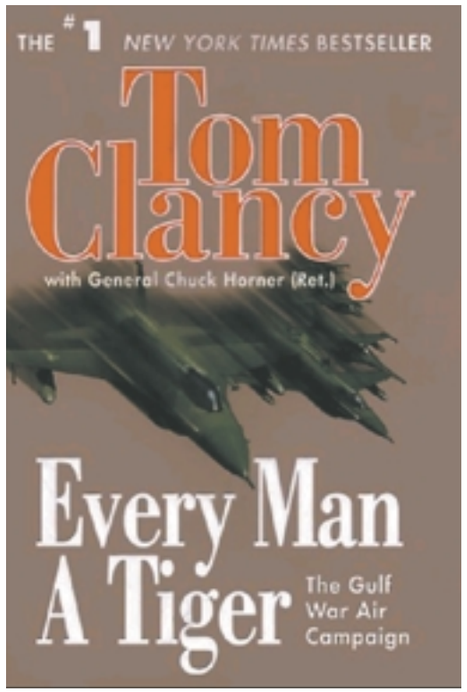
EVERY MAN A TIGER: THE GULF WAR AIR CAMPAIGN

Tom Clancy with General Chuck Horner (Ret.)



Review essay by John Andreas Olsen (RNOAF)

General Charles Albert Horner embodies a considerable amount of air power history. He was awarded pilot wings in 1959, spent two tours flying combat missions in Vietnam, was in charge of the American-led air campaign in Operation Desert Storm and ended his military career as commander-in-chief of the unified U.S. Space Command (CINCSPACE) in 1994. He was consequently in charge of perhaps the most successful air campaign ever fought, and according to Benjamin S. Lambeth his assignment as commander of the Space Command proved to be a 'seminal event' with respect to bringing the space and fighter communities closer together.[1] Although Horner has given numerous interviews, appeared before Congress on several occasions and participated in conferences world-wide, one appreciates finding his personal experiences collected in one volume. He explores together with Tom Clancy the origin, evolution and execution of the air campaign against Iraq with reflections and perspectives on the maturity of the USAF and the art of air power on the strategic, operational and tactical levels of warfare.

THE LEGACY OF VIETNAM

The Vietnam War remains a distressing memory for Chuck Horner, and in 'The Big Lie' he provides severe criticism of the operations in which he participated. He argues that the Washington administration did not have a clear objective of what it wanted to achieve with air power, and that the chosen Graduated Pressure strategy essentially asked the military to fight with its hands tied. The pilots were given politically selected targets, the rules of engagement prevented them from hitting the enemy where it hurt, they were not allowed to take initiatives on their own, and combined with target exclusion zones air power was prohibited from being used in an effective manner. Numbers of sorties and bombs dropped were hopeless measures of merit and the critical airfields north of Hanoi were off-limit for political reasons, thereby allowing MiGs and critical surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites sanctuaries. Although Horner accepts that there are always legitimate higher priorities than your master air campaign plan, and that the military strategy had to be devised in order not to provoke the Soviet Union and China into war, he argues that it was mere stupidity not to attack the SA-2s that were overtly brought in by train from China and ships from the Soviet Union. The Americans were not allowed to attack SA-2s that were being set up, or MiGs that prepared for take-off, unless they were fired at first. Horner also faults the generals for having conducted the war inadequately and for not having stood up to their political masters. On the lower levels of war he argues that there were unhealthy rivalries between

