

Post Mortem

by Robert C. Whitten

"A general who sees with the eyes of others will never be able to command an army as it should be."

—Napoleon I

The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf
by Michael R. Gordon and
Bernard E. Traynor
Boston: Little, Brown; 551 pp., \$27.95

In Senate hearings in 1991, General Al Gray, the Marine Corps Commandant, was asked to describe the role of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1987 mandating "jointness," or the operational integration of the Armed Forces, in the Persian Gulf War. He answered that it had played no role. Republican Senator John Warner interrupted, "I don't think you understood the question. Let me rephrase it for you." Gray replied that he had understood the question perfectly. "Goldwater-Nichols played no role." His answer was both true and false, true in that the act was not significant with respect to jointness, false given that Goldwater-Nichols elevated the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff above the heretofore "first among equals." The authors of *The Generals' War*—respectively, defense correspondent for the *New York Times* and director of National Security Programs at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard—make clear the absence of jointness, and also the flawed performance of the then-chairman of the JCS, General Colin Powell, to whom Goldwater-Nichols assigned the dominant role in the war.

In fact, the concept of jointness was and to a large extent still is submerged in

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accept its sister sea service, the Marine Corps. In contrast, the Marine Corps was a fully integrated team with its ground force, air force, and logistics units working as equals. To point up the lack of integration within the Air Force, the authors cite the refusal of the tactical air wings based in Terrejon, Spain, to provide messing and berthing facilities for Military Airlift Command (MAC) transports flying troops and war materials to the Gulf. Similar considerations applied to the various arms of both the Army and the Navy. It is not surprising, then, that the services found it difficult to work and fight in cooperation with each other. Quite apart from their being disjointed, the services were spooked by the Vietnam experience.

The events that led to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, were not particularly complex. The 1980-88 war with Iran had been disastrously expensive, leaving Iraq heavily in debt despite its great oil revenues. The poorly defended emirate to the south with its vast oil fields, some of which lay in disputed territory, was an inviting target. Once in position, the armed forces of Saddam Hussein were able to subjugate Kuwait within a few days.

Previously, the Bush administration had viewed, and to some degree courted, Saddam Hussein as a counterweight to the Iranian mullahs. Bush appointed the career diplomat and Middle East expert April Glaspie as ambassador to Iraq with a charge to continue conciliatory efforts. The attitude of the Bush administration was ambiguous right up to the onset of hostilities: it wanted to court Saddam Hussein as a counterweight to Iran, but it did not wish to see him expand beyond his current borders. When military in-

the service cultures. The Air Force, the first of the Armed Forces to take major offensive action against the Iraqis, was still dominated by the theories of Douhet and Mitchell 70 years and several wars after their origin. The Air Force leaders, both military and civilian, saw the conflict as a golden opportunity for the service to emerge from the war as the "senior service," winning without assistance from the ground or naval forces. Like the Air Force, the Navy, dominated as it was by carrier admirals, had little interest in jointness; unlike the Air Force, it did not even bother with going through the motions although it did (reluctantly)

telligence reported the Iraqi buildup on the border with Kuwait, the Bush administration discounted it. Without a coherent response to the invasion, the administration was simultaneously pulled in several directions. Secretary of Defense Cheney wanted to expel the Iraqis from Kuwait as soon as possible, while General Colin Powell had been reluctant to send even deterrent forces. The State Department proved to be as bellicose as Cheney. Secretary of State James Baker and his staff advocated the use of force, a position that was strengthened by the support of British prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

Within a few days, Washington had settled on expulsion; peacefully if possible, by force if necessary. The question was "How?" The Persian Gulf was halfway around the world from the Eastern Coast of the United States, and more than halfway from the West Coast. Vast air and sea lifts would be essential. While the former were easily accomplished, long-standing neglect of the merchant marine, both ships and sailors, had left the nation with a weakened capacity to move heavy forces to the Gulf. The reserve fleet was elderly and unreliable, and the engineers qualified to operate the steam propulsion plants were elderly too; one recalled chief engineer was 84! Despite the Reagan military buildup, the Pentagon had neglected both logistics and mine warfare. In the authors' words, "The Pentagon acted like a bachelor who forgot to pay his electric bill." That an enormous buildup of ground forces would be required was gospel to the Army chiefs, who had been impressed by Iraqi military prowess during the Iran-Iraq War. So great, indeed, was their awe that even after the Marines punctured the myth at the battle of Khafji, they refused to take notice. The ghosts of Vietnam were apparently haunting during the Army's operations in the Gulf. The war would be prosecuted by the Central Command (CENTCOM), a unified command under a Commander-in-Chief (in this case, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, U.S. Army), who would in theory report directly to the Secretary of Defense but in reality to Colin Powell. Prior to the Gulf War, CENTCOM, which covered the Middle East and Southwest Asia (except Israel), had been a "backwater" command. Indeed, the Pentagon had intended to abolish it. Schwarzkopf was appointed C-in-C only upon the insis-

tence of General Carl Vuono, Army Chief of Staff. Since CENTCOM was "backwater," Schwarzkopf could do little harm—or so it was thought.

