

## BOOK REVIEW:

# *Havoc 06, A Combat Controller on Operations*

by Troy Knight, with Brooke Strahan

*Big Sky Publishing: Newport, NSW; 2022; 297 pp; ISBN 978-1-922615-6578  
(soft cover);RRP \$26.26*



*Havoc 06* is an autobiography of a former Australian Combat Controller, Troy Knight. A Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Airfield Defence Guard, he sought more adventurous activities than defending military airfields, and found them on combat operations in several theatres around the world.

Combat Controllers are qualified to call in airstrikes in support of troops on the ground. They are deployed with the ground forces and must be able to hold their own in combat. For the air side of their job, they are trained as JTACs (Joint Terminal Air Controllers). However, before training as JTACs, they must pass the Commando qualification course to enable deployment with Special Forces.

*Havoc 06* was Troy Knight's call sign and is the story of his life as an Airfield Defence Guard; a contractor supporting military combat operations; and as a Combat Controller.

Australia's commitment to peacekeeping operations in East Timor encouraged him to enlist in the Army in 1999; however, the recruitment process had considerable delays and instead he joined the RAAF. Troy describes his training in the Air Force, including *recon and sniper* and close personal protection training, his successes and failures, and the maturing process that is intrinsic with military service.

In 2003, his first deployment was to Aceh on disaster relief operations and in the same year he completed a tour in Iraq defending Bagdad International Airport. However, returning to Australia, the peacetime activities of the Air Force failed to satisfy his adventurous streak and he resigned in 2004.

Then followed a period of contracting jobs that took him around the world. The first was back to Iraq as a bodyguard where he survived ambushes and being hit by an IED (Improvised Explosive Device); then anti-piracy operations the Malacca Straits; and finally, as a security manager for a smelting company in Indonesia.

After three years as a contractor, Troy learned of the RAAF's evolving air specialist capability that required selection for the elite Commando training course and in 2008 he applied to rejoin the Air Force, although at that time he was technically still a member of the Air Force Reserve.

He describes the rigours, pain and dangers when undergoing the commando course and the multi-million-dollar training facility used to train the clearing of multi-level houses; broken legs during parachute training, some serious enough to result in discharge from the Service, roping into buildings, and learning to shoot to

meet Special Forces' requirements.

Following completion of the commando course, Troy describes the training requirements to qualify as a JTAC and the high standards set by USAF training teams supervising the embryo combat controllers.

Then followed tours in Afghanistan, training courses in the United States, and further specialist training in Australia.

He describes in vivid detail the adrenalin rush when he stepped from a Blackhawk helicopter onto the battlefield on his first mission in Afghanistan as a Combat Controller. He captures the dangers, confusion and heart stopping moments experienced fighting the Taliban and tasked to destroy heavily defended drug laboratories during operations; the challenges of putting air delivered weapons onto an enemy position on a confused battleground where the location of friendly forces and the enemy are difficult to determine; and the critical decision process as the continued existence of the friendly forces depended on the delivery of air power.

On a personal front he is open about the costs to his personal life. Failed marriages, alcoholism and eventually the recognition of PTSD. He concludes his account with a description of the role of No 4 Squadron based at Williamstown, the residence of Air Force Combat Control. A Squadron whose duties and responsibilities are little known within the RAAF and virtually unknown outside the ADF.

In *Havoc 06* Troy vividly captures the sense of personal danger and the challenges that confront combatants in every battle. In doing so he uses the language of a trooper which is often colourful, earthy and raw, and may confront some readers. However, he has captured the essence of personal involvement in combat.

*Havoc 06* is co-authored by Brooke Strahan, a former member of the ADF, a security consultant and successful author of a series of fiction books that have a large American readership. She agreed to co-author *Havoc 06* when approached by Troy for assistance.

While the book is essentially presented in chronological order, there are some parts where it is difficult to link the sections to retain a sense of orderly progression. This requires some attention by the reader.

That said, *Havoc 06* is a very readable book and will provide strong interest, and possibly education, for a reader of military matters and recent Australian commitment to combat operations.

**Bob Treloar**