

BOOK REVIEW BY GROUP CAPTAIN PETER W GRAY

OVER LORD

GENERAL PETE QUESADA AND THE TRIUMPH OF TACTICAL AIR POWER IN WORLD WAR II

**Thomas Alexander Hughes
Free Press, New York 1995**

The main part of the title of this book is, at first sight, somewhat confusing. The cover picture shows an excellent painting of Royal Air Force Typhoons roaring overhead an enemy armoured convoy that had obviously been recently destroyed. The reader is therefore expecting an exposition on the use of tactical air power in the Allied invasion of Normandy – Operation OVERLORD. The use of the upper case, but with a gap between the two syllables then implies that Quesada had been in charge of all tactical air power over Normandy – which he was not. He was actually the US Army Air Force two star general in charge of the Ninth Tactical Air Command. His British opposite number was Air Vice-Marshal Arthur ‘Mary’ Coningham who was in charge of the Second Tactical Air Force. Given that egos were a major factor in the complicated inter-command relationships during the invasion of France, the distinction is worth making.

This book is actually well worth reading for its treatment of a number of these relationships, especially those centred around Quesada himself. He was often considered to be immature, brash and impetuous in his actions and in his dealings with people. He

spent most of the inter-war years in personal staff appointments rather than gradually accumulating command and leadership skills. His contacts proved invaluable with the onset of war seeing him rise from Major to Brigadier General in very short order. According to his subordinates this showed at first. The other side of this coin, however, was that Quesada was very broad minded when it came to what he saw as the real priorities of war fighting – he was far less indoctrinated with strategic bombing theory than were many of his compatriots. This book is at its best in its treatment of the special relationship that developed between Quesada and General Omar Bradley, the US Army land force commander, and the tactical employment of air power.

Hughes covers three broad generic areas in this work. It is obviously based specifically on Quesada and provides a very useful biography of a talented and energetic US airman. As with many such works, there is a tendency towards hagiography leaving the reader wondering how the war could possibly have been won without Quesada. Hughes provides some useful insights into the high level command relationships and the doctrinal issues that desperately needed voicing if the debate was to rise above the sterile attachment to strategic bombing alone. Even while the War was still far from won, many senior US airmen were pursuing a hidden agenda – an independent Air Force and their own likely role therein; this is also well covered. The third element is the narrative story of the significant events in which Quesada played a part. Much of this is at the tactical level and makes very entertaining reading. Overall, the balance between these themes is well handled and Over Lord is recommended.

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