The Air Force would be the first service to attack. The planning team established by Air Force Chief of Staff General Michael Dugan and headed by Colonel John Warden developed a strike priority system that emphasized disruption of the central command, control, and communications, as well as "decapitation" of the leadership, rather than the destruction of the Iraqi military forces. The Air Component Commander, Lieutenant General Charles "Chuck" Horner, objected and sent the team home, replacing it with another headed by Brigadier General Buster Glosson. Glosson, however, did not object to Warden's approach. He wanted to "go to Baghdad," and merely reworked the strategy.

In order to make the strikes effective with minimal losses, the Iraqi air defense system would have to be taken out. This system, called "Kari" (Iraq spelled backward in French), was of French design (Thomson CSF) and quite sophisticated. The Air Force found that it was vulnerable to low-level attack and to antiradiation missiles. Suppressing it would not be difficult if sufficient drones could be found to activate the system during the air attack phase. Border radar stations would be destroyed by Army helicopters. To develop strategy for the ground campaign, Schwarzkopf established a special isolated staff under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel James Purvis. The staff, which called itself "the Jedi Knights," contained no Marine officers although it did have a British representative assigned to it. The absence of Marines was to have a profound influence on combat operations. There was a justifiable concern over both the competence and the good will of the Saudi army. The Saudi attitude toward cooperation was a constant source of friction and irritation. In fact, the leaders of the French light division assigned to work with the Saudis swallowed their pride and asked to be placed under American command in the XVIII Corps. Meanwhile, the Marines were developing their own attack plans quite independently of Schwarzkopf's staff.

The attack plan included two phases. First, the air war was to destroy or suppress air defenses, then decapitate the leadership and its command and control

system, eliminate weapons of mass destruction, and disrupt the economy. In the second phase, the ground forces would attack, the Marines holding the Iraqis in Kuwait while VII and XVIII Corps circled behind the Republican Guard and, in the words of Colin Powell, "cut it off and kill[ed] it." The failure fully to attain any of these objectives, and the reason for this failure, form the body of the book.

In the opening hours of the air war, a vast armada of aircraft took to the skies: B-52's from the continental United States and tankers to refuel them, F-117 stealth aircraft and F-15's from Saudi bases, carrier-based F/A-18's and A-6 attack aircraft, Army Pavelev helicopters to take out the border radars, and the Navy's sea-launched Tomahawk cruise missiles. The hunt for Scud missiles that were designed to deliver Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was completely unsuccessful, contrary to Air Force claims. While the air attack was proceeding and the ground forces were still training, the Iraqis attacked what they thought was a weak link in the coalition defenses—the Saudi army deployed near the coastal highway. The attack was initially successful. It routed the Saudis, nearly overran marine outposts to the west, and led to the capture of the town of Khafji. When the Marines counterattacked, using a combination of air and ground forces, the Iraqis fled. In fact, they showed so little taste for combat that the commander of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, Lieutenant General Walter Boomer, quickly became convinced that the Iraqi army was "hollow." Boomer sent a complete action report to Schwarzkopf's staff, but the message was disregarded, despite the presence of a Marine general as Chief of Staff. Failure to appreciate the Khafji battle profoundly influenced the course of the war.

The poor condition of the Iraqi troops was evident even before the air phase had ended. Thousands of Iraqis, including senior officers, surrendered whenever they saw an opportunity. Others deserted. Of the 10,000 man Hammurabi Division of the Republican Guard, 5,000 had deserted and 400 were casualties on "G-Day." Moreover, the Iraqis never picked up changes in the coalition deployment. They could not navigate in the open desert and assumed that the coalition forces could not either. Nevertheless, the coalition high command

drew no inferences concerning the disposition of the Iraqi army and its low morale. The plan (if one can call it that) adopted by the coalition would, in fact, make it extremely difficult to “close the door” on escaping Iraqi forces.