commands and services, where one of the consequences was the Route Package system wherein no single commander had the overall responsibility for air assets. The U.S. forces were consequently not mutually supportive, much of the tactics did not make sense and 'the enemy could easily take advantage of the split in U.S. forces'.[2] To cite one example on failed tactics, Horner argues that there was a belief in 1965 that SAMs were 100% effective. Consequently they had to avoid the radar detection zone, but the Strategic Air Command's doctrine subscribed that the large numbers of jets had to fly in trail over the target – 'bomber stream tactics'. The result was that the anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) proved far more lethal to low-level flying than the SAMs did in the first place. Additionally, as long as the Americans had to follow a scripted plan they were not only predictable to the North Vietnamese, but easy targets – 'ducks in a row'. Only when tactics were changed and the combined effect of the Wild Weasel and Electronic Counter Measure (ECM) Pods were introduced during his second tour to Vietnam did the SAM threat become manageable. Horner uses strong words in describing his hatred for the generals, admirals and politicians who were responsible for the loss of some 58,000 American lives in a conflict that resulted in several million being killed:

> If I had to be a killer, I wanted to know why I was killing; and the facts didn't match the rhetoric coming out of Washington… They just did not know what they wanted to do… they came up with strategies almost on a day-to-day basis… Our generals were bad news…I hated my own generals because they covered up their own gutless inability to stand up to the political masters in Washington… We taught our enemy to endure air attacks, we taught our enemy how to best defend against the world's greatest air power, and we taught our enemy how to defeat us in the end… I lied… I stripped myself of integrity… I learned that you cannot trust America… The result was that we were living a lie and had lost our pride… The policy of Vietnamization was a sham… We had become a Communist nation within the very organization that was to protect our nation from the threat of communism.[3]

Although some of these lessons have become compulsory reading in air power courses they are important as they shaped the mindset and focus that Horner brought with him when he prepared and led the air campaign in 1991. The first part of the book shows how the concepts of air power developed in Horner's mind.

In the aftermath of Vietnam the U.S. military went through several reforms in order to improve their training, technology and concepts of operations. Horner shows his disgust for the so-called 'Management Computation System' and praise for the exercise programmes that aimed at training the way you planned to fight. By the mid 1970s the USAF started to focus on the enemy actions and on 'time' as war-winning factors, rather than scripted combat orders and procedures. Both 'Aggressor Training' and 'Red Flag' were exercises in dealing with Soviet tactics and doctrine that derived from the so-called 'Fighter Mafia', a party to which Horner belonged. The group believed that the Cold War paradigm of air power solely as a bomber force with nuclear weapons did not account for what air power could do as a *war-fighting* and *war-supporting* instrument. This period witnessed the introduction of the F-15 and the lighter and more manoeuvrable F-16, Horner's favourite aircraft.

Although these initiatives were important in reforming the USAF and bringing it out of the doctrinal doldrums of the Vietnam era, Horner stresses that motivation and sound leadership represents the cradle of productivity and success. He argues that the growing discipline, pride and belief in one's own profession came with individuals such

as Generals Bill Kirk (Ninth Air Force Commander) and Wilber Creech. With the latter appointed commander of the Tactical Air Command (TAC) in 1978 truth, honesty and operational efficiency came together and gradually the air power dictum of 'centralised control and decentralised execution' was implemented. The implications of the authors' observations are that the USAF witnessed the redemption from the Vietnam mistakes as it systematically sought to mitigate its shortcomings. When dedicated generalship was combined with the huge investments in military assets during the Carter and Reagan administrations the USAF came of age with the liberation of Kuwait. Horner argues that they 'had to learn how to be an Air Force all over again', and in that process the two elements – the intellectual and the material – complemented one another.

PREPARING FOR BATTLE

In the second part of the book Horner takes the reader into the personalities and intricacies of the US military command during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. As commander of the Ninth Air Force and Central Command Air Force (CENTAF) he was General Schwarzkopf's air component commander in the Gulf region. While much has already been written about the early days of the crisis, Horner argues that there are two aspects that are imperative to understand the success of the air campaign. The first is personal relations and trust between commanders. Horner had gone to the National War College together with General Colin Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Lieutenant General John Yeosack, CENTCOM's ground component commander, from August 1975 to June 1976. Additionally, the co-operation with the other component commanders during the crisis over Kuwait, Major General Walter Boomer and Vice Admiral Stan Arthur, worked superbly: 'Unless you understand our relationships, then you really won't understand what went on in Desert Storm, all the good and bad – and there was plenty of each'.[4] Horner also managed to get good working and personal relationships with several Arab military leaders, such as the commander of the Saudi Arabian Air Force, General Ahmed Behery, throughout the three years he had been assigned to the region.

