

1994

Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942-1991

Robert Pinnell

James A. Winnefeld

Dana J. Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Pinnell, Robert; Winnefeld, James A.; and Johnson, Dana J. (1994) "Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942-1991," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 47 : No. 4 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol47/iss4/21>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

the war was not the greatest moral challenge this nation has faced since World War II; perhaps that challenge lies closer, on America's shores. Still, once in a generation, it is enough and sufficient to know that this nation's armed forces were ready when called upon and that the United States and its military reaffirmed their sense of common purpose and mutual respect. That in itself was a remarkable achievement—and a story that remains to be told.

COLE C. KINGSEED
Colonel, U.S. Army

Winnefeld, James A. and Johnson, Dana J. *Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942–1991*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1993. 199pp. \$29.95

Joint Air Operations has a narrow purpose: “to determine how unity of effort has been achieved in joint air operations.” The authors treat air operations as distinct from surface, land, and sea operations; this keeps the book to a manageable size, although one may question whether air operations can properly be studied if separated from associated ground and naval action. Notwithstanding that caveat and the criticisms which follow, *Joint Air Operations* is on the whole a superb book. It is an excellent starting point for serious study, as it provides both the appropriate cases and criteria for analyzing them.

Joint operations date from antiquity, but they originally tended not to require much coordination between land and sea forces. The ease with

which aircraft, however, pass across the boundary between land and sea has made air warfare a focal point for multiservice coordination and contention since World War I.

In the introduction the authors define some critical conventions and definitions, and they explain their methodology for analysis of joint air operations. The latter enables the reader to judge how well the authors meet their own criteria. Unfortunately, as they are applied to cases, these criteria undergo significant changes. For example, in the introduction Unity of Effort is considered in terms of “evidence of unity of command or, in the absence of such unity, the command arrangements used to broker various interests.” Nine chapters later, Unity of Command is evaluated in terms of “meddling by senior command echelons,” “single command for land and sea-based air,” and “single commander for land-based air forces of different services.” These reveal Winnefeld and Johnson's general support for the traditional Air Force viewpoint that—at least where air operations are involved—“unity of effort” is synonymous with “unity of command” under a single air commander. This view is not commonly shared by the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, or the post-World War II U.S. Army. In Chapter Two, the authors provide a concise overview of the philosophical approaches to aviation of the U.S. Army Air Corps, Army Air Forces, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps. Understanding these competing, often antagonistic, philosophies is critical to understanding

134 Naval War College Review

the resulting service orientations toward aviation in the examples Winnefeld and Johnson examine.

The issue of “meddling” by “higher echelons” is a recurrent theme throughout this book. It is odd that complaints about too much centralized control (meddling) originate from those at the theater level, since they themselves exercise minutely detailed tactical control, down to the sortie of a single aircraft. Apparently, centralized command and control is desirable or even necessary, but only up through the Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC) level!

In addition, imprecise or incorrect terminology bedevils this work, as in the authors’ frequent misuse of the terms “strategic” and “operational.” For example, “Operational decisions on the employment of air forces generally should not be made by theater commanders—or even component commanders in many cases.” Operational (theater-level) decisions are precisely what unified and specified commanders in chief are supposed to make.

Winnefeld and Johnson’s decision not to include analysis of post-World War II Army aviation in their analysis is regrettable. They make a number of references to the need for the JFACC to control Army and Marine Corps helicopters but give no supporting reason. As the Army and Marine Corps both use helicopters not only as “flying trucks” but also as direct support weapons and reconnaissance platforms for troops engaged with the enemy in fluid situations, any effort to control these assets through the JFACC Air

Tasking Order would be exceptionally burdensome to the JFACC and would still yield unacceptable results at the front lines.

The authors have chosen six campaigns that included significant joint air operations: the Battle of Midway, the Solomons Campaign (1942–1944), the Korean War (1950–1953), Vietnam (1960–1965), El Dorado Canyon (the Libyan bombing), and Desert Storm. The authors devote a full chapter to detailed analysis, against their criteria, of each of the campaigns. They present their overall conclusions and lessons learned in both narrative and tabular form in Chapter Nine.

At the core of all discussions of airpower is the question of its purpose. If one accepts the Air Force view, then acceptance of centralized command follows logically. If, however, one sees other purposes and missions for aviation, centralized control may be the wrong answer. As the authors note, “The diversity of the air services—in doctrine, training, and hardware—is a weakness, but also represents a profound strength.”

In their final recommendations the authors call for “acceptance of the fact that unity of effort does not always require unity of air command; control may be sufficient.” Many would contend that the El Dorado Canyon case study illustrates that this should be amended to “*coordination* may be sufficient.” The case for centralized control of all aircraft in a theater is evident to the authors of *Joint Air Operations*, but they do not adequately argue the case in this book, which implies, without satisfactory support, that

the JFACC should control all aircraft in a theater regardless of their mission or purpose. Some would see the evolution of Army aviation since the end of World War II, particularly its reliance on helicopters, as a response to inadequate air support from the Army Air Force and the United States Air Force, whose warfighting priorities were, and often continue to be, different from the ground commander's.

The imperfections of *Joint Air Operations* reflect the complexities and contradictions of its subject. This book will not settle the question of the need for centralized control of all air operations, but it is an outstanding collection of cases and methodologies for studying the subject. *Joint Air Operations* should be a core textbook at every war college and required reading for all military officers and defense civilians. The resulting, and often heated, discussions will be instructive to all participants.

ROBERT PINNELL
Commander, U.S. Navy, Ret.
Kingston, Rhode Island

Frame, Tom. *Where Fate Calls: The HMAS Voyager Tragedy*. Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992. 447pp. \$A 14.95

During naval exercises off the coast of New South Wales on the night of 10 February 1964, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* sliced in two the destroyer HMAS *Voyager*. Moments before the collision, *Voyager*

had inexplicably cut across the bows of the carrier in the process of taking up planeguard station. Within minutes, *Voyager* had sunk, taking with it eighty-two crew members and all present on the bridge, including the captain. In view of the magnitude of the disaster and a series of accidents that had recently occurred in the RAN, the Australian government broke with all legal precedent and instituted a Royal Commission to investigate the tragedy. So controversial was the finding of the First Royal Commission in 1964 that a second had to be conducted in 1967.

It would be a mistake to conclude that Tom Frame is concerned only with this terrible naval tragedy and judicial morass. He has presented not only an excellent chronicle of the events but, more importantly, a social history of the RAN, its practices, and its growing isolation from Australian society. Moreover, the author has written an exhaustive analysis and interpretation of what happened the night of the collision.

This is fine history of a rather difficult time in the proud history of the RAN. While the work does suffer from the charge that it is probably a better Ph.D. dissertation than book (it is heavy reading at times), it is still a superb analysis and narrative. The absence of an index is, however, incomprehensible for a work of this magnitude. As the *Voyager* tragedy continues to this day to loom large in the collective minds and spirit of the RAN and Australia (personal legal claims against the government are still being filed), anyone wishing to