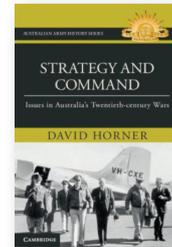


BOOK REVIEW:

Strategy and Command, issues in Australia's Twentieth-century Wars

by David Horner

Cambridge University Press; 2021; 320 pp; ISBN 9781316512371 (hardback); RRP \$49.77



David Horner (DH) is one of Australia's most prolific and eminent military historians, having produced a plethora of articles and books over the last 45 yrs. These include contributions to the official military history series, which allowed him privileged access to primary sources and personnel. DH was a regular infantry officer and commenced his academic odyssey with a thesis on Australia's Strategy in WW2. He also spent time in the Army Reserve and retired as a Colonel.

This book draws on his previous work and provides an important insight into the strategic decisions, and military commanders who shaped the history of the Australian Army from the Boer War to date. It also charts the evolution of the command structure for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) over the period.

DH examines strategic decisions such as whether to go to war, the nature of the forces to be committed to the war, where the forces should be deployed and when to reduce the Australian commitment. Decisions made by commanders at the highest level and passed on to the operational level for implementation are recounted.

The significant role of the Boer War in giving experience to a large percentage of officers who became Brigadiers and Major Generals in WW1 is highlighted; as is the harsh realities of the initial battles that the AIF engaged on the Western Front in 1916. Thankfully, he records the contributions of the Australian Commanders in Palestine as this theatre is often overlooked.

DH's analysis of the interwar period is fascinating as he portrays the insightfulness of the ex AIF Commanders at their February 1920 conference. The machinations over the Singapore Base and the concerns around the credibility of the associated maritime strategy are shown in their true paucity (as are the inter Service rivalries of the time).

The sections covering the evolution of Australia's Strategy in WW2 through a range of political leaders, campaigns, and threats are very well done. He is kinder to Shedden and MacArthur than the historical record warrants, but does appropriately address the significant contribution of Blamey, given the multifaceted challenges he faced. The diversion of the Burma convoy carrying the returning AIF (Australian Imperial Force) Divisions shows Curtin's stalwartness in the face of Churchill's three refusals. Conversely, the floundering in the face of MacArthur's self-serving duplicity, over how the AIF and the war economy were to be optimally balanced post the PNG campaign, showed the immaturity of our strategic processes.

The section on Korea and the occupation of Japan illustrates the utility of this period in shaping the development of the careers of a number of key individuals - Wilton, Daly, Hasset and others; true professionals, who went on to craft the way through the Vietnam War and derive the enhancements required to delivery a truly *joint* approach for

the ADF. Whilst he does mention the Guam Doctrine¹ and the UK withdrawal from East of Suez, the monumental strategic impact of these changes is not brought out.

Whilst the book does have a small section on the Vietnamisation of the war, and the move to draw-down the role (or lack thereof) of the Australian military and government's interaction with the US military/government is only scantily covered. As the book was finalised before the debacle of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the opportunity to draw useful and concerning parallels was forgone. Thus, the key issue of how the Australian government and the ADF implements strategy, whilst dealing with the complexity of being a minor player in a global coalition in the past, and the lessons for the future have only partially been explored in the book.

Similarly, whilst the process of planning for involvement in Afghanistan, Iraqi and Syria is covered, there is minimal focus on the associated strategy. Nor is there hardly any examination of the higher level of integration of Australian staff officers and commanders into US command structures, and the considerable multifaceted benefits that accrued. DH also declines to analyse the *War on Terror* from a holistic perspective, encompassing the combined strategy of conducting concurrent domestic, Asia-Pacific and coalition operations. *i.e.*, what Joint Operations Command (JOC) was conceived for.

The Timor operation is generally well covered and brings out the value of prior CPX (Command Post Exercise) in preparing the Australian DJFHQ (Defence Joint Force HQ) for this challenging task. Whilst DH does examine the rationale for Admiral Barrie's decision to assume direct command, he does not address the negative affects this had on the perception of the role of HQAST (HQ Australian Theatre). Nor does he focus on the current issues with JOC, *i.e.*, how to be properly manned in a crisis (as closing Command and Staff College has been done twice, and directing the students to Bungendore is clearly sub optimal). Similarly, should scarce personnel be optimised by having 'Fly Away' teams from JOC for DJFHQ and COMFLOT², as the UK has implemented?

The book is supported by a list of abbreviations, useful pictures and maps, extensive notes for each chapter as well as a comprehensive Index and Bibliography. Whilst disappointing in parts, this book is a very useful read for anyone interested in Australia's involvement in 20th-century wars.

Ian Wolfe

¹Also known as the Nixon Doctrine, *i.e.*, President Richard Nixon's reaffirmation in 1969 that the United States is committed to the security of Asia and its allies in the region.

²Commodore Flotillas, Royal Australian Navy