The second imperative in understanding the success of the 1991 air campaign according to the authors is the concepts of operations that Horner introduced to Schwarzkopf in April 1990 in preparation for Exercise Internal Look – a mock war against 'Country Orange' (Iraq). The air campaign planning did as such start well over a year before 2 August 1990, when Powell and Schwarzkopf acknowledged that the Americans were no longer fighting the Russians and that they had to plan for regional contingency in which Iraq was perceived as the main aggressor. In his briefing to Schwarzkopf Horner emphasised what he thought was important in order for air power to be effective. Firstly, he stressed that there should be a single air component commander so that all air assets were integrated into an overall war plan rather than operating with separate areas of responsibilities for the different services, as had been the case with 'Rout Packs' in Vietnam. Secondly, Horner argued that it was unnecessary to build a new air defence system in the region since the Saudi Arabian Air Force solution was adequate. The challenge was rather how to integrate American forces with the existing infrastructure and pre-positioned material. Thirdly, Horner talked about defence against the Scuds, and together with Yeosack he argued that the Patriot was a suitable counter measure. Fourthly,

Horner explained how he thought air power could support the Army in a fluid manoeuvre battle, and herein he introduced the concept of Push Close Air Support (Push CAS).[5] Finally, in the event of a chemical threat Horner suggested that several targets deep inside the Iraqi homeland should be attacked either to prevent him from using chemical weapons or in retaliation to prevent further use. Horner's idea was that such an offensive would not be executed if Saddam Hussein was forced to keep his 'chemicals in the barn'.[6] The April briefing was important in several respects, but first and foremost Schwarzkopf came to trust Horner. Although the posture of Internal Look was much more defensive than the actual combat would be, there were several organisational, administrative and logistical matters that were dealt with or tested in July 1990. This would bear fruit a few months later during the real crisis since the main military commanders had the opportunity to work with each other. As history would have it Iraq invaded Kuwait before the new contingency plan (OPLAN 1002-90) was finished, and Schwarzkopf turned to Horner when the CENTCOM joint planning staff (J-3) proved incompetent in briefing an air option to the President at Camp David. Schwarzkopf admitted that he was no expert on air power, but he showed Horner full confidence, and as it turned out he would arguably have a better relationship with Schwarzkopf than the Chief-in-Command (CINC) would have with many of his own Army commanders. Schwarzkopf chose in the end, as Eisenhower and MacArthur had done before him, to use air power to its fullest, even if he had the traditional view that wars are really decided on the ground.[7]

One of the qualities of Chuck Horner is his ability to be pragmatic, to network and provide his leadership with what it needs. He is also impressively observant and known for accepting new ideas as long as he is convinced that it is for the better of the cause. Against this background there has been much speculation to why he did not accept Colonel John A. Warden as part of his team. As it happened, since Horner was busy managing the bed-down in Saudi Arabia in early-mid August 1990, and Schwarzkopf did not trust his own staff in developing an air option, he approached the Air Staff. The response, Instant Thunder, which sought to impose strategic paralysis on Iraq, was developed by Warden's team in 'Checkmate' and presented to Powell, Schwarzkopf and Horner. The former two found it attractive but Horner rejected it summarily. Horner found that Warden was 'very intelligent', 'a brilliant targeteer' and even a 'genius' on some aspects of air power theory, but he found that he was 'difficult to reason with' and that the briefing was flawed in several respects.[8]

