

Air Force F-16A Fighting Falcon, F-15C Eagle, and F-15E Strike Eagle fighter aircraft fly over burning oil field sites in Kuwait during Operation *Desert Storm* (U.S. Air Force)



If We Fight Joint, Shouldn't Our History Reflect That?

By David F. Winkler

American forces are fighting joint as never before in conjunction with the armed forces of allied nations. Joint and combined operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and current operations over Iraq and Syria have demonstrated conclusively that the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 came at the right time and has subsequently produced impressive results.

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Yet because its historical assets remain in a pre-1986 Service-centric paradigm, the Department of Defense (DOD) has denied itself valuable historical analyses of the many joint and combined operations that have occurred since the landmark legislation. We are failing to effectively “collect, chronicle, and connect.” These three words, once used by now-retired Admiral Edmund P. Giambastiani, Jr., to describe what the Navy expects from its history, could be extended to the joint and combined level.¹

DOD faces tremendous challenges in the collection realm, given the increasing sophistication of digital command and

control systems and data storage. While this article touches on that, it focuses its argument on the idea that realignment is needed to correct a void in its historical chronicling and connecting process.

Stovepiped History

To illustrate the problem, there are no unclassified DOD-produced historical monographs from the first Gulf War that cover the big picture. Instead, each Service published works documenting the missions and accomplishments of the forces they provided. The U.S. Army Center of Military History publications include *The Whirlwind War:*

*The United States Army and Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm and Jayhawk! The VII Corps in the Persian Gulf War.*² The Air Force History Support Office publications include *On Target: Organizing and Executing the Strategic Air Campaign Against Iraq.*³ Representing the Naval Historical Center's contribution to this genre is *Shield and Sword: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf War.* The Marine Corps History Division has several monographs in print.⁴

These publications are well written and do not ignore joint and combined operations. *Shield and Sword*, for instance, argues that the Navy needed to be better integrated at the joint command level, citing naval air's difficulty in receiving air tasking orders. But Service biases can be clearly discerned from such works as the Air Force's *Decisive Force: Strategic Bombing in the Gulf War*, which posited that the Gulf War—demonstrated airpower could bring down an enemy's military and economic infrastructure with few civilian casualties and minimal application of ground forces.⁵

While it could be argued that a span of 4 years may not have allowed Goldwater-Nichols an opportunity to trickle down within the DOD historical community at the time of the Gulf War, that excuse holds little water nearly three decades later. Again, the Service history offices strove to chronicle their branch's story in the global war on terrorism.⁶

Then there is the problem of connecting. Historians tend to focus on researching, writing, and getting their products to press. Marketing is someone else's job. To their credit, the Services have Web sites that list their publications and are posting some of these works online. However, most hard-copy products are distributed to limited internal audiences. Useful studies conducted by one Service history office are not being taken advantage of by other Services, government agencies, and outside institutions.

As for collecting, the picture is somewhat brighter due to the efforts of the Joint History Office (JHO). In 1993, recognizing the inadequacies of joint history coverage during the Gulf War, the

Director of Joint History formed a Joint Operational History Branch within JHO to assure historical coverage for joint task forces created for contingency operations. To do this, the branch liaised with the history office of the combatant command charged with conducting a contingency operation to determine requirements. Each combatant command has a history office, which usually consists of one or two historians and a clerical assistant.

To meet contingency operation history gathering requirements, the JHO requested Reservists from the combat documentation assets of the four Service history organizations.⁷ With the sometimes reluctant cooperation of those organizations, JHO deployed joint documentation teams to cover operations in Somalia, Guantánamo Bay, Rwanda, Haiti, and the Balkans, and in recent years to capture the history of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Putting joint combat documentation teams in the field addresses only the collection part of the mission. The recipients of the electronic data, oral interviews, and other materials received from these joint combat documentation teams are the historians and archivists of the combatant command history offices. Having a responsibility to produce "accurate, thorough, and objective historical accounts of their commands, including all significant contingency and joint operations conducted by their respective commands," these individuals have to cull through this mountain of material to extract the information needed to chronicle recent operations.⁸ The first step is establishing a chronology of events. This task alone is daunting, given the increasing complexity of combat operations.

Some of this work is being conducted at the JHO level. For example, Frank N. Schubert's *Other Than War: The American Military Experience and Operations in the Post-Cold War Decade* (2013) brings clarity to a list of nearly 300 military deployments from 1989 to 2001.⁹ Are the combatant command offices, however, properly resourced to produce the operational historical analyses for their respective commands? The consensus points to a negative response.

