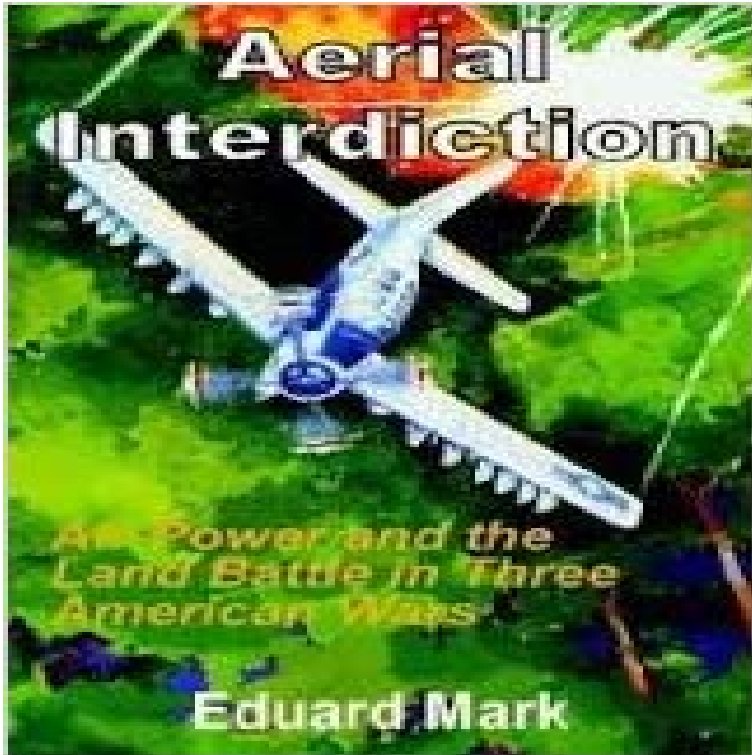


Aerial Interdiction : Air Power and the Land Battle in Three American Wars



This analytical work by Dr. Eduard Mark of the Center for Air Force History examines the practice of air interdiction in three wars: World War II, the Korean War, and the war in Southeast Asia. It considers eleven important interdiction campaigns, all of them American or Anglo-American, for only the United States and Great Britain had the resources to conduct interdiction campaigns on a large scale in World War II. Dr. Mark proposes what he considers to be a realistic objective for interdiction: preventing men, equipment, and supplies from reaching the combat area when the enemy needs them and in the quantity he requires. As Mark notes, there has been little intensive scholarship on the subject of interdiction especially when contrasted with the work done on strategic bombardment. In the wake of the Persian Gulf War, the reader will no doubt be impressed by the comparatively low performance of weapons in these pre-Gulf war campaigns. DESERT STORM showed that recent advances in technology had enabled interdiction to reach new levels of effectiveness, especially in night operations. Yet, as the reader soon discovers, interdiction in the pre-Gulf campaigns sometimes profoundly influenced military operations. As is often the case in military history, the effects were often serendipitous-not as planned or anticipated, but present nevertheless. By the middle of the Second World War, aircraft were already demonstrating that they could have a devastating impact upon a military forces ability to wage war. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, for example, complained bitterly during the North African and Normandy campaigns about air power that, in his memorable words, pinned my army to the ground and otherwise denied his forces both supplies and the ability to freely maneuver. The aircraft and weapons that caused the German commander such problems were,

by today's standards, primitive. The accuracy of bombing was calculated in terms of circles with radii of hundreds or even thousands of feet. Bridges took dozens, sometimes hundreds, of sorties to destroy, meaning that a simultaneous taking-down of an enemy's transportation network was impossible. A single target also required strike packages of hundreds of airplanes. Target revisiting because of poor bombing accuracy meant that aircraft loss rates were often alarmingly high. Yet, even with all of these limitations, air attack still had the ability to hinder, limit, and eventually help defeat a robust, well-trained and well-equipped opponent. It is important that this be recognized, just as it is important that we recognize that modern air war, as shown in the Gulf conflict, is very different and more effective, not only from that of 1941-1945, but from the more recent Vietnam era as well. The challenges posed by aerial interdiction from the dust of the Western Desert to the triple canopy of Southeast Asia gave but a hint of how devastating an attacker the airplane would prove in the Gulf War of 1991. There, advanced strike aircraft—some of them stealthy as well—dropped precision munitions with shattering effect against the Iraqi military machine. As shocking as it might seem, revolutionary advances in precision navigation and weapons technology had largely reduced the previous experiences of interdiction to historical anecdote, not historical prediction. Today, in the era of Global Reach-Global Power, the lessons of aerial interdiction through Vietnam are instructive, for no other reason than this: they reveal how far modern airpower has come. This book, by tracing air interdiction from the Western Front through Vietnam, and by examining both its failures and successes, fills an important gap in the history of air power and enables us to appreciate to an even greater degree the profound significance that air power possesses now and for the future.

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examines the practice of interdiction in three wars: World War II, the Korean war, and **none** stating he was sure that if the war lasted, air power would decide it. Eduard Mark, *Aerial Interdiction: Air Power and the Land Battle in Three American Wars*.