

Book Reviews

'The Cinderella Service: RAF Coastal Command 1939-1945'

By Andrew Hendrie

Reviewed by Group Captain Clive Blount

No official history has ever been devoted to RAF Coastal Command and its activities during the Second World War despite its vital role in keeping open the sea lines of communication - particularly the Atlantic bridge for vital supplies and reinforcements from the USA. *'The Cinderella Service: RAF Coastal Command 1939-1945'* goes some way to rectifying that omission. This book was derived from the Author, Andrew Hendrie's PhD thesis and, as such, is a sound traditional academic text, extensively researched and footnoted. However, it is also unusual in that it is also part memoir, drawing on the author's own operational experience; Andrew Hendrie served in Coastal Command from 1939 and flew operationally from 1942 to 1945. He completed his PhD just before his death on 1st April 2004.

Hendrie paints an interesting and very full picture of the Second World War from the Coastal Command perspective, the name of the book coming from the fact that the Command was often referred to as the 'Cinderella Service' - as it was often overshadowed by Fighter and Bomber Commands and was not given priority in terms of aircraft and equipment. Its wartime record, however, was second to none and *'The Cinderella Service'* reveals the vital contribution that Coastal Command

made to the Allied war effort.

The book looks first at the aircraft and armament available to the Command and describes the development of operational capability as the war progressed - and that development was from a pretty parlous start. In addition to a steady improvement in aircraft and weapons, it is clear that emerging technology was a key driver of mission success and the value of the 'boffins' - in close contact with the front line - is made very clear. He then progresses to discuss the main roles of Coastal Command, particularly anti-submarine warfare and anti-surface shipping operations against enemy warships and merchant vessels. Hendrie's extensive research and first hand knowledge ensure that all his main assertions are well-supported and referenced. He is able, for instance, to support his somewhat surprising conclusion that small-scale strikes on enemy surface shipping were more effective than the massed attacks of the well-known strike wings, which often suffered disproportionately high losses for the results they achieved. The minor tasks performed by the Command, which were no less important, included photo-reconnaissance, meteorological flights and air-sea rescue, and the author covers these well in a later chapter before drawing

some general conclusions and paying tribute to his fallen colleagues in a moving retrospective. Lengthy and comprehensive appendices then follow, covering Orders of Battle at various stages of the war, notable Commanders, achievements in terms of U boats and ships sunk, and details of aircraft losses and casualties.

Whilst now fully recognised as key players performing a vital role that ensured, directly, the survival of our Nation, the personnel of Coastal Command often felt unappreciated and unsupported, but, as Hendrie points out, morale was usually very high. The author uses a poem by Sqn Ldr Tony Spooner, DSO DFC, to sum up this spirit:

*'Fighter or Bomber?' his friends used
to ask;
But when he said 'Coastal' they'd turn
half away....
..... 'Fighter or Bomber?' his friends
used to ask;
'Coastal' he'd say, his face a tired mask;
Though not in the spotlight where
others may bask,
We've a tough job to do and I'm proud
of the task.*

This book forms a valuable reference for anyone interested in RAF Coastal Command from an academic perspective but also provides much food for thought for the general reader interested in Air Power, and Airmen, at war.

This article has been republished online with Open Access.

Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2023. The full printed text of this article is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/>. Where we have identified any third-party copyright information or otherwise reserved rights, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned. For all other imagery and graphics in this article, or for any other enquires regarding this publication, please contact: Director of Defence Studies (RAF), Cormorant Building (Room 119), Shrivenham, Swindon, Wiltshire SN6 8LA.

 **ROYAL
AIR FORCE**
**Centre for Air and
Space Power Studies**

OGL