

Book Review



Gulf War, The Complete History, by Thomas Houlahan, Schrenker Military Publishing, New London, New Hampshire, 1999, 471 pages, list \$21.00 (paperback). The book is available online from Amazon.com.

In this unusual book, the author has produced a comprehensive combined-arms account that includes the significant but largely unknown contributions of our British, French and Arab allies. The focus of the narrative is on the battalion and brigade levels, where real-time synchronization of combat power actually occurs. The book presents significantly more information than has been available on the Iraqis, including a good order of battle and their actions during the war. Many diagrams and maps help clarify the text. The thoroughness of the author's research has produced a balance that many military history accounts lack. In the process, the author has created a cogent analysis of why the coalition succeeded and the Iraqis did not.

The extent of the coalition's operational victory over the Iraqi Army in the Gulf War has created a myth that has obscured many of the tactical challenges that coalition soldiers had to overcome to achieve success. By interviewing many of the key participants in Operation Desert Storm (the list is more than eight pages long), the author was able to strip away much of the myth that has grown up around the Gulf War. For example, air power knocked out only about 600 Iraqi armored vehicles, not the 2,600 claimed by coalition air forces. Two of the three heavy divisions in the Republican Guard were destroyed (the other withdrew from the theatre of operations to avoid the ground war), and an additional three motorized divisions and one "commando" division were destroyed. Media hype aside, the Republican Guard still has not recovered from the severe mauling inflicted by American and British units during the ground war.

The contributions of combat engineers often are forgotten in military histories. Accounts by general officers paint with broad brushstrokes, while first-person accounts by individuals on the ground lack a tactical perspective and omit the less glamorous work of the sappers. Refreshingly, combat-engineer issues are well represented in this narrative, as shown by the following examples:

- Detailed accounts of major breaching operations conducted by the Marines, VII Corps, and the Arabs of the coalition, including many detailed sketches and photos.
- Information about the remarkable effectiveness of Iraqi field fortifications and decoys against the coalition air forces' sensors and munitions.
- Information on the first use of scatterable mines (primarily GATOR) by the United States since the Vietnam War.
- The casualties and delays caused by our (U.S.) unexploded submunitions that littered the battlefield. The Army has not yet adequately addressed this problem.
- A detailed analysis of all known fratricide incidents, including two that involved combat engineers.
- A description of what is probably the CEV's last close combat action at Al Bussayyah, where 20 rounds fired from its demo gun destroyed 19 heavily fortified buildings.

The author also provides a remarkably detailed accounting of casualties on both sides as well as their causes, allowing readers to assess the relative effectiveness of various weapons.

Combat engineers should find this book to be fascinating reading. It is recommended to all combat arms leaders.

Major William C. Schneck is Commander, 276th Combat Engineer Battalion, Virginia Army National Guard. His e-mail address is: wschneck@NVL.Army.mil