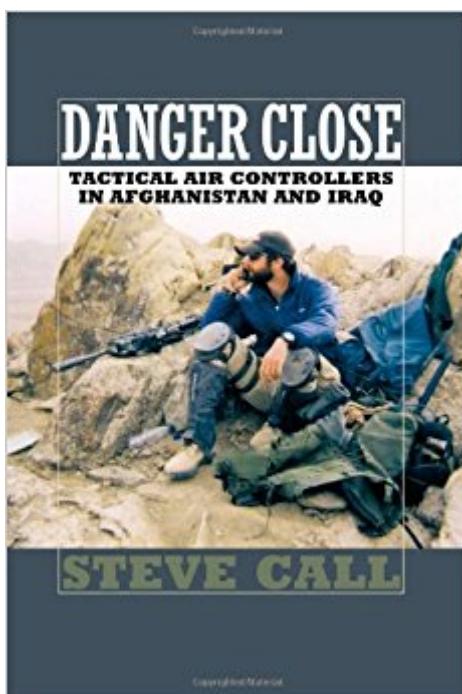


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# Danger Close: Tactical Air Controllers In Afghanistan And Iraq (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)



## Synopsis

America had a secret weapon, writes Steve Call of the period immediately following September 11, 2001, as planners contemplated the invasion of Afghanistan. This weapon consisted of small teams of Special Forces operatives trained in close air support (CAS) who, in cooperation with the loose federation of Afghan rebels opposed to the Taliban regime, soon began achieving impressive and unexpected military victories over Taliban forces and the al-Qaeda terrorists they had sponsored. The astounding success of CAS tactics coupled with ground operations in Afghanistan soon drew the attention of military decision makers and would eventually factor into the planning for another campaign: Operation Iraqi Freedom. But who, exactly, are these air power experts and what is the function of the TACPs (Tactical Air Control Parties) in which they operate? Danger Close provides a fascinating look at a dedicated, courageous, innovative, and often misunderstood and misused group of military professionals. Drawing on the gripping first-hand accounts of their battlefield experiences, Steve Call allows the TACPs to speak for themselves. He accompanies their narratives with informed analysis of the development of CAS strategy, including potentially controversial aspects of the interservice rivalries between the air force and the army which have at times complicated and even obstructed the optimal employment of TACP assets. Danger Close makes clear, however, that the systematic coordination of air power and ground forces played an invaluable supporting role in the initial military victories in both Afghanistan and Iraq. This first-ever examination of the intense, life-and-death world of the close air support specialist will introduce readers to a crucial but little-known aspect of contemporary warfare and add a needed chapter in American military history studies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

". . . fascinating and worthwhile book for military professionals, strategists, historians, and interested civilians." -Military Review (Military Review 2008-05-01) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

STEVE CALL is an assistant professor at Broome Community College in Binghamton, New York, teaching both American and military history. During his twenty-year career in the air force, Call held many command and staff positions, including liaison officer with the army, Pentagon staff officer, and squadron commander. His PhD in military history is from Ohio State University.

Mr. Call collected excellent primary source/primary actor interviews for this look at the role of Tactical Air Controllers. Coordinating between ground troops and close air support has been a thorny issue since the airplane was added to the military inventory. This book explains recent innovations at the battalion and under level, highlighting the professionalism of enlisted personnel as significant force multipliers. While members of the Air Force, they live "in the mud" with the troops on the ground, integrated with Army special forces or armored units. Call makes the common-sense argument that neither air power nor "boots on the ground" win wars, but rather a seamless integration of the two. He uses the experiences of the TACPs on the ground during the initial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to buttress his argument. Short discussions at the beginning and end of the book sum up his points nicely. I only have a few complaints about this book. While it wasn't a problem for me, the military acronyms come fast and heavy. Readers with less experience reading military documents might struggle at times to understand what is being discussed. The glossary at the end of the book is a big help and should be marked by Kindle users. Secondly, I would have liked to see a further examination of airpower uses in the aftermath of the initial invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. As the Afghan war in particular has entered its tenth year, I would like to hear if the tactics outlined here have changed. Finally, while it was no problem for me, I could understand if some would call this book "war porn" for all the descriptions of large-scale slaughter of opposing forces. My response would be "it's war, that's what happens, and it's hell. Deal." Overall, this is a good close examination of recent developments in close air support integration. Worth a read by anyone associated with the military or modern military history.