In order to understand the dispute one must realise that at the time Horner was faced with 27 Iraqi divisions on the Kuwaiti border of Saudi Arabia and without any ground forces in defence. The stated mission was to defend Saudi Arabia and Horner's major concern was to develop a defensive air campaign plan that could deal with the imminent Iraqi threat. Warden, for his part, believed that if they went directly for key targets in Baghdad the Iraqi ground forces would prove irrelevant. Horner found Warden one-dimensional in his focus on leadership targets in Baghdad and did not find that he could rely on an offensive air campaign alone in coercing the Iraqi leadership to withdraw from Kuwait. Moreover, Horner found that opening the air campaign with a substantial attack on a major Arab capital without having fully tested the new technology of stealth and precision was partly a gamble, because if the precision-guided missiles did not perform well it could jeopardise American-Arab

relations for decades to come. Horner also felt that Warden went too far in his suggestion of degrading Iraqi air bases and its command-and-control structure. In essence the air commander concluded that Warden was too academic, optimistic and broad in his approach to what air power could do rather than consider operational details and account for the non-linear and unscientific reality of air operations. Finally, Horner did not disagree with Warden that it was preferable to have Saddam Hussein overthrown, but he was not ready to commit to such intent without having the political acumen of conducting the actual replacement. In the end Horner chose to keep some of the ideas, as he decided to establish a strategic planning cell with the mandate of developing an executable offensive option. On balance Warden's effort was the genesis of what became the strategic air campaign, Phase I of Operation Desert Storm, which was subsequently developed by a team led by Lieutenant Colonel David Deptula who became the key air campaign planner in the 'Black Hole'. Deptula made sure that the essence of the strategic focus envisioned in Instant Thunder was upheld throughout the planning, while at the same time incorporating Horner's larger concerns into building the actual attack plans.

THE AIR CAMPAIGN

One of the air power questions that have taken centre stage in the debate after Operation Desert Storm is whether 'strategic bombardment works'.[9] Although there is little consensus on what the term implies, the concept of operations has departed significantly from the images of Dresden and Tokyo during the Second World War. The 'Checkmate' and 'Black Hole' air planners believed that the leadership of Saddam Hussein was the true centre of gravity, and thus all efforts should be brought to bear against his regime through the combination of stealth and precision. Horner argues that the precision attacks against the Iraqi command, control and communication targets in Baghdad were a huge success as far as the military strategy of gaining air supremacy was concerned, but that they failed miserably in disrupting the Iraqi leadership. Horner argues that Americans did not know how to use military power in order to overthrow the regime, and that they failed to understand that the Baath Party and Saddam Hussein could not be considered as one entity. He argues that the 'mirror imaging' failed to understand the nature of a regime governed through fear:

> *The American planners failed to change the government of Iraq, because they did not understand how the government operated, and therefore how to attack it. They did not understand that Saddam stayed in power by creating an aura of crisis that caused his people to need him more than they needed change. The fear that motivated the average Iraqi citizen's loyalty to Saddam was beyond their comprehension, because they had never experienced life under a repressive regime. They did not understand that they needed to target the fear, and that they did not have either the smarts or the intelligence analysis to destroy the hold of fear on the Iraqi people. They did not understand that the bombing of Iraq ensured that hold was increased and not decreased.*[10]

Although many of these observations are valid one has to take issue with Horner's condemnation of this aspect of the strategic air campaign. It was never a declared objective to overthrow the Iraqi regime, and although a number of air planners hoped that the Iraqi leader would get killed, there was never a targeting focus that amounted to a 'hunt for Saddam Hussein'. The objective was to incapacitate rather than decapitate, and to state that one aspect of

