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"A Dazzling Vision of Antiseptic Warfare"

Captain Robert C. Rubel, U.S. Navy

Hallion, Richard P. *Storm Over Iraq: Air Power and the Gulf War*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. 352pp. \$24.95

THE CHIEF OF AIR FORCE HISTORY, Dr. Richard P. Hallion, has written a book about Operation Desert Shield-Desert Storm that embodies the thesis that "simply (if boldly) stated, air power won the Gulf War." He argues that advances in technology have enabled air power to fulfill the promise of a former generation of visionaries; that air power can win wars by itself. Dr. Hallion conducts an analysis of the Gulf War to marshal evidence for his view.

He begins with a compelling account of how the U.S. military underwent the process of reassessment and renewal after the humiliating withdrawal from Vietnam. The author deserves praise for writing a chronicle of the process through which the American military establishment rebuilt its pride and professionalism, and he also clearly shows why many Americans should not have been surprised by the overwhelming effectiveness of the American military forces against Saddam's vaunted war machine.

The book is richly infused with data about the war, including a series of well written appendices that describe the weapon systems the coalition forces employed, much of which is a valuable source of information for the lay reader. However, there are shortcomings and difficulties. Some of the illustrations that tout the superiority of air power over other kinds of forces appear to be straight out of Air Force indoctrination publications, but their origin is not noted. Some of the evidence offered is not totally accurate.

For example, Hallion implies on page 135 that in the first hours of Desert Shield, early-deploying U.S. Air Force units immediately constituted a "trump card" against a possible Iraqi armored thrust into Saudi Arabia. The evidence he offers is the existence of a prepositioned cache of fuel and enough air-to-ground ordnance to destroy "3,000 tanks." However, while there was indeed considerable ammunition in-theater, it was not actually available at the airfields until ten days or two weeks after the invasion of Kuwait had occurred. Neither were

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there sufficient aircraft available, from any source, to generate a level of effort sufficient to stop a determined Iraqi assault. At that time, what anti-armor and ground-attack capability existed resided in the two aircraft carriers that had reached the Red Sea and Gulf of Oman and with the Marines and the Army airborne units that were rushed to the scene. Because a fundamental part of Hallion's thesis rests on the presumed ability of air power not only to get to scenes of crisis "firstest with the mostest" but to act effectively, even decisively, immediately thereafter, this is not a minor point.

Shifting to his account of the Gulf War, Hallion develops evidence that air operations in the Gulf War had a powerful effect on the capacity and will of the Iraqis in Kuwait to resist the advance of the allied ground forces. He further asserts that the war was essentially won before the first coalition ground unit crossed its line of departure. In fact, he refers to the ground portion of the campaign as the *reoccupation* of Kuwait. His description of ground operations makes almost no mention of any of the significant actions between VII Corps units and the Iraqi Republican Guard, or of the heavy fighting that the First Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) experienced at the outskirts of Kuwait City. His outlook on the ground portion of the campaign was that "sporadic ground action did occur. . . ."

Hallion's intent seems to be to convey the impression that the ground war was not necessary; he apparently believes it occurred only at the behest of ground officers eager to participate and earn glory. His account of the deliberations that culminated in the order to execute the ground portion of the campaign is filled with quotes that make it appear the U.S. leadership felt that air power was decisive. Viewed through Hallion's eyes, the decision to commit ground forces appears almost irresponsible. After all, if everyone was convinced, including the president and the secretary of defense, that air power alone was winning the war, what justification was there for risking innumerable American and allied lives in a ground assault? The reader is left with the feeling that while the national leadership was convinced of the efficacy of the air campaign, they caved in to "traditionalist" pressures to launch a ground offensive. If only air power had been allowed to proceed, Hallion's argument goes, a decision could have been reached without recourse to ground operations.

