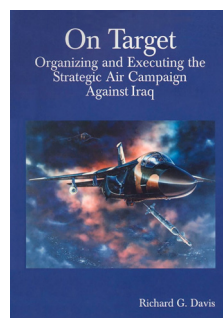


Book Reviews

On Target: Organising and Executing the Strategic Air Campaign Against Iraq



By Richard G Davis

Publisher: University Press of the Pacific, 2005 (ISBN: 978-1410219848) 404 pages

Reviewed by Group Captain Phil Lester

Biography: Group Captain Phil Lester is currently Station Commander of RAF High Wycombe. An RAF Regiment officer, he has served in staff and command tours in the UK and Germany, including with US EUCOM. Operational experience includes deployment on Op TELIC. He is a CAS' Fellow and an active member of the RAF's Centre for Air Power Studies Advisory Group.

Introduction

"A strategic bombing campaign must answer 3 fundamental questions: Did it expend its efforts on targets vital to the enemy's conduct of the War? Did it select targets vulnerable to friendly air action? And, did it contribute decisively to the overall success of the air, ground and sea operations and to the national political objectives? For air power in the Gulf War the quick answer to all 3 is 'yes'!"

Richard G Davis has written an exceptionally clear and incredibly valuable account of the political, strategic and operational perspectives and juxtapositions surrounding both the organisation and delivery of the strategic air campaign against Iraq in 1991. To do so he has drawn on a multitude of interviews of those involved in the campaign as well as analysing a plethora of planning documents, plans and operational assessments. To help him bring this account to life and contextualise it against other strategic campaigns he has drawn on his 20+ years with the United States Air Force Air Staff History Branch where he has focused on strategic bombing and the role its commanders. The result of this painstaking research is an extremely well-written narrative and critical assessment of the

many facets behind the 20th Century's last and arguably most conclusive example of successful strategic bombing.

Davis set out to provide a critical account of the strategic imperatives of the campaign and the associated inter- and intra-Service challenges and tensions. He also constructed an argument, while demonstrating the successful strategic campaign against Iraq, that air power can seldom operate in isolation to other components. He also weaves into this narrative many of the prevailing and competing debates of the day while providing a useful handrail to the various doctrinal stand points. Davis succeeded in his goal and has shown how air power, from a standing start, can be configured, mission-prepared, deployed, integrated and deliver strategic effect within weeks of Kuwait's annexation by Iraq. The book also serves as a very useful datum for how air power could be utilised to deliver a responsive deterrent effect to many of the challenges we face today. From a personal perspective, I found the chapter on the Offensive Air Campaign to be particularly satisfying as it laid bare, in chronological order, the development of Instant Thunder and the key role played by the now renowned characters of Warden and Deptula and the challenges that they faced from the conventional wisdom of General Horner and his operational headquarters. If nothing else, the chapter reaffirmed in my mind the planning mantra of 'ownership' of the plan and the planning process by the commander and not the staff. Similarly the closing chapter, entitled 'Assessment' not only provided a clear account of the key factors behind the successes of the air campaign but it set these against much analysed and critiqued successes and failures of strategic air operations in the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam.

'On Target' is a balanced and sequenced account demonstrating the fundamental tenet of air power planning - that is, Strategy to Task. Through this approach Davis has addressed many of the perennial arguments faced by air power planners at the operational and strategic levels from the genesis of air power in the First World War to the modern day. This book provides an exceptionally useful and thought-provoking reference of air power's potential for delivering strategic effect. However, it is clear from Davis' examination that such potential can only be realized fully if all involved in planning and execution understand strategic effect and have the appetite and patience to see it through! Therefore there is much to recommend in this book to all proponents of air power, political and military, especially for our brothers and sisters in the Army and Navy who would benefit from a clear and close analysis of this successful strategic air campaign. I will leave the closing statement to Richard Davis:

*"The strategic bombing campaign against Iraq was **a** decisive factor in the Coalition's defeat of Iraq. When joined to the tactical air effort against Iraqi forces in Kuwait, which consumed almost three-fourths of the total air effort, air power was **the** decisive factor in the Coalition's quick and almost bloodless victory in the Persian Gulf War."*

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