

# Operation MEDUSA

reviewed by Maj Skip Crawley, USMCR (Ret)

Since 11 September 2011, numerous books have been written about U.S. military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries. But relatively few books have been written for American audiences from the viewpoint of a coalition partner. *Operation MEDUSA: The Furious Battle That Saved Afghanistan from the Taliban* by MGen David Fraser (Ret) of the Canadian Army helps fill that void. Then-BGen Fraser commanded a brigade group (i.e., reinforced brigade) in Regional Command South in Operation MEDUSA, “the largest combat engagement of Canadian armed forces in more than fifty years” and a crucial battle that would decide if the Taliban’s objective of “destabilize[ing] the government of Afghanistan” would prove successful. Gen Fraser describes the background of Canadian combat participation in Afghanistan and the 2006 deployment of his brigade group, focusing on the fifteen-day battle in the mountains of Kandahar Province.

Gen Fraser offers several insights into working with coalition partners:

- A coalition partner may not view their mission the same as the United States. “Canada was never going into Afghanistan to kill bad guys,” Gen Fraser states. They intended “to be the biggest—and most robust—provincial reconstruction team ever” in Afghanistan. This remained true even when “the Americans were pushing us to ... capture and kill as many [Taliban] as possible, we never once saw our mission that way.” Unsurprisingly, this caused tension between the coalition partners. Interestingly enough, the reality on the ground eventually changed Gen Fraser’s view—to the point that he re-

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quested Leopard tanks be deployed in theater.

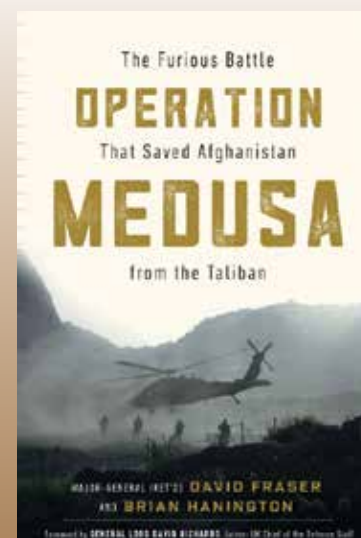
- A coalition partner may gloss over the reality of combat casualties. Closely related to the previous point, the Canadian Government did not want to talk about “likely casualties.” When Gen Fraser worked up “an expected death toll” and presented it to the Chief of the Canadian Defense Staff, he was ordered to “take that slide out and never show it again.”

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- A coalition partner may lack institutional combat experience. The last time the Canadian Army “saw combat was during the Korean War.” This lack of institutional combat experience was of great concern—both for themselves and their American partners. Initial combat is challenging for any unit; however, the learning curve for the Canadian Army, which had primarily conducted peacekeeping operations for decades, was much steeper than for an equivalent American unit that could draw on the institutional knowledge of the U.S. military.



**OPERATION MEDUSA: The Furious Battle that Saved Afghanistan from the Taliban.** By MGen David Fraser and Brian Hanington. Toronto, Ontario: McClelland & Stewart, 2018.

ISBN: 978-0771039300, 272 pp.

- Do not underestimate your ally. Despite the above constraints, Gen Fraser and his soldiers fought well. They achieved “a temporary effect that allowed the coalition and the Afghans to move on.” Had they not, “the consequences would have been grave.” NATO would have been proven to be a paper tiger and the “Taliban would have proven the inability of the Afghan leadership to govern.”

Gen Fraser’s *Operation MEDUSA* is an excellent account of the war in Afghanistan in Kandahar during 2006 from the viewpoint of a coalition partner. I recommend this for anyone interested in the perspective of a coalition partner conducting combat operations in their own area of operations with overall U.S. support and oversight.