an overall effort 'failed miserably' for not having achieved an objective that was not declared is seemingly unfair. Moreover, as it turned out, a significant number of Iraqis deserted and defected, and an unprecedented uprising against the Iraqi regime took place in the immediate aftermath. What part of the war actually triggered this mass movement is not easy to define, but there is no reason to conclude that the bombing of the Iraqi leadership had nothing to do with this. A considerable number of Iraqis chose to leave Baghdad at the beginning of the bombing, and as these were mainly middle and upper-class citizens it is reasonable to suggest that menace and uncertainty reduced the efficiency of the Iraqi state apparatus. The strategic air campaign ensured fog and friction on the strategic level of war, as Saddam Hussein was forced to operate from second- and third-rate command and control centres in the outskirts of Baghdad. He had to operate in an 'underground' fashion, and some of the Iraqi accounts indicate that the uprising and defection was partly a result of them not knowing whether Saddam Hussein was dead or alive. The Iraqi leader and the Baath Party's lack of presence combined with the fact that any target in Baghdad could be bombed at will may have presented a vulnerability to the Iraqi people that gave them confidence enough to conclude that if they rebelled they would be on the winning side. To argue that the disruption of the command, control and communication system was reasonably successful while the bombing of government buildings proved ineffective could be contested, since leadership and command, control and communication can be considered part and parcel. Furthermore, there is a good chance of a lucky strike when one goes for the core of an enemy's instruments of power, and as long as the leadership targets were visited by only a few per cent of the overall bombing tonnage one might suggest that it is worthwhile. Indeed, one might argue that not bombing regime targets could be perceived as lack of resolve from both parties. Finally, interviews with Iraqis indicate that Saddam Hussein has never been as weak as he was during the *Intifada* of March and April 1991, and thus only marginal efforts would have been required by the Coalition to overthrow the Iraqi leader at the time.[11] It is immensely difficult to assess the effectiveness of the strategic air campaign, but there is good reason to believe that Phase I contributed to the Iraqi regime being incapable of functioning as a strategic entity and consequently the Iraqi strategy was undermined.

Horner can to a much larger degree identify with Phase III of Operation Desert Storm, the unprecedented offensive air campaign against Iraqi troops occupying Kuwait. The objective was to prepare and partly destroy the battlefield so the Coalition ground forces would meet as little resistance as possible in their endeavour. The campaign was a huge success by most standards of measure, and as Horner goes into the actual execution one can derive several tactical imperatives that had operational significance. The A-10 is much praised for its role in deep-interdiction and reconnaissance, but Horner argues that it took so many hits from the Republican Guard forces that it had to concentrate on the less capable Iraqi troops on the front line. Secondly, much praise was given to the F-16 killer scout operations, the Push CAS system and F-111s and F-15Es ability to hit tanks at will – the so-called 'tank plinking'. Additionally, the 'shelter-busting' proved successful, and so did the use of cockpit videotape as a source of intelligence. Combat Search and Rescue is, however, a role that Horner finds inadequately handled and urges future commanders to consider seriously. Horner also provides a brief account of the ground battle and air power's support of the ground commander's scheme of manoeuvre. Although

Horner secretly hoped that Saddam Hussein would surrender without a ground battle he showed 100% commitment in supporting the army endeavour. After the successful conclusion he would of course use every opportunity to refer to the ground war as the 10% war since it amounted to only 100 hours of battle as opposed to 1,000 hours of air operations.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

General Horner would have been fully capable of writing this book on his own, but he chose to write it together with Tom Clancy. The style does naturally reflect this, at the expense of being more scholarly or academically narrated, but Horner's choice was considered closely: 'I wanted to tell the story about air power, but I didn't want to lecture people. Let the story come out of the anecdotes. The other thing I wanted to do was create some romance, some passion about things that go on in the military. So it goes well beyond airplanes and bombs and strategy and national policy'.[12] With this purpose in mind the objective of the book has been achieved and the partnership with Clancy makes sense. There is, however, much more about the history of air power that Horner could have contributed to as a primary and authoritative source, but which is only dealt with in brevity because of the joint venture. An obvious point here would be the running battles between him and the army corps commanders on whether one should target deep or at the front. Another would be the air-ground bickering which resulted in the Republican Guard being allowed to escape to Basra partly because of the restrictive Fire Support Co-ordination Line (FSCL) at the end of the war. As it stands one has to go through a novel-style story telling, and although that is great in some respects, one has to search harder to get to the real heart of Horner's messages. Other than where Horner is directly speaking in his own words it is difficult to know whether we are getting Clancy's or Horner's opinion. While the effect of the Clancy partnership is that the informative discussions reach a wider audience than one would normally find for a book on air power, a point that should not be missed, it also lessens the value of the study as a contribution to historical records and academic research.

