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Tactical Air Power and the Vietnam War: Explaining Effectiveness in Modern Air Warfare

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invasion of Ukraine, the author suggests that what is required is a maritime approach, integrating all relevant assets and agencies into a policy that fits broader national objectives. Speller pays significant attention to the challenges posed to the naval world by the ongoing rivalry between the United States and China. While tracing the rise of China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) from a mediocre force in the 1970s to its present greatness, Speller pays much attention to the development of its aircraft carrier program. In Speller's view, China has made great strides to develop an aircraft carrier with indigenous technology. He further discusses the U.S. response to the robust growth of China's naval presence by highlighting the new edition of U.S. naval doctrine published in 2020 and entitled *Advantage at Sea*.

Speller's last chapters in this compelling work unveil more about the future of naval warfare. He examines the contemporary security environment in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, showing how mutual threat perceptions led to changes in naval doctrines, such as the latest edition of Russia's maritime doctrine and the European Union's Strategic Compass, both published in 2022. He rejects popular arguments in comparing China's robust growth with imperial Germany's naval expansion, which set the path to the Great War. Speller argues that China is aware of the repercussions of falling into the trap of building big navies: "The PLAN can give China a tool with global reach and forward presence that may give Beijing influence in regions where it might otherwise be ignored" (p. 222).

All in all, *Understanding Naval Warfare* is a very readable book not only for

strategists but also for general readers. His discussion of key naval theorists and their strategies should motivate readers to examine them in depth on their own. Notwithstanding the changing character of war, this book emphasizes that naval warfare remains a fascinating topic and not one likely to become irrelevant anytime soon.

PUNSARA AMARASINGHE



Tactical Air Power and the Vietnam War: Explaining Effectiveness in Modern Air Warfare, by Phil Haun. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2024. 312 pages. \$105.

In his latest book, *Tactical Air Power and the Vietnam War*, Phil Haun offers a practical and theoretical model for assessing and employing airpower. Using the Vietnam War as his primary case-study vehicle, Haun presents his tactical airpower (TAP) theory formulation. Through analysis of the American air campaigns during the Vietnam War, Haun argues that airpower is most effective on the modern battlefield when used in direct attack against enemy fielded forces. The result is, arguably, the most complete and practical presentation of why and how airpower contributes to victory both politically and on the battlefield.

Tactical airpower is a familiar subject to Haun. As a practitioner, he flew the venerable A-10 in the U.S. Air Force and saw combat in Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. As an academic, Haun has written multiple books and articles about airpower application and theory, among other subjects. His most recent works include *Air Power in the Age of Primacy: Air Warfare since the Cold*

War and “Near-Catastrophic Victory: Disregarded Lessons from the Six-Day War.” Currently, Haun is a professor at the U.S. Naval War College, and arguably the leading expert in the field. The construct of the book flows logically and sequentially beginning with Haun’s introduction and explanation of tactical airpower theory. The bulk of the book, its five central chapters, chronologically steps through the various eras and air campaigns of the Vietnam War, beginning with ROLLING THUNDER, then Tet and the defense of Khe Sanh, the various iterations of COMMANDO HUNT (divided into two parts), and then Operations LINEBACKER I and II. Finally, Haun concludes with an overall analysis. Within each chapter, he provides a brief historical overview of the chapter’s air campaign before analyzing its effectiveness within the construct of TAP theory. In supporting his argument, narrative, and analysis Haun draws deeply on primary sources—such as the Air Force’s Project CHECO reports and CIA analysis—along with other works on the Vietnam War. The book’s logical sequence and strong supporting research make a compelling case for Haun’s argument. Similarly, he employs a tight narrative structure that delivers facts and analysis in a dense but digestible manner that guides the reader through the campaigns to his conclusions. In the end, Haun makes his point capably. He concludes, through both the narrative and analytical examples, that effective tactical airpower employed with a capable friendly army places an enemy’s armies on the horns of a dilemma: they must choose between concentration and dispersion. If an enemy army concentrates on defeating

