

Bryn Evans. *The Decisive Campaigns of the Desert Air Force 1942-1945*. Barnsley: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2014. 8 maps. xv + 223pp. ISBN 978-1783462605 (Hardback). Price £19.99.

This work on the Desert Air Force is a most welcome addition to the historiography of the air aspects of the war in North Africa and the wider Mediterranean. The Desert Air Force was formed in the last months of 1941 and continued to fly and fight through to the end of the war. It became the epitome of air land co-operation, pioneering many new developments and reaffirming many fundamentals of air warfare. The importance of winning and maintaining air superiority was one of the most important, followed by a blend of close air support and battlefield interdiction.

This book starts with a fascinating description of the trials and tribulations facing the aircrew attempting to get across Africa to Cairo. Setting the tone for the rest of the book, Evans uses a mix of narrative and personal testimony which brings to life the realities of operating in such a hostile environment. Evans then follows the Desert Air Force through North Africa, on to Sicily and then into Italy.

In some ways the *Epilogue* is the most eloquent part of the book in which the author sums up the remarkable achievements of the Desert Air Force with Montgomery's assertion on taking command of the Eighth Army that it was one battle, not two, coupled with Tedder's insistence on the independence of air assets, albeit working ever closer with the land component. The Desert Air Force achieved all that Army Co-operation Command ever did and more (always supposing that that was what it was for). Many aspects of the air war during the Second World War have come under scrutiny over the years. Air Land co-operation was almost always questioned with the performance in France and subsequently with Army Co-operation Command particularly contentious. The Desert Air Force proved what could be done.

This book makes excellent use of the *Operational Record Books* of the various squadrons involved and uses a number of veterans' accounts. The author gives due credit to Tedder himself and to his first biographer, Roderic Owen. It is a shame in some ways that Evans has not gone further and deployed the works of Vincent Orange on both Tedder and Coningham. As the author lives in Australia, he naturally makes good use of the Australian War Memorial sources, but more could possibly have been made of British material such as the Air Historical Branch Narratives (TNA AIR 41 series).

That all said, this work will have considerable appeal to a wide ranging readership, but especially those interested in the tactical detail and personal experiences of the airmen involved in the various campaigns.

REVIEWS

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