

VULCAN 607:

THE EPIC STORY OF THE MOST REMARKABLE BRITISH AIR ATTACK SINCE WWII

BY ROWLAND WHITE

UXBRIDGE:
CORGI BOOKS, 2007
523 PAGES ISBN 9780552152297

Review by
Major Andrew B. Godefroy, CD, PhD

With the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Falkland Islands War having recently passed, a number of new books concerning that conflict have appeared. Among the recent releases are a number of publications focused on the air war, including studies of both fleet air arm as well as bomber operations.

In his book *Vulcan 607*, Rowland White traces the stories of the British bomber crews that were formed into the legendary V-Force and assigned to Operation *Black Buck 1*, an ambitious plan to conduct a strategic long-range attack from the Ascension Islands against Argentinean air power capabilities on the occupied Falkland Islands. The prize for the first mission was Port Stanley Airfield, which consisted of two asphalt runways (918 metres and 338 metres respectively) as well as a number of aircraft and other military air assets. The operation itself was no small endeavour, as the target was 3,800 miles away from the nearest friendly airbase and would require no less than four air-to-air refuelling events on the way to the target. At the time, it was one of the longest long-range bombing missions in history, and its later announcement took the world by surprise.

At the centre of White's book is the crew of Vulcan XM607, one of the two bombers

assigned to the first raid. Captained by Flight Lieutenant Martin Withers, XM607 was originally assigned as the reserve aircraft to the mission's primary bomber, XM598 which was captained by Squadron Leader John Reeve. Yet shortly after take-off, Reeve's aircraft developed an unsolvable technical malfunction, and he was forced to return to Wideawake Airfield at Ascension. Withers, the designated backup pilot, would now fly the historical mission.

White's account of the mission is remarkably well presented. He begins by briefly tracing the history and evolution of the Vulcan and Victor aircraft, explaining how their entwined pasts would come together again en route to the South Atlantic. His narrative of the XM607 crew and their colleagues reads like a "Dambusters"¹ tale, and White recounts with great accuracy the difficult and gruelling training to re-master air-to-air refuelling, the technical challenges that occurred, the harrowing night-time voyage to the target, how enemy air defences were avoided at the target and how much of a "near run thing" the whole mission was.

Vulcan 607 is also noteworthy as an in-depth examination of one of the last pre-global positioning system (GPS) era air wars. In 1982, the Vulcan B2s employed in this mission were already considered "last generation," with the oldest aircraft having already banked nearly

22 years of flying. The airframes were not made of stealth materials; there was no simplified GPS navigation. There were no “smart bombs”; however, a later mission did employ AGM-45 Shrike missiles against Argentinean air defences. Vulcan 607 carried twenty-one 1,000-pound general-purpose bombs, struck the Port Stanley Airfield from 10,000 feet and employed its H2S radar to guide the munitions toward their target.

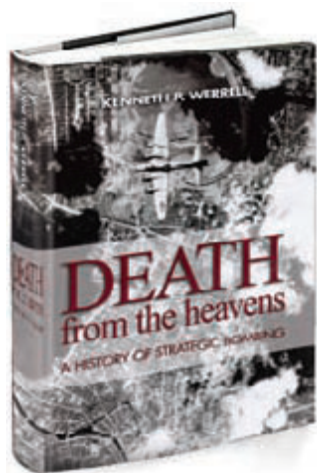
Included with the book are numerous useful maps, diagrams that explain the in-air refuelling plan as well as technical drawings and specifications for the main aircraft involved in the mission. Finally, two full-colour sections of photos give the reader plenty of companion material to consider and enjoy while reading

this history. Overall, very well researched and well supported with firsthand interviews and accounts, White’s *Vulcan 607* makes both an interesting and enjoyable read for those interested in either the Falkland Islands War or the late cold war air power era in general. ■

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Notes

1. The nickname given to the Royal Air Force’s 617 Squadron.



**DEATH FROM THE HEAVENS:
A HISTORY OF STRATEGIC BOMBING**

BY KENNETH P. WERRELL

ANNAPOLIS:
U.S. NAVAL INSTITUTE PRESS, 2009
332 PAGES ISBN 978-1-59114-940-8

Review by
Dr. James R. McKay

D *Death from the Heavens* is another work by the well-known scholar of air power, Dr. Kenneth Werrell. Some of Werrell’s other works include studies on ground-based air defence, air power in the Korean War, cruise missiles and strategic bombing. Werrell graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1960 and flew WB-50 Superfortresses (weather reconnaissance variant) before obtaining his MA and PhD from Duke University.

The book is unusual. First, one would not normally expect the Naval Institute Press to publish a work devoted to a topic that has been the *raison d’être* for the existence of a number of the world’s air forces. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the review. Second, the author stated that this was the result of a career’s worth of research on aviation history with a focus on the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) and United States Air Force (USAF). This could lead one to draw