

## Naval War College Review

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Volume 50  
Number 1 *Winter*

Article 21

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1997

# Blue on Blue: A History of Friendly Fire

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### Recommended Citation

Blood, Christopher G. (1997) "Blue on Blue: A History of Friendly Fire," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 50 : No. 1 , Article 21.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol50/iss1/21>

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President Assad has been able to control Islamic fundamentalism and any opposition in Syria by imposing a rigid police state. She also discusses how Damascus has utilized Islamic fervor to profit strategically and economically in Lebanon.

The last chapters are devoted to Jordan, Israel, and Iran. Miller shows great respect and admiration for King Hussein of Jordan, who has been able to hammer out a gentlemen's agreement with Islamic groups in his kingdom. Miller also sheds light on King Hussein's reasons for taking Iraq's side during the Persian Gulf War. The author reports on the oppressiveness of Israeli forces that led to the development of the Intifadah and radical groups like Hamas. As for Israel, there is a superb account of how non-Jewish Israeli citizens participate in the Knesset (parliament). The author also forecasts the future of Israeli society as we approach the twenty-first century. Finally, the Iranian revolution is considered as a turning point for Islamic radicals, sparking the fuse that ignited the radical Muslim challenge throughout the Middle East against ruling governments. Iran has also been active in supporting these groups in order to export its brand of religious fundamentalism. The author addresses the open debate among the mullahs over the success of Khomeini's vision of the Islamic Republic.

Although this book is primarily a description of events and offers little real analysis on how to counter threats from such militant groups, *God Has Ninety-Ninety Names* does explore the successes and failures of secular regimes and U.S. allies in combatting religious fanaticism in the Middle East. Miller offers a fine account of the people, history, economics,

and politics that have molded and shaped Islamic militancy. For those with an interest in Middle East affairs, counterterrorism in particular, this work is a must-read.

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Regan, Geoffrey. *Blue on Blue: A History of Friendly Fire*. New York: Avon, 1995. 258pp. \$12.95

"Mistakes will be reduced when men have less to fear. But then that would not be war, and they would not be men." While this statement is the concluding sentence in Geoffrey Regan's book, it is far from the theme of this literary undertaking. Rather, the author's accounts of events endeavor to support the statement emblazoned on the cover: "We have no one to fear but ourselves." However, although *Blue on Blue* does provide an interesting collection of anecdotes, the author has granted himself too much latitude in defining friendly fire and has succumbed to the temptation to psychologize as to its causes.

Regan's compilation of "blue on blue" incidents includes nonbattle injuries, self-inflicted wounds, malfunctioning fire-arms, training accidents, suicides, an army shooting its own men on the battlefield to discourage desertion, "fragging," the release of glider pilots too far out at sea, the poor design of the K-class submarine, a rogue admiral who chose not to follow the course of action prescribed by the British Secretary of State, and the American sinking of a Japanese ship that happened to be transporting Allied prisoners. To combine all these types of incidents under the heading of *A History of Friendly Fire* tends to distort a very real issue that needs a greater

understanding by the public and the military alike.

This book is at its best in shedding light on things that can and have gone wrong throughout the history of warfare, but it is at its worst in implying causation and attributing motive. Regan writes of troops "firing in the air and then at each other in frustration," tank crews who "succumbed to the primitive urge to kill in which conscious thought played no part," and of Americans who "ignored the signals and plastered the British position;" he asserts that "a 45 percent casualty rate was not enough for the American High Command." The author, somehow, is able to take the scant information that exists on most "frasualty" incidents and perform psychological postmortems on the motivations of the personnel involved.

Also, in some cases *Blue on Blue* fails to provide substantiating data, while in others it cites potentially misleading statistics. On the very first page it states that "during the Gulf War, coalition troops killed far more of one another than the enemy did." A statement like this certainly deserves further amplification or documentation. Regan also writes of "77 percent of U.S. combat vehicle losses resulting from friendly fire." Seventy-seven percent is a tremendously high number. But is it 770 out of a thousand vehicle losses, or seventeen out of twenty-two? Also, when he mentions that 23 percent of American casualties were self-inflicted, does the author deem the actual number of casualties of such trivial importance that the reader need not be apprised of it? Is it 23 percent of ten thousand or of 146?

Moreover, Regan does a disservice to Charles Shrader, who wrote the report

*Amicide: The Problem of Friendly Fire in Modern War* in 1982, long before the Gulf war kindled interest in this subject. The author, while using Shrader's superior work as a guide to various "frasualty" incidents, ignores his analytic approach and re-reports these accounts with emotionally charged descriptions intended to appeal to those who have little familiarity with combat operations. Further, the fact that artillery and close air support reduce the casualties inflicted by enemy forces by numbers generally far outweighing the friendly casualties sustained in the process is a point that Regan fails to underscore.

Blue on blue, friendly fire, amicide, fratricide, frasualties, or whatever people decide to call them, are unfortunately as much a part of warfare as the casualties inflicted by the enemy. Given the awesome power of today's arms technology, it should be no surprise that heightened stress, reduced visibility, inadequate training, faulty intelligence, poor coordination, and mathematical miscalculations can all lead tragically to unintended deaths in times of both war and peace. While many of the anecdotes related in Regan's book are entertaining and some are revealing, most lack any substantial documentation. As a vehicle for objectively informing a curious public or eliciting possible remedies from battlefield commanders, *Blue on Blue* falls woefully short.

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Guilmartin, John F., Jr. *A Very Short War: The Mayaguez and the Battle of Koh Tang*. College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1995. 264pp. \$39.50