the friendly army, it exposes itself to destruction by air attack. In contrast, if it disperses to prevent air attack, an army risks piecemeal destruction by friendly ground forces. The only critique to make of the work is an organizational one; it would have been helpful to move the two appendices—one on airpower theory broadly and the second analyzing post-Vietnam air campaigns—into the introductory and concluding sections, respectively. This is a style preference, rather than a critical flaw, but one that would better integrate those parts into the rest of the work and help drive Haun’s theoretical and analytical points home.

Despite the book’s strong argument, logical narrative, and ample research support, one might assume by Haun’s background and previous works that he was predisposed to his conclusion about the application of airpower. However, he does not dismiss other airpower missions in drawing his conclusions about direct attack. He acknowledges the critical role that air superiority plays in setting conditions in a successful air campaign. Ultimately, Haun provides his theory and analysis to weigh the use of airpower in a future conflict. In his epilogue, Haun offers an overview of the state of American airpower and focuses a sharp critique against the U.S. Air Force’s current structure and doctrinal choices. Likewise, he points out the flaws in the Russian air campaign in Ukraine, noting it “provides the case of a recent conflict which can help demonstrate how TAP theory can predict the likely effectiveness of air power in current and future modern air wars” (p. 327).

Tactical Air Power and the Vietnam War is not a beginner’s guide to airpower. The

text requires the reader to have some understanding of the doctrinal airpower terms and campaigns Haun harnesses in making his case. That is not to say he does not offer any explanations along the way, nor is the book inaccessible to novices, but it is aimed at experts and policy makers who think and deal with airpower as a means of national power. Critically, it offers a lens through which policy makers, military leaders, and campaign planners must view the use and effectiveness of airpower. To that end, *Tactical Air Power and the Vietnam War* belongs on the bookshelf of all who style themselves academics or practitioners of airpower and national defense policy—or anyone who might strive to be one.

MATT DIETZ



Apartheid's Black Soldiers: Un-national Wars and Militaries in Southern Africa, by Lennart Bolliger. Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 2021. 292 pages. \$80.

The Cold War in southern Africa produced some odd bedfellows, and there are contemporary lessons to be learned from it, as presented by Lennart Bolliger, a lecturer in international history at Utrecht University.

Bolliger highlights some startling juxtapositions. At one point during the Angolan civil war, some two thousand Cuban soldiers were defending the operations of an American oil company. The irony of Communist internationalists defending an American oil company whose revenues were providing the majority of the funds for Angola's communist government may have been lost at the time.

Elsewhere on the continent, when Zimbabwe's then-new president,

Robert Mugabe, and the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) faced their greatest-ever test they ultimately were saved by elements of the old white Rhodesian government they had just displaced. Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) launched what is known as the Entumbane uprising in 1981. The Rhodesian African Rifles and elements of the Rhodesian Armoured Corps commanded by white officers decisively defeated a ZIPRA force. The four-day clash gave the Rhodesian military something it had never achieved on the battlefield previously—a victory that had both decisive military and political results. The defeat of the ZIPRA helped pave the way for Mugabe's decades-long rule and allowed him to break previously agreed commitments on military integration.

Bolliger's work provides many more such intriguing examples that have, until now, slipped through the pages of our history books. The book looks at Namibians who fought against the socialist South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and mostly Angolan soldiers who fought with the South African army. The latter formed the core of the 32nd Battalion, which started out as a uniquely Angolan unit made up of former rebels who had fought against the Portuguese empire. Many of them became rebels once again when the socialist People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (abbreviated MPLA, after its name in Portuguese) took power in the country in the 1970s, and some were defectors from the MPLA itself.

There are similar parallels here with the Kit Carson Scouts, made up of former Vietcong fighters, used during the Vietnam War, but, as the author