Loved the collection of short war stories from first hand accounts, wish there was more publication on the TACP/JTAC community.

"Danger Close" is a straightforward and clear look at the work of (largely) USAF Joint Terminal Air Controllers in the opening phases of the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns. The author describes the day-to-day work of USAF enlisted controllers embedded with US SF and conventional manoeuvre forces as well as some of the wider organisational and conceptual challenges that impeded Close Air Support (CAS) development in the 1990's and in the opening phases of Afghanistan and Iraq. Writing very much from the perspective of the US ALO/TACP community, the author explains the lack of institutional interest in CAS by the USAF (and to a slightly lesser extent, the US Army) prior to 9/11 led to neither service being well prepared to integrate CAS with tactical manoeuvre. His description of organisational, doctrinal and procedural innovations between the start of OEF and the fall of Baghdad is clear and insightful (perhaps less so for the reader without a military background). At the tactical level, his first-hand accounts of the efficiency and effectiveness of US enlisted controllers in both operations demonstrate the fallacy of the old perception that JTACs needed to be both pilots and officers to be safe and effective. A limitation of the book is that it is written very much from an airman's perspective and is to a large degree focused on telling the stories of the guys at the coal face. Although the author is not a rabid USAF partisan (he is open and forthcoming about USAF institutional shortcomings) his perspective is very much that of an airman and his interest is the relatively narrow one (albeit somewhat important) of getting weapons from aircraft onto targets. I would have liked to have seen more discussion on the challenges of integrating air with artillery, attack aviation, manoeuvre, etc, and some observations on how the ALO network fit into manoeuvre and fires/effects planning. Some more discussion of alternative means of generating this effect (eg, the USMC ANGLICO's or some of the Coalition approaches to training and fostering the JTAC capability) would have been worthwhile, as would some wider discussion of the selection and training of USAF JTACs. While I agree with the author that the rank or service of a JTAC is of little relevance, I think he may underestimate the long term danger of it remaining an 'enlisted only' sport. Despite the professional competence of NCOs in this role, without a community of officers who are engaged in CAS and in a position to act as advocates there is a danger that the importance and nuances of this capability will not be properly understood or resourced at the highest levels in the future. For the reader with little or no background in the subject who is interested in first person accounts by JTACs and gaining a broad understanding of the challenges of supporting land forces

with air power, this is an informative and easy to read volume easily worth four stars. If you have a close professional interest in the subject, add another half a star on top of that.

As a Crew Chief KC-135's in the AF, I have experienced the "rear" side of war operations. Reading how all of it was tied into a lot of these operations is just amazing! This book, in my opinion, is well written and should be read by anyone interested in the TACP community. If you were thinking about becoming one(as I have) then this book will make you want to do a PAST and give it a try ASAP. Awesome job Sir, well done!

Great read kept me engaged thank you

Husband enjoyed this book.

Book arrived before estimated delivery date and was in great condition considering it was used. I bought this as a gift for a TACP soldier and he is going to love it!! Thank you so much!!

A good story. Written more like a history story instead of about a specific person or incident. My only issue was the author's statement that the use of "kill boxes" came into being just before the second invasion of Iraq. We used those during the first Gulf War. I served as a Combat Controller and called in air support on many occasions. I appreciate the author's acknowledgement of the scud hunting missions during Desert Storm, worked a few of those with joint forces; most were boring, some not so much.

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