The Special Operations Example

This conclusion factors in the experiences of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) history office. Working with a small permanent staff, this office keeps pace through the use of Reservists and contract employees. These trained individuals convert materials collected from the field into operational studies that are fed into the USSOCOM hierarchy. In many cases, the Reservists chronicling recent actions are the same ones who were deployed to the field to gather the raw materials. Because of the initiative of the USSOCOM historian and the willingness of his superiors to fund Reservists from the four Services to produce some of the best narrative analyses that will never be read by the general public, USSOCOM is receiving products that are integral for the training and planning of future missions.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the USSOCOM experience is atypical. Unlike the special operations community, where officers rotate in and out of related assignments and appreciate the need for a robust history program, officers assigned to other joint staffs usually have 2- to 3-year tours and then rotate back to their respective Services. Involvement with their combatant command history offices during their joint assignment yields little bang during their tours. Thus, due to benign neglect, combatant command history offices are understaffed and often not attuned to the commanders they support.

Instead, DOD depends on each of the Service history offices to collect and chronicle its operational combat history. But since the combatant commands are joint, and the Services are fighting jointly, why are the Service history offices still in the business of collecting material for, producing, and distributing operational histories? Is this a call to abolish the Service history offices? Hardly. Producing operational history is only a fraction of the valuable work these organizations perform for their respective Services. Each branch still recruits, trains, equips, administers, and provides the forces that the combatant commanders draw on to perform the mission of defending



National Museum of the Marine Corps, located in Triangle, Virginia, next to Marine Corps Base Quantico, is center for all Marine Corps history (U.S. Marine Corps)

the Nation. These processes have to be documented and chronicled. In addition, each Service has a rich heritage and lore that must be preserved and promoted as a means of instilling institutional identity.

But a realignment of how DOD employs its historical assets to support the chronicling and connecting of its operational history at the joint level should be considered. An obvious answer is ramping up the current 2- to 3-person shops at the combatant commands to much larger offices to include dedicated Reservist combat documentation collection support, additional historian and archival personnel to chronicle command events, and individuals to oversee the distribution of materials. However, bolstering the history offices of the combatant commands is only part of a more efficient solution. The USSOCOM history office experience is instructive, as that command hires help only when it is needed.

Oh, Canada!

For a complete solution, it is useful to examine how another country tackled the problem. In Canada, the Directorate of History and Heritage was created in 1996 by combining the National Defence History Directorate and the

Directorate of Military Traditions and Heritage. What emerged from this amalgamation were five sections that addressed various aspects of history and heritage. Most germane to the focus of this narrative is the History and Archives Section, which gathers, preserves, and imposes intellectual control over the historical record (including unit annual historical reports and unit operational records), carries out historical research and provides historical support on demand, and publishes official, commemorative, and popular histories to meet the goals of the Department of National Defence. In addition to capturing the narrative history, this section manages the Canadian Forces combat art program. Other sections manage uniforms and ceremonial matters; the museums, military heritage, and traditions; and the nation's military bands.¹¹

It is interesting to note that minus the musical component, the Canadian sectional alignments are quite similar to the direction the U.S. Navy took with its Naval History and Heritage Command, which comprises a History and Archives Division, a Collections Management Division, a Museum Systems Operations Division, and a Communications and

Outreach Division. If the United States were to apply the Canadian/U.S. Navy model across DOD, the outcome would be a large Defense History and Heritage Agency (DHHA). The DHHA would take on the operational history collection, chronicling, and connection mission. Such an agency could not only take charge of the overall collection and chronicling efforts, but also take command of all DOD historical resource management efforts. The current JHO and Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Historical Office could come under this new agency's auspices.

As with other Service mergers leading to the creation of other defense agencies, initial consolidation efforts would be painful and costly. However, longer term efficiencies could be realized through standardization of collection and archival practices, the creation of joint storage and preservation facilities, and the discontinuation of nonessential and overlapping functions.

While it could be entertaining to conceptualize the creation of a DHHA, however, there are words of caution: *Be careful what you ask for.* In addressing the challenge of producing operational histories from a joint perspective, the

DHHA solution is akin to hitting a tack with a sledgehammer. As the Canadian Forces found out when they had all of their personnel don the same uniform, there are benefits to having distinctions of Service identity. Just as it is impossible, for example, to envision the U.S. Marine Band (“The President’s Own”) reporting to a Director of Defense History and Heritage, it is hard to see how any of the Services would want to part with their Service heritage and museum establishments—especially when considering the size of each of the American Services matches that of the whole Canadian Forces and then some.¹² A criticism of the Canadian model is that the individual service components have been shortchanged within the whole historical narrative. Because the U.S. Service history organization historians focus on their respective Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard narratives with all the Service-specific weapons systems, command and control structures, and customs, they produce quality Service-specific work. For these Service historians, there is a learning curve, and the quality of work they produce often becomes apparent in comparison to projects contracted out to PhDs with little military experience.

