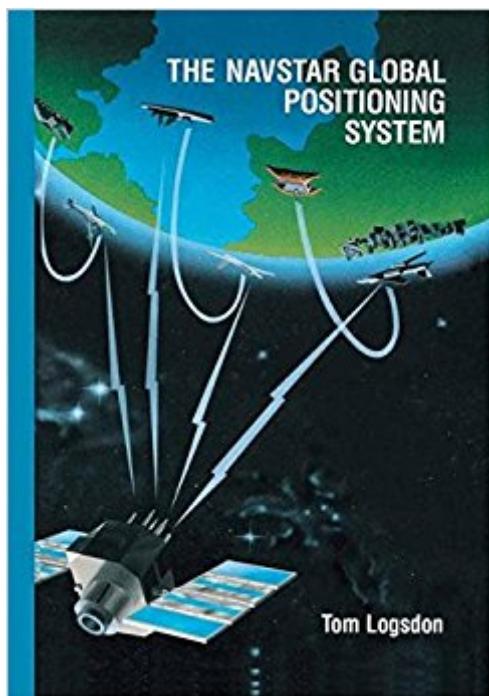


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The Navstar Global Positioning System



Synopsis

During the Persian Gulf War a group of American soldiers scooped up a new recruit at Rijaid Airport, then drove him, with blackened headlights, directly across miles of tractless deserts and sand. Squinting toward the horizon, he could see almost nothing when suddenly the driver mashed on the brakes, gave him a quick salute, and instructed him to step out into the darkness. As his boots sank into the sand, he was stunned to realize that he was only a few feet away from the flap of his tent. Before setting out, the driver had keyed the tent's coordinates into a Navstar receiver, so it could guide him back again. No one knows exactly how many Navstar receivers ended up serving coalition forces along the Persian Gulf because mothers and fathers-and sweethearts, too-located a few stray units on the shelves of marine supply houses/plunked down their money, and express mailed them to their loved ones in the Persian Gulf. A few resourceful soldiers called stateside suppliers long distance, then used their credit cards to order receivers, many of which arrived in Saudi Arabia a day or two later aboard commercial jetliners. By the time the ground war finally started, 4,000 to 7,000 Navstar receivers were clutched in the hands of grateful American soldiers. They were used to guide fuel-starved airplanes for linkups with aerial tankers, to pull in air strikes against enemy emplacements, to guide mess trucks toward hungry troops, and to vector Special Forces units in their muffled dune buggies deep behind enemy lines. A few enterprising military engineers learned how to follow meandering goat trails so they could locate underground springs where the goats watered themselves. They then used their hand-held Navstar receivers to record the precise coordinates of each spring, thus insuring fresh water supplies for onrushing troops.

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