In comparison, the Mitre Corporation's analysis of the war is more objective. Its review of ground operations reveals a different picture. While the air campaign did indeed have a considerable effect on the Iraqi capability and will to fight, its effects were primarily on command and control and on the less capable units composed primarily of conscripts. The overall Iraqi defensive capability remained significant. A valid case can be made that the nature of coalition ground maneuver and the technical superiority of our weapons were at least as important as air action and share responsibility for the stunning success

we enjoyed. Our Abrams tanks' 120mm guns outranged those of the Iraqi T-72s by a decisive margin, which, along with advanced fire control, allowed our armored forces to shoot up Iraqi tanks and positions without any return fire. Moreover, coalition forces found that Iraqi troops offered tough resistance when in a position to fight the kind of frontal defensive battle for which they had been prepared. But when flanked or otherwise outmaneuvered, they quickly surrendered or fled. The "Hail Mary play" prevented any organized defense of Kuwait by Iraq, and, along with the disruptions of command and control brought about by air power, it created in the Iraqis a mindset of impending catastrophe—precisely the condition rapid and integrated AirLand Battle maneuver is supposed to create. It is therefore not at all clear that air power alone caused the massive surrenders.

The author's view of the Navy's contributions to the victory is especially troubling. While Hallion is effusive in his praise of the Navy's performance of missions he regards as appropriate for naval forces (such as maritime interception operations), he takes pains to present a negative picture of naval aviation. In this vein he uses excerpts from a letter by a naval officer who functioned as an observer of operations in the Arabian Gulf that indicate naval aviation as a body did not understand the strategic concepts of air power. In contrast, he repeatedly attributes to Colonel John Warden, U.S. Air Force, and his ad hoc group of Air Staff planners known as "Checkmate," a true understanding of how air power should be employed. His one-liner stating that naval aviation planners also contributed fails to indicate the true nature of the situation that preceded the opening of the air war. While Checkmate planners were busy applying doctrine, a joint but Navy-led organization called SPEAR did a heroic job of convincing Air Force leaders to change their initial air campaign tactics. The Air Force planners had proposed tactics that were inappropriate for the nature of the terrain and defenses that U.S. pilots would encounter in Iraq. We will never know what would have been the outcome of the Checkmate plan had it been carried out as initially drawn up, but it is clear that the extremely low rate of coalition air losses is directly attributable to the so-far unacknowledged efforts of the small but influential SPEAR team.

What Hallion offers is a dazzling vision of antiseptic warfare in which destruction of a certain "target set" by high-technology aircraft and missiles will quickly and cleanly bring about the political conditions necessary for a favorable settlement of disputes. This is a seductive claim because air power is easy to use. It can be employed without the logistical expense and political messiness of troops on the ground, and its newest technology seems to reduce both the risk of U.S. airmen becoming POWs and that of innocent civilians being harmed. When making claims for the effectiveness of air power it is also easy to hide

unasked questions and unchallenged assumptions within such broad concepts as the "Five Strategic Rings."

There are also some logical difficulties. In order to accept the author's thesis that (land-based) air power can win wars by itself, one must first perceive a linkage between destruction (air power's stock-in-trade) and control (the acquiescence by the enemy to our desires). Many writers have tried to establish such a link, but uniformly they have failed to demonstrate a clear theoretical connection. The late Admiral Joseph C. Wylie, in his search for a universal theory of strategy, admitted that he could not establish such a connection. The reason it is difficult if not impossible to do so is that political conditions attendant to conflict are both complex and dynamic. There are cases in which neither destruction of an opponent's forces nor damage to his resources was sufficient to generate the desired political objectives. This was either because the victim was able to mobilize outside support through diplomatic initiatives or because the attacker's own populace became disenchanted.

The problem is that once the bullets and bombs start flying, the flow of events is not linear; effects do not devolve from causes in a straightforward manner, for any number of reasons. But an air-only strategy is necessarily based on the logic of a straight-line link between the application of a certain tonnage of bombs to some array of targets and obtaining acquiescence of the enemy to the desired conditions. Among the many factors that can confound such an approach is the distinct possibility that the amount of destruction required to extort cooperative decisionmaking from enemy policy makers may be out of proportion to the national interests at stake, a condition which may produce more overall political harm than a favorable settlement is worth. Those who argue that precision delivery of ordnance makes it possible to paralyze an enemy's military and economy with minimum "collateral damage" beg the question of whether such effects, even if obtained, would be relevant to the issue at hand.

