



**GOODERSON, IAN, AIR POWER AT THE
BATTLEFRONT: ALLIED CLOSE AIR SUPPORT IN
EUROPE, 1943 – 45. LONDON, FRANK CASS, 1998.
ISBN 0-7146-4211-8 (PAPER). ILLUSTRATIONS.
TABLES. DIAGRAMS. APPENDICES. NOTES.
BIBLIOGRAPHY. INDEX. PP.XVIII, 282. £18.50**

The subject of close air support has received very little attention from scholars, and Dr Gooderson's book is the first in-depth study of battlefield air support in the European theatre between 1943 and 1945. By this point in the war, the Allies had learned most of the important air support lessons from the battles in France and North Africa, and applied them with devastating effect from D-Day onwards. Gooderson investigates one of the key debates of the invasion period: whether battlefield support was best provided by the interdiction of German lines of communication, the bombing of enemy positions at the front, both of which diverted resources away from the bomber offensive over Germany, or the close air support offered by the fighter-bombers. He concludes, correctly, that all three approaches were required. Gooderson also brings to light a conclusion reached during the war that close air support operations had an important impact on the morale of the German land forces, particularly rocket attacks on armour.

The work begins with a useful account of the development of Operational Research, again, a neglected area of the RAF's history. Without Operational Research, *any* of the air campaigns during the Second World War would have wasted valuable resources, not to mention lives, and this was particularly true of Bomber and Coastal Command's campaigns. Gooderson then goes on to discuss the doctrine and hardware available for Allied air support by 1943. One of the few flaws of this work is the minimal discussion of the all important developments up to that point, particularly the Allied

experience in North Africa, where the RAF's lack of coherent air support doctrine and tactics was exposed in a large way first in 1941. Insufficient credit is given to Coningham's work, in particular. The reviewer would also have liked to see more discussion of the interwar doctrinal legacy. There are a number of reasons why the RAF was bereft of a coherent army support doctrine by 1939, and at least a few pages on interwar doctrinal debates would have added weight to this work. Having said this, Gooderson does discuss in detail the development of the hardware used in close air support. He challenges some of the accepted views of the Allied air campaign in north-west Europe, particularly the idea that fighter-bombers inflicted massive losses on German armour and that this was the only important impact on the German fighting capability. He points out that the psychological impact of fighter-bomber attacks was also of great importance, as German tank crews abandoned their tanks, often never to return. Unfortunately, some of Gooderson's interesting findings have been left in their raw form, in tables, which are left to 'speak for themselves', while, on other occasions, tables add very little to his argument. Having said this, he has distilled many facts which would have otherwise remained buried, and must be applauded for his diligent research.

This book is an essential read for air power and Second World War scholars, and also to anyone interested in today's joint service environment. Many of the issues Gooderson raises have been doctrinal and organisational stumbling blocks again since the Second World War, and, as with so many other air power facets, the lessons learned by an earlier generation remain relevant.



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