

Bandits Over Baghdad: Personal Stories of Flying the F-117 over Iraq

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Voyageur Press (October 2000)

Unknown \$24.95 (216pp)

978-1-58007-031-7

Primarily an account of the futuristic Stealth Fighter's significant combat role in Operation Desert Storm, *Bandits over Baghdad* is a glossy, smoothly written production, filled with photographs, first-person accounts, and operational information, catnip to anyone interested in modern military aviation.

While not an official publication, the book bears the stamp of Air Force approval; the foreword, for instance, is by the commanding officer (now retired) of an F-117 unit operating from Saudi Arabia in 1990, and many illustrations come from Pentagon sources or Lockheed Martin, builder of the angular black Nighthawk. There aren't any unauthorized photos here, or any controversy, but despite a slightly sanitized feel the book offers a solid look at state-of-the-art air combat in the most advanced single-seat fighter ever sent into action.

After the Allies' swift victory a decade ago, it's easy to forget that on paper Iraq was a dangerous enemy, with battle-hardened pilots and daunting anti-aircraft defenses. The 415th and 416th Fighter Squadrons fully expected to take casualties; that they lost neither planes nor personnel is testimony to the F-117's success. Anyone who remembers, however, CNN's scenes of Baghdad under air attack can imagine how men like Colonel Alton Whitley felt: "The closer I got, the more I doubted our ability to fly through the defenses and survive! Over the city, the bright flashes illuminated my cockpit and I could feel the concussions and hear the explosions."

Along with actual missions, often described from several points of view, *Bandits* also traces the F-117's history, from its design at Lockheed's legendary Skunk Works to squadron formation and training at a secret U.S. airbase to overseas action when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. It provides a useful overview of tactical operations, describing the complex environment of an air battle, from the AWACs command planes and refueling tankers orbiting behind the front to the pilots on the cutting edge, relying on skill, stealth, and smart weapons to rack up an impressive record.

Illustrations include strike photos, many candid shots of flight crews and ground personnel, and various diagrams explaining the theory and practice of modern air warfare. On this book's evidence, the Nighthawk is a formidable weapons system, all but invisible yet packing a wicked punch. *Bandits Over Baghdad* reflects Air Force pride in a job well done—and in the stealthy plane and pilots who did it.

PEYTON MOSS (January / February 2001)

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