Contrary to the demands of a sound strategy, which would have held as many Iraqis in Kuwait as possible, the Marines led the attack. Using ingenuity to penetrate rapidly the Iraqi defenses in Kuwait, they drove to Kuwait City in three days, foiling an attempt by the aggressive commander of the Iraqi III Corps to hit them on the flank through a screen of smoke from burning oil wells. In contrast to the rapid forward movement of the Marines, the Army’s VII Corps—a clanking armored monster, something out of *Jurassic Park* in configuration and tactics, and designed to counter a Soviet thrust through the Fulda Gap in “the war that never was”—would require seven to ten days to take out the Republican Guard. Moreover, the Corps would not fight at night despite the overwhelming technological advantage for night-fighting held by the U.S. Army. Schwarzkopf exploded when he learned of the delay, but did little to goad its commander, Lieutenant General Frederick Franks. Meanwhile, XVIII Corps raced ahead. The commander, Lieutenant General Gary Lucks, had split his forces. To the west, the 82nd Airborne Division and the (light) 6th French Division raced across the desert while the 101st Airborne and Major General Barry McCaffery’s 34th Mechanized Infantry Division charged between them and XVIII Corps.

The end of the third day of the ground war thus found the Marines at the gates to Kuwait City, XVIII Corps in a position to cross the Euphrates and cut off all the escape routes of the Iraqis, but the mighty VII Corps lagging far behind,

“killing gnats with sledge hammers.” By this time the Bush administration, prodded by Colin Powell, had begun to think of terminating the war. Incredibly, *no plans* had been laid for ending the war. Powell himself seems to have been concerned only with restoring the Army’s honor after the debacle of Vietnam. Not only did he wish a crushing victory, but he wanted to avoid a high number of Iraqi casualties. Optimistic reports from Schwarzkopf combined with the Powell “spin” persuaded President Bush to end the war at the 100 hour (four day) mark. Asked how he felt about this more or less arbitrary decision, Bush replied that he was uneasy. Whatever one may think of George Bush, it must be conceded that his World War II experiences as a Navy bomber pilot had made him wary of “quick fixes” in war. Nevertheless, Vietnam had affected him too; he would not overrule his commander in the field.

What is one to make of all this? Is the story of the Gulf War presented by Gordon and Traynor reliable? In the June 1993 issue of *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, Colonel John Burton, USAF-Retired, published an article, “Pushing Them Out the Back Door” (later included as an appendix in his book *The Pentagon Wars*), which suggested the broad outline of *The Generals’ War*. A flurry of dissenting “comments” from the Army failed to dent Burton’s thesis. Indeed, Burton’s account is quite consistent with Gordon’s and Traynor’s where the two overlap, and both are consistent with Bob Woodward’s version, presented in *The Commanders*.

If one accepts the Gordon and Traynor version of the Gulf War (as this reviewer does), one is led to several inescapable conclusions. First, each service followed the Sinatra method—by doing things “its way.” Jointness was an illusion created by the high command and the Pentagon; it never existed in the Gulf War. And one wonders what Schwarzkopf’s Chief of Staff, Marine Major General Robert Johnston, was doing during the planning process. He obviously knew the Marines, yet never implanted their mode of warfare on the collective mind of the staff. Was he, as many officers were, cowed by Schwarzkopf?

Second, while the air war was critical to the outcome, it alone did not win the conflict, as was shown by an independent Air Force survey. The Marines also engaged in self-criticism, but the Army

refused to do so. Instead, it denied the importance of the air attack on the Republican Guard, and promoted Franks to four stars and the important Training and Doctrine Command.

Third, American technology simply overwhelmed the Iraqis, more than compensating for the mistakes of the coalition commanders.

Fourth, the only members of the coalition who contributed substantial forces to the war effort were the British and the French. The British 1st Armored Division under Major General Rupert Smith and the French 6th Division were hard-charging units largely (but not entirely) integrated into the American command system.

Fifth, the importance of the prepositioned large stocks of military supplies and the construction of military facilities, especially airfields, cannot be overemphasized. It is most unlikely that such favorable conditions could exist anywhere else outside Western Europe and North America.

Sixth, while the Goldwater-Nichols Act did not advance the cause of “jointness” during the Gulf War, it did confer enormous authority on the chairman of the JCS, thus contradicting the rule of civilian control of the armed forces (a consideration given little if any notice by the national press).

Seven, the war in Vietnam, looming in the background, influenced all of the American commanders up to the Commander-in-Chief himself. In an odd and undoubtedly unintended way, Robert S. McNamara’s *In Retrospect* is a timely contribution to national security as the United States revises its national security system. The micromanagement characteristic of McNamara’s prosecution of the Vietnam War stands in counterpoint to George Bush’s propensity to take the opposite tack. The extremes of micromanagement and over-loose control by the civilian authorities must be avoided in future conflicts.

Eight, Colin Powell deserves criticism for his obsession with recovering the Army’s honor at the expense of national interests (the two do not always coincide). Indeed, Powell’s narrow focus argues against his fitness for the presidency—and the job of commander-in-chief. Schwarzkopf, on the other hand, apparently promoted far above his level of competence, may have been, in the immortal words of W.S. Gilbert, “the very model of a modern major general.”

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Up From Television

by The Reverend Ian Boyd

"I came to cast fire upon earth; and would that it were already kindled!"