Clearly, the United States must have at its disposal an array of military capabilities that can be used in ways that make sense in terms of the specific circumstances. To chain ourselves to an air-only doctrine, as Hallion appears to suggest, would limit severely the flexibility of our future responses in crisis situations. It might even produce the unfortunate effect of luring our policy makers prematurely or inappropriately into making destruction part of U.S. policy.

Richard Hallion's book does provide the reader with a sophisticated understanding of why the United States military did so well in the Gulf War. But in its attempt to make a case for the dominance of land-based air power over all other forms of military might, it does the reader a disservice.

IN MY VIEW . . .

"How Cross He Must Have Been. . . !"

Sir,

I was much taken by the painting on the cover of the latest copy of the *Naval War College Review* [details from "The Sloop *Providence*, John Paul Jones, Eluding H.M. Frigate *Solebay* and Firing a Swivel Cannon," an oil painting by William Gilkerson, Spring 1993]. I am currently putting together a book on "command decisions" and have it in mind to include this incident as an example of professional skill, coolness in the face of danger, all accompanied by a little bit of luck!

So, as I was in the Public Record Office (PRO) on another task I decided to dig out the captain's log (Captain Thomas Symonds, RN) of HMS *Solebay*. Somewhat to my surprise I read the following:

September 1. Moderate and cloudy with showers of rain. ½ past 1pm saw a sail ahead, fired 23 rounds [*sic*] shottes at the Chace, a Sloop from Philadelphia to Surinam laden with Flour, Tar and Lumber. 5 sail of the convoy in sight.

September 2. Moderate and cloudy. Read Articles of War. 3 sail of the convoy in sight.

Well, I thought, a British captain cannot tell a lie in his ship's log, so all this talk of John Paul Jones making a fool of the *Solebay* must be fabricated, or, perhaps, the date is wrong. But, being a prudent researcher, I then decided to dig out the master's log and here is what I found (some of the writing is ungrammatical, all of it difficult to read):

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Sunday September 1, 1776. [Off the New England coast.] Moderate breeze and cloudy. PM saw a Sail ahead and gave chace. At ½ past 3 fired 2 guns at the Chace. She broached too, found her to be a sloop from Philadelphia bound to Surinam. Out a boat and sent 2 petty officers and 8 men onboard the sloop and brought the master and 6 men from the Sloop. At 6 hoisted in the boat and made sail. At ½ past 6 AM saw a sail to windward, shortened sail for the convoy. At 7 made sail, out 2 reefs [indecipherable] and gave chace to the sail to windward. Found her to be Rebel privateer. Fired 2 Nine Pound shot at her. At ½ past 9 [our?] ship got up the fore-top-gallant yard. Still in chace.

Monday September 2. Moderate breeze and cloudy. At ½ past 5 PM the Chace finding we came up with her, bore away. We bore away after her and set Stearingsail. During the chace fired 40 Nine pounders at her. Night coming on left off chace. Hauled down the steering sail, in 2 reefs of the Topsails to wait for the convoy. . . .

So, the master was obviously a rather more honest man than his captain, who simply left out the bits that showed him up badly! How cross he must have been that a Yankee privateer outsailed him!

I find the master's timings a bit difficult to follow and am not sure what he means by "Stearingsail," but obviously he is writing about the same incident portrayed in the *Review*.

David Miller
Meadway, Twickenham,
England

Editor's note:

As to the master's seemingly reversed "AM" and "PM," Mr. Miller points out in a separate letter that the master's log's "day" ran from noon to noon; "in modern terms, they caught the Surinam-bound vessel one afternoon and saw the 'Rebel' vessel the following morning," i.e., 2 September. Also, as the artist, Mr. Gilkerson, explains to us, "the master's reference to 'steering sail' refers to the setting of studding sails [light sails set outboard of square sails to increase their effective area]—no telling how many—probably foretopsail studding sails, maybe topgallants. There was a stiff breeze blowing."