One might disagree with some of the authors' conclusions, and one might speculate that Horner exaggerates certain points in order to provoke and force people to think. On balance the book is both interesting and perceptive as it takes the reader through the debacles of Vietnam and the planning, development and implementation of the air campaign, with added assessment of what went well and not so well. The book provides several interesting aspects of the operational art of air power and how, when politics, parochialism and cultural sensitivities are considered, it becomes the art of the possible. The sophisticated and complex world of technology, weaponry and tactics is easily explained, and we get useful insight into the difficulty of running a coalition. The account traces the organisational, technological and doctrinal improvements of the USAF, as air power rose from the misfortune of South East Asia to the victory over Iraq two decades later. It is therefore rather comprehensive as it deals with the implications of that experience, the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 and the conception of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force that resulted in the command system of the 1990s. The book touches upon issues like the problem of rotating personnel, the air tasking order and the challenges in battle damage assessment, in addition to thoughts on how Desert Storm was not a revolution in military affairs, but rather a vindication of the changes that had occurred in technology prior to and during the Reagan administration. We also get to see the human and emotional

side of the air commander. We are told that he is deeply religious, that he experienced near death in 1962, how he helped a Vietnamese family settle in the United States and how he felt personal responsibility for pilots who died under his command. He talks about the importance of family and friends, and these serious considerations are further entwined with humorous anecdotes, sharp critique and praise of colleagues, insight into the Arab culture, and perceptive thoughts on tactical and operational issues. Horner tells us about his daily concerns during his command and how he managed chaos, and importantly one gets a picture of how important logistics and organisation matters are in succeeding with air power. Although as a fighter pilot he could have maintained a focus on the sharp end of combat he chooses to provide a rather exhaustive view of what air power is in its widest sense. The way Horner contextualises air power from first hand experience is an important contribution to the available literature on both air power and the Gulf War. Horner is blunt and honest in his conclusions on what air power can and cannot do, and some readers will certainly disagree with the Airman's view, but Horner would not want it any other way as he does not claim to have all the answers.

NOTES

1 Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Air Power*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 238.

2 Tom Clancy with General Chuck Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, (G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 1999), p. 88.

3 Tom Clancy with General Chuck Horner, *Every Man a Tiger,* pp. 96-98 and 156.

4 'Ten years after', *United States Naval Institute, Proceedings*, January 2001.

5 Push CAS: 'aircraft would be designated for CAS, but where, how, and when they would be used would be determined 'on the run' by events in the field'. Tom Clancy with General Chuck Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, p. 21.

6 Lieutenant General Charles A. Horner, interview with Lieutenant Colonels Suzanne Gehri and Richard Reynolds, 'The Desert Story Collection', 2 December 1991, p. 6.

7 Richard P. Hallion, correspondence with author, 23 February 2001.

8 See also Tom Clancy, *Fighter Wing: A Guided Tour of an Air Force Combat Wing*, (New York: Berkley Books, 1995), pp. 35-60.

9 For an account arguing that strategic bombing does not work, see for example Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

10 Tom Clancy with General Chuck Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, p. 374.

11 Captain John Andreas Olsen, 'Operation Desert Storm: An Examination of the Strategic Air Campaign', Ph.D. submitted to De Montfort University, March 2000.

12 Interview with Jamie Allen, CNN Interactive Senior Writer, 'Tom Clancy, General Chuck Horner return to Desert Storm', www.cnn.com/books/news/9905/12/clancy.horner/~hsindex.html

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