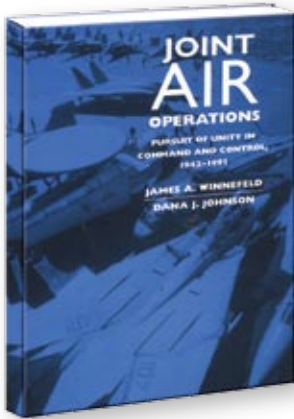


# BOOK REVIEW



## JOINT AIR OPERATIONS:

### PURSUIT OF UNITY IN COMMAND AND CONTROL

**BY JAMES A. WINNEFELD  
AND DANA J. JOHNSON**

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Review by Major William March

Most students of military and political history would agree that air power is an important element of national power, especially in time of crisis or war. As such, it behoves the employers of air power to ensure that it is used efficiently and effectively in the interests of the nation. Given the intricacies of air power and its reliance on complex technologies and organizational constructs, this task would be difficult at the best of times. However, if the elements of air power are scattered amongst the different military services of a nation, such as they are within the United States (US), then the difficulties associated with applying air power are exacerbated. Joint air operations, or those missions involving the air elements of two or more military services, are perhaps the type of military undertaking most fraught with the potential for failure as different training, equipment and doctrine compete for primacy over the battlefield. As the authors argue in *Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control*, the one critical factor that can make sense out of the joint dynamic is a unity of command and control.

Published in 1993, the origins of this book stem from a RAND study undertaken in the aftermath of the first Gulf War. The Allied victory over Iraqi forces was absolute and, as

the authors argue, for the first time in American history, the United States services approached unity of command and control in joint air operations. However, even as the victors celebrated their military achievement, there were already grumblings from within the various services that seemed to call into question how unified the command and control really was. From within the United States Air Force (USAF), the service whose sole purpose is the application of air power, it came to be understood that their strategic vision was somewhat hampered by the need to support the ground war and the less than optimum cooperation from the air elements of the other services. Conversely, the United States Navy (USN) and Marine Corps (USMC) complained that they were relegated to second-tier status and pressured to ignore their ground-support mission respectively. If true, and the authors go to great lengths to provide corroborating evidence, then unified command and control could be viewed as a necessary evil rather than a preferred construct for modern warfare.

The authors hope to avoid this outcome by undertaking a historical analysis of six joint air campaigns: Midway, 1942; Solomon Islands, 1942-1944; Korea, 1950-1953; Vietnam, 1965-1968, Eldorado Canyon (raid on Libya), 1986;

and the First Gulf War, 1990-1991. In their analysis they purposely chose not to include the United States Army due to its rather limited air power role (although it could be argued that the USMC's role is just as limited). In each of the chosen campaigns they focused on four elements, the first of which is evidence of unity of command or, if lacking, a look at how arrangements were put in place to achieve unity of effort. Secondly, the authors looked at how the capabilities of each service were employed in joint planning and operations. Then the command and control arrangement employed was examined with respect to its ability to deal with uncertainty and adversity. Finally, the degree of each service's readiness and tactical compatibility in meeting mission requirements is assessed. The measure of success was determined by the level of unity of effort achieved through the "exercise of operational command (OPCOM) by adherence to common strategic plans and directives, by sound operational and administrative command organization."<sup>1</sup>

The authors, Winnefeld and Johnson, are experienced defence analysts and Winnefeld brings the added insight of being a retired naval aviator with service in Korea and Vietnam. Very quickly they assign the difficulties encountered in seeking unity in command and control at the feet of each service's respective doctrine and experience. Simply put, each service's unique experiences led to the development of service-specific doctrine that served not only to guide the employment of air power in war, but also to promote the organizational survival and pre-eminence of the USAF, USN and, to a lesser degree, the USMC within the peacetime political "battlefield."

Winnefeld and Johnson do not undertake a comprehensive historical study of the chosen campaigns. Instead, they give a cursory overview of events and jump right to their

analysis. Very quickly the reader gets a sense that the success or failure in achieving unity of command and control was directly proportional to the potential for disaster and the extent to which one service dominated the rest. Thus

at Midway, which was for all practical purpose a USN battle, unity of effort was achieved because the USN was the dominant service and defeat would have had serious consequences for the US services.

