

AIR POWER REVIEW'S PLACE IN RAF HISTORY

BY AIR VICE-MARSHAL TONY MASON (RETIRED)

Biography: Air Vice-Marshal Tony Mason was the RAF's first Director of Defence Studies from 1977 to 1980. A prolific writer and commentator on RAF and air power matters, following retirement from the RAF he was the Director of the Centre for Studies in Security and Diplomacy at the University of Birmingham, which made him an honorary professor in 1996.

In his address to the first RAF Staff College course at Andover in 1922, Sir Hugh Trenchard directed: *"Remember that the one great thing to which you should at all times apply your thoughts and brains is expansion of the power of materiel and personnel without increasing either. That way lies economy."* In 1945 US General Hap Arnold emphasised the need for an air force *"to keep its doctrines ahead of its equipment and its vision far into the future"*. Those exhortations are now manifested in the RAF's emphasis on the "conceptual component" of air power.

In 1977, the RAF held its first ever Air Power Conference. The speakers, led by CAS, included senior RAF and other officers from friendly air forces, a senior civil servant and the two UK academics whose interests were the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union and Defence Economics. The Conference proceedings were published, but without any bibliography, because none existed.

Later in 1977, the University of Cambridge agreed to allow some RAF Staff College graduates to attend its post-graduate MPhil course in Defence Studies without a first degree. In 1979 the University was the first academic establishment in the world to establish a lectureship in Air Power Studies. In April 1980, an Air Power Supplement was issued with the Flight Safety monthly journal *Air Clues*. It contained just four articles from serving RAF officers, on Low-Level Air Defence, Warsaw Pact AWACS Deployment, Air Weapon Training, and Lessons from the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and Vietnam.

In 2018, the legacy of successive Directors of Defence Studies is impressively demonstrated in this Centenary series of the *Air Power Review*. It marks the culmination of forty years of influential publishing, stimulating, encouraging, facilitating and organising the study and promulgation of all aspects of air power, within and beyond the boundaries of the Service. Contributors include serving and retired officers, servicemen and women on university Fellowships, academics specialising in air power studies and authoritative writers from the Air Historical Branch. All available, and studied, internationally in print and online.

Today, CAS' annual Air Power Conference sets the international benchmark. A massive bibliography of air power now exists. It is constantly expanded by contributions from students benefiting from the ever-increasing academic air power specialists located at several British Universities, led but by no means dominated by, Birmingham, London, Exeter and Cambridge. The steady flow of new students assures the future health of the discipline. The fusion of operator and academic, fostered by shared conference platforms, joint seminars, academic presence at Colleges and networks of personal relationships, induce mutual respect and understanding. The product, epitomised by the *Air Power Review*, is a school of British air power original thought with international presence.

Lord Trenchard and Hap Arnold would have approved.

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