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Four U.S. Marine Corps All-Weather Medium Attack Squadron 242 (VMA(AW)-242) Grumman A-6A Intruder aircraft (BuNo 155623, 155624, 155625, 157014) flying in echelon formation on 21 November 1975.
U.S. Defense Imagery - Sgt. C. Quinn, USMC

ON TARGET - ON TIME

- VA-65 Takes on Vietnam
- Our Gateway Intruder
- VA-35 Black Panthers

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Reviewed by Randy "Dirtman" Dearth

Operation Eldorado Canyon

The 1986 US Bombing Raid on Libya

Author: Major Jim Rotramel

I wholeheartedly endorse Major Jim Rotramel's book *Operation Eldorado Canyon: The 1986 US Bombing Raid on Libya*. This meticulously detailed account is significantly enhanced by beautiful supporting graphics (photos, maps and graphics) of the joint USAF/US Navy strike against Libyan dictator Colonel Qaddafi and his terrorism infrastructure in Tripoli and Benghazi. The book will be of particular interest to anyone who enjoys military history, especially those interested in aviation history, the early stages of the war on terror, the timeline for development of and fielding of military technology, those willing to learn from history as they look forward to the future, and those who may have been a part of the US military in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Major Rotramel's effort brings out both the specifics of the aircraft (to include bureau numbers), weapons (to include mod numbers), routes of flight, airspeeds, fuels and weapon delivery profiles. One of the most beneficial aspects of the book is that it places all of this strike specific details in perspective of the on-going political decisions, command relationships, interpersonal relations and the impact on participant families. I was transported back in time and, in the process, I learned a great deal of the behind the scenes activity that bore direct impact on the strike results.

There are three excellent reasons to read this book:

It's an enjoyable read where the details, photos, graphics and multitude of specific events enhance the story. It truly does take you back to the days, not that long ago, when technology was so different than it is today.

It is an excellent reminder of what all is required to field a modern military force. Despite the expenditure of massive funding in the early 1980s, the USAF/USN of 1986 struggled with organizational challenges, constantly updating weapons for which aircraft software systems had to be

synchronized, the implications of on-high decrees on strike specifics such as numbers of aircraft involved and time on target and finally, changes in non-visible supporting datasets (i.e., an incomplete shift to WGS-84 spheroid impacted Navy planning and resulted in correctly targeted bombs missing their targets). Building a military takes time, vast amounts of money and discipline.

For those interested in looking forward to the military challenges of today (e.g., China), it is an excellent primer in the challenges of conducting long-distance strike missions. The number of tanker assets required and the susceptibility of a plan to minor shifts in execution by either the strikers or the tankers or the weather should give anyone pause as to the ease with which the US military can handle China given the size and capability of their military and their ability to deny close-in access to opponents. Distance, like quantity, is a quality in and of itself.

I have two critiques of the book, both cultural in nature. First, I'm a Navy guy and when you apply USAF callsigns to a strike/tanker package of this size, I struggled to maintain awareness of who's who in the zoo. I never was able to wrap my head around the different callsigns and their roles in the

strike; it's well explained in words and graphics, but wasn't easy for me to follow. The Navy side however, always made perfect sense to me. Second, this book is pricey for a "paperback;" this is not a paperback in any sense of the word. It does have a soft cover, but it is the size of a desktop magazine and the pages are glossy and thick and show the photos and graphics very clearly. The book is well worth the price.

My final takeaway from Jim Rotramel's book is that an enormous gratitude is owed by all Americans to those who took up an extremely difficult and dangerous task and executed it with high levels of bravery and professionalism. ■

