bombing campaign. However the book is not diminished by any lack of consideration in this regard and accurately reflects the operational focus on Coalition Air Power achieving decisive force against the Iraqi military in 1991.

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