A Public Affairs Template

Rather than dismantle the current DOD history infrastructure and build anew around a DHHA, a more practical proposal would be to create an activity that aims to coordinate and synthesize collection, chronicle, and connection functions. Instead of creating yet another huge bureaucratic agency, it is proposed that a Defense History Activity (DHA) be stood up—ideally at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, DC, to be collocated with the U.S. Army Center of Military History and the National Defense University’s National War College. DOD executed a similar concept with the creation of a Defense Media Activity (DMA) in 2008.

An outgrowth of the Base Realignment and Closure study that occurred in 2005, DMA consolidated various Service media functions into one activity headquartered at a Fort Meade,



U.S. Army Africa staff apply lessons of World War II to current mission by visiting places of Army legend in Tunisia such as Kasserine Pass, Longstop Hill, and El Guettar (U.S. Army/Rick Scavetta)

Maryland, facility that opened in 2011. While each of the Services retains its well-established public affairs organizations, DMA performs functions that not only enhance Service-specific outreach capabilities but also improve the overall DOD information dissemination capability.

DMA has organized itself into seven operating components. Its two most well-known components—the American Forces Radio and Television Service and *Stars and Stripes*—continue to operate from their respective offices in California and in Washington, DC, Germany, and Japan. Other Fort Meade-based components include the Defense Information School; a defense visual information component that manages the Joint Combat Camera program; a production component that provides services such as the Pentagon Channel, Joint Hometown News Services, and support for the various Service Web sites; a technical services component that hosts hundreds of DOD Web sites including the OSD Historical Office Web site; and a support services component that manages the activities’ administrative and logistical needs.¹³

Future History

DMA could most definitely serve as a template for a DHA. The first compo-

nent worthy of emulation is the creation of a schoolhouse. A Defense History School could offer courses to military personnel assigned to combat documentation duties such as those assigned to Army Military History Detachments and the Navy’s Combat Documentation Detachment. Such a course would help to standardize collection methodologies and build camaraderie across Services. Other courses provide initial professional development to newly hired civil service/contractor historians, archaeologists, librarians, curators, and information management specialists to broaden the understanding of available resources and methodologies and, most importantly, to build professional relationships that will benefit DOD in the long term. A Washington, DC-based orientation program could offer students visits to the local Service history offices as well as tours of the Navy, Marine Corps, and eventually, Army museums.

The Defense History School could also manage an internship program expanding on an initiative by the OSD Historical Office to bring in students from respected graduate programs, obtain needed clearances, and obtain experience on producing historical products. By collocating DHA with



Curtiss A-1 Triad seaplane built in 1911 on display at Naval Air Station North Island as amphibious assault ship USS *Peleliu* (LHA 5) transits San Diego Bay (U.S. Navy/Troy Wilcox)

the National War College, the Defense History School could co-host symposia such as the “Air War in Vietnam” conference in October 2015 that was co-sponsored by the Air Force, Navy, and Army Historical Foundations, and the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation.

Another section of DHA could serve as a clearinghouse for historical products—both classified and unclassified—produced by the Service history organizations, combatant command history offices, and affiliated academic organizations such as the war colleges. While the classified publications and studies should be shared and posted on a classified network, unclassified products could be offered for purchase to the general public through a Defense History Bookstore. More than just a clearinghouse, this section could provide some comparative analyses of the different products through a comprehensive review program that aims to push relevant materials to proper audiences. Finally, in partnership with National Defense

University Press, this section could provide a publishing option for different DOD history entities. Other DHA coordination/facilitation functions on behalf of DOD might include:

- The creation of an Operations Section to assure material is collected, properly archived, and turned into narrative. This section would coordinate with combatant command history offices to assure they are adequately resourced to document and chronicle current operations. As part of its mission, this section could liaise with institutions within and outside of DOD to include war colleges, academic institutions, other agency historical offices, and even historical offices of allied nations.
- The creation of a Defense History Bookstore would require the creation of an Information Management Branch and could develop the mother of all joint history Web sites

that could host or link to classified chronologies, narratives, selected situation reports, after action reports, and summaries and transcripts of interviews with individuals serving in theater. The site could also serve as a repository for end-of-tour interviews conducted by the various Services and combatant command history offices. By offering access to operational history through one Web site, DHA would make a valuable contribution in connecting with the forces in the field.

- Finally, the DHA should coordinate with the DMA to have a strong public affairs and marketing function. Staffed by individuals with journalism and marketing skills, this function could have an important collection and dissemination role. Regarding collection, this branch should be on the distribution list to receive press releases from all operational commands within DOD. While not often detailed, these press

releases often provide the who, what, when, and where vital to writing good narrative.¹⁴ In addition, this branch could coordinate with the various news bureaus to collect news reports from reporters in the field covering various conflicts. For source material gathering to chronicle operational history, the media serve as a force multiplier.