—Luke 12:29

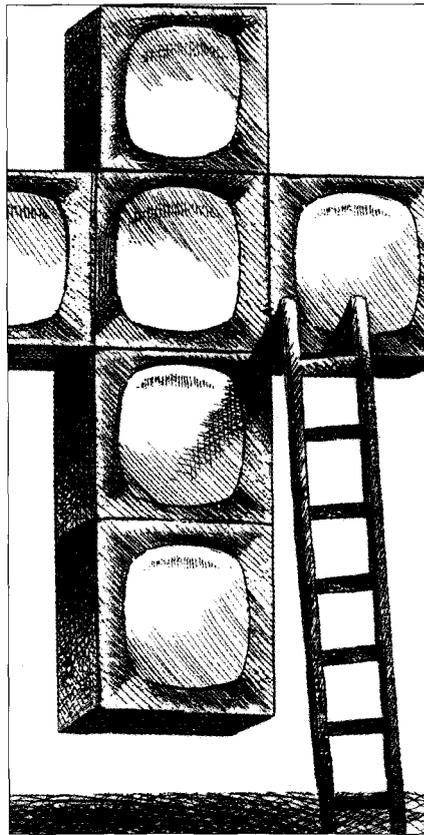
Crossing the Threshold of Hope

by His Holiness John Paul II
New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
229 pp., \$20.00

In order to mark the 15th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's election to the Papacy, Italian Radio and Television commissioned Vittorio Messori to conduct a live television interview with the Pope. It must have seemed a good idea at the time. Vittorio Messori is the author of a number of books and articles; but outside Italy, he is best known for the *Ratzinger Report*, a very readable account of a series of conversations with Cardinal Ratzinger. When that book appeared, some of the people who admired Cardinal Ratzinger most expressed misgivings about his taking part in such a project. No doubt the opinions of the man entrusted with safeguarding moral and doctrinal orthodoxy within the Catholic Church were matters of keen interest to people who read journalism, but was it really wise for the Head of the Holy Office to share his private thoughts with the world? He was the spokesman for a tradition. Did not the very format of an interview, with its emphasis on personality, encourage the false notion that his pronouncements somehow depended on his own background and personal idiosyncrasies? Nevertheless, the book was full of good things, and it deserved to be an international best-seller.

Ten years later, it would certainly have been a *coup* if Signor Messori had been able to repeat his success by interviewing not a distinguished Curial Cardinal, but the Pope himself. At first, everything seemed to favor the project. Dr. Joaquin Navarro-Valls, the Vatican Press Secretary and Opus Dei notable, was said to be one of its staunchest supporters. Admittedly, the program would not be quite what it seemed. Questions were pre-

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pared and sent to the Pope, so that he would have an opportunity to consider what he would say before the live interview took place.

In the end, however, there was no interview. According to Messori's own somewhat vague explanation, the Pope's "many obligations" prevented his participation in the interview. It looks as though someone had second thoughts about the television program. At this point, an alternative arrangement was suggested. Unable or unwilling to respond to the journalist in person, the Pope offered to send him written answers to his questions, answers which he would write during the brief moments when he was free from the obligations of what must truly be a busy schedule. *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* is the record of the Pope's answers to the journalist's questions, the written word substituted for the television word.

Everything disappointing about the book can be blamed on what it owes to the format of the failed TV program.

The questions, for the most part, are unctuous and vague, and it is difficult to discover any logical order to the topics that they raise. Beginning with questions about the meaning of the Papacy and some standard questions about proofs for the existence of God, the centrality of salvation, and the meaning of evil, the questions then veer towards such topics as "Why are there so many religions?" and the Pope's views about Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism, only to end, in the final and most interesting part of the book, with a hodgepodge of questions about everything from the fall of communism to the reality of hell.

From the nature of the book, there is of course no opportunity to develop a line of thought beyond the original answers that the Pope provides, since there are no follow-up questions. On the other hand, in the preface, Messori admits to having *added* questions to the final text of the book. Since these additional questions are never identified, the reader can only guess whether a particular question that the Pope seems to be answering is one that he has ever been asked. In a sense, it does not really matter. Much of what is best about the book comes from the Pope's efforts to transcend the format imposed on him by the stilted questions. Like the university lecturer he once was, he will correct a clumsy question or challenge the assumptions on which a question is based, or even anticipate the sort of question that a slow student might not have the courage to ask. It is appropriate, therefore, that some of the banal questions he answers should turn out never to have been asked. Trying to guess which ones they are adds an element of fun to an interview that, understandably, is not notable for its humor.

But if there is little humor in this book, there is a good deal of cheerfulness. One of the themes running through the Pope's reflections, like a golden thread, is a strong affirmation of the reality of joy. He describes his first Encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis*