

instance he misinterprets a significant study. He says that the 1941 Butt Report showed that two-thirds of Royal Air Force bombers bombed more than 75 miles from their targets while in fact Butt said that aircraft were bombing outside of a five mile radius of the target (an area of 75 square miles). A suspicious reader might conclude that these misinterpretations serve to make Hansen's attack on Harris all the louder.

There is little argument among air power historians that Harris does represent a curious case. Why, as the war was being won so convincingly and as his crews by mid-1944 were capable of better precision accuracy than the Americans, did he continue to insist on area attacks? If Hansen's volume causes us to reflect on this question—and on the morality of war in any form—then it does have a redeeming value for aviators and military professionals. ■

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NO CLEAR FLIGHT PLAN: COUNTERINSURGENCY AND AEROSPACE POWER

EDITED BY JAMES FERGUSSON AND WILLIAM MARCH

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Review by James R. McKay, PhD

The current trend in warfare is land-based asymmetric war waged by non-state actors against large coalitions led by the United States. The use of asymmetric war (in the form of an insurgency) means that the enemy seldom presents itself in a manner convenient for what the aerospace-minded community considers the optimal application of aerospace power. In recent years, aerospace power has often ended up being applied in a supporting role to land-based forces in counter-insurgency operations, namely those of surveillance/reconnaissance or acting as “flying artillery.” To a community that developed as a result of

the belief that aerospace power is best applied decisively (i.e., the means by which a war is won) against a near-peer competitor, this is not an intellectually comfortable position. It strays perilously close to the existential debates of the past. As a result, the potential effects of counter-insurgencies on air forces form an issue that is ignored only at an air force's peril.

This edited anthology of papers is the product of a pair of conferences that occurred in 2007 and sought to explore issues surrounding the effects of the growth of counter-insurgencies on air forces. The two

conferences in question were the Air Force Historical Conference in Toronto and the Third Biennial University of Manitoba's Centre for Defence and Security Studies Aerospace Power Forum in Winnipeg. The editors assembled a series of historical and contemporary papers presented at one or the other conference that address issues of the doctrine and employment of aerospace power in counter-insurgencies. The title is apposite and belies the nature of the problem. Yet one must bear in mind that "Unconventional wars grow because of the peculiar local soil of individual cultures. They are causal reactions to perceived opportunities in political-power struggles or social weaknesses in particular societies. They are not interchangeable..."¹ What may be more uncomfortable is the idea that a "clear flight plan" for counter-insurgency warfare does not exist, and it may not even be useful.

The nature of the papers highlights the problem described in the title rather well. For the sake of brevity, it is not possible to summarize all of the well-crafted and incisive contributions, but some merit particular mention. Tami Davis Biddle's article on service culture and identity within the United States Air Force and Royal Air Force illustrates the issue well by noting that both of those services emerged as potential "tools of first resort" that offered relatively "clean" and "efficient" ways of war. This goes against the complicated and messy grain of counter-insurgencies, where the enemy seldom allows itself to be detected or attacked in clean or efficient manners. William T. Dean III's paper on French air power in small wars is extremely informative, but offers the perspective that air power in that historical experience was best served as

flying artillery. Mark Clodfelter's discussion of Vietnam is worthwhile for its discussion of the applications of air power at the tactical and strategic levels, and his warning that an over-reliance on aerospace power's capacity to strike may even be counterproductive in trying to defeat an insurgency is worth heeding. Yet the most relevant discussion from a contemporary perspective is Robert Owen's paper on structuring air forces for counter-insurgency. He argues that the likelihood of having to fight a counter-insurgency is high, and therefore, it behooves every air force to consider the problems in advance of having to face them. In addition, he argues that counter-insurgencies are not fundamentally different for an air force in that they represent a series of "strike, logistics, and intelligence problems that differ little from those of other conflict types..."² In short, he counsels that the wisest course of action for an air force is to be capable of adapting to a series of potential types of war as opposed to optimizing for any single type of war.

The book is an informative and useful primer on the issues surrounding the application of aerospace power in counter-insurgencies. The combination of historical papers largely based on national experiences in "small wars" and contemporary papers that explore doctrine and its application provides a powerful mix of thought on force employment and force development issues. For this reason, it would be of interest to those studying the phenomenon of insurgency and how to deal with it as well as those currently serving in the Air Force. If nothing else, it allows one to consider the issue of aerospace power's place in counter-insurgencies from a more informed perspective. ■

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NOTES

1. Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato: Presidio, 1986), 53.
2. Robert Owen, "Structuring Global Air Forces for Counterinsurgency Operations," in *No Clear Flight Plan: Counterinsurgency and Aerospace Power*, Silver Dart Canadian Aerospace Studies Volume IV, eds. James Fergusson and William March (Winnipeg: Centre for Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba, 2008), 234.