Having a robust combat documentation collection and operational history production capability ensconced within a DHA would yield several benefits:

- First and foremost, the Reservists who conduct combat documentation and the historians responsible for writing operational history would be gathering material for an organization that could make immediate use of it and provide content of value to all Services.
- An operational history organization at DHA would encourage joint training within the Reserve combat documentation units and facilitate joint projects involving historians from the component commands.
- Combatant commands could draw on DHA to receive joint combat documentation support and historians, as needed, to augment operational narrative writing efforts.
- Having an understanding of operational history sources, the DHA director would be ideally positioned to reach out to academia to encourage civilian scholars to write on operational points.

This last point is critical. Closer contacts would encourage feedback that would enable DOD historians to produce products that better meet the needs of the targeted audience. Of course in this context, the targeted audience is the uniformed men and women at the combatant commands who are burdened with making critical decisions regarding the use and employment of American military forces.

History is often considered an afterthought by military leaders until the

day after they retire. That mindset must be changed. We owe it to the men and women—and their leaders—who are currently fighting for their country to capture their story in a way that will be most beneficial to future generations. JFQ

Notes

¹ Edmund P. Giambastiani, Jr., speech at the 75th anniversary of the Naval Historical Foundation, March 15, 2001.

² Frank N. Schubert and Theresa L. Kraus, eds., *The Whirlwind War: The United States Army and Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 1995); Stephen A. Bourque, *Jayhawk! The VII Corps in the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2002).

Three other recent Center of Military History books on operations in Southwest Asia touch on the Gulf War.

³ Richard G. Davis, *On Target: Organizing and Executing the Strategic Air Campaign Against Iraq* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2003).

⁴ Edward J. Marolda and Robert J. Schneller, *Shield and Sword: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1998; reprint 2002 by Naval Institute Press). The Marine monographs can be found on the Marine Corps Museum and History Division Web site. These Service-centric historical center publications represent a tip of the iceberg. Both the Army and Air Force have extensive field history programs with historians assigned to produce additional studies and monographs for the major commands they serve. For example, in 1996, the Army Corps of Engineers History Office published *Supporting the Troops: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Persian Gulf War*. A further negative indicator of the overall joint value of these narratives is their non-use in Joint Military Operations courses offered by the U.S. Naval War College.

⁵ Richard G. Davis, *Decisive Force: Strategic Bombing in the Gulf War* (Washington, DC: Air Force History Support Office, 1996).

⁶ Charles H. Briscoe et al., *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), is the first book of an Army special operations forces history series; *The United States Army in Afghanistan: Operation ENDURING FREEDOM—October 2001–March 2003* was published as Center for Military History Publication 70-83-1. Marine Corps publications include Nicholas Reynolds, *Basrah, Baghdad, and Beyond: The U.S. Marine Corps in the Second Iraq War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005); Michael S. Groen et al., *With the 1st Marine Division in Iraq: No Greater Friend, No Worse Enemy* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University History Division,

2006); and C.M. Kennedy et al., *U.S. Marines in Iraq, 2003: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps History Division, 2006).

⁷The Air Force and Marine Corps depend on Individual Mobilization Augmentee Reservists who report, respectively, to the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, and the Marine Corps Historical Center in Washington, DC. The Army mobilizes three-person Military History Detachments from the Army Reserve and National Guard to capture history. The Naval History and Heritage Command in Washington, DC, is the gaining command for Naval Reserve Naval Combat Documentation Detachment 206.

⁸ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 5320.01A, “Guidance for the Joint History Program,” August 14, 2003.

⁹ Frank N. Schubert, *Other Than War: The American Military Experience and Operations in the Post-Cold War Decade* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 2013), iii.

¹⁰ John Partin, the U.S. Special Operations Command historian for two decades, retired in 2008.

¹¹ See National Defence and the Canadian Forces, Directorate of History and Heritage, available at <www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/index-eng.asp>.

¹² Active-duty strength of the Canadian Armed Forces is 68,250. See Global Fire Power, available at <www.globalfirepower.com>.

¹³ See Defense Media Activity, available at <www.dma.mil>.

¹⁴ This concept was presented by Peter Swartz of the CNA Corporation at the Naval Historical Center Stakeholder Meeting, October 19–20, 2004, at the Washington Navy Yard. Subsequently, the Naval History and Heritage Command has developed a proactive Communications and Outreach Division that provides a good template for a Defense History and Heritage Agency marketing/public affairs organization.