Therefore, the various air forces were willing to subordinate themselves to naval direction. The Solomon campaign

had a similar construct and, although there was a larger USAF (then the US Army Air Corps) component, the USN still called the shots. Korea and Vietnam were different. Both conflicts were limited in scope and defeat, while serious, would not have had the same dire consequences. Therefore, each service's organizational imperatives took precedence over joint requirements. Eldorado Canyon in 1986 was seen as a throw back to the campaigns of World War II in that unity of effort was achieved because one service, again the USN, was placed in overall command.

Winnefeld and Johnson point to the Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (also known as the Goldwater-Nichols Act) as the turning point in joint cooperation. This document empowered the commanders of US Unified Commands (basically joint commands) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in areas of resource allocation, planning and operations. These new powers came at the expense of the service chiefs. In effect, not only were service chiefs forced to live and operate in a "joint world," but officers seeking to advance had to play the "joint game." The First Gulf War was the first true test of this new joint outlook. Despite the success of joint (and coalition) air operations, there was friction within what could be categorized as a USAF dominated

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campaign. USAF procedures and controls, such as use of an air tasking order, were imposed on the battlespace and the USN and USMC had to conform if they wished to participate. The authors conclude that “what was achieved... was unity of control of air operations, not unity of command.”<sup>2</sup>

The final chapter is entitled “Lessons Learned, Relearned, and Unlearned” and provides a synopsis of the authors’ analysis as well as some suggestions for improving unity of command and control in joint operations. One of the main points that they make in this chapter is that despite improvements brought about during the crucible of the Gulf War, post-war budget cuts and downsizing appeared to be making institutional survival more important than learning joint lessons. Still, the authors provided a list of nine “guidelines” born in the experience of the Gulf War that may improve unity of command and control. Many of these guidelines, such as an increase in joint doctrine, less rigid application of service doctrine and more opportunities to conduct joint exercises, have been implemented.

Although this book was published 15 years ago the information contained therein is still relevant. Certainly it should come as no surprise that within joint air operations the move towards unity of command and control has been evolutionary rather than revolutionary. What is more surprising is how quickly lessons and procedures learned in war are forgotten during long periods of relative peace—especially when institutional survival is threatened by budget pressures. As well, it is interesting to note that service-specific doctrine needed to be balanced with not only joint doctrine, but cemented with increased opportunities to exercise the joint doctrine as well. Finally, despite the fact that this book dealt with US air power practitioners, the need to conform to the requirements of their respective service made it difficult to work together.

The points brought forward by Winnefeld and Johnson are applicable to the Canadian Air Force albeit from a slightly different perspective. As we strive to create our own air power

doctrine, we need to ensure that it is done so in conjunction with that of the Army and Navy as well as Canadian joint doctrine. However, we also need to ensure that our air power doctrine incorporates the requirements, while at the same time guiding the development, of the various air communities. It could be argued that the Air Force faces a “joint” demand from both within and without. The Air Force must ensure that budget and political pressures do not allow the perceived need for institutional and organizational self preservation to take precedence over joint operational effectiveness. Last but not least, the Air Force needs to understand the factors that influenced, and continue to influence, US air and joint power doctrine. Not only will this permit us to operate more effectively with our major ally, a better understanding of these factors will allow us, in an age where we seem to be adopting US doctrine as a default setting, to bring home doctrine appropriate for us today and in the future. *Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942 - 1991* is a good start in increasing our understanding of joint air power from an American point of view. ■

**Major William March, a maritime Air Navigator working on unmanned air vehicle concepts and doctrine, has taught Canadian defence and air power history at the undergraduate level. He is currently pursuing his doctorate in War Studies at the Royal Military College.**

## List of Abbreviations

OPCOM	Operational Command
US	United States
USAF	United States Air Force
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USN	United States Navy

## Notes

1. James A. Winnefeld and Dana J. Johnson, *Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942-1991* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 4.

2. *Ibid.*, 140.