

DOCTRINE NOT DOGMA:



Lessons from the Past

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Military doctrine is by definition historical. It changes through time, as circumstances and experience dictate. It is, in this sense, an intensely unstable or evolutionary phenomenon. This has always been a difficult situation for the military establishment of any country to cope with.

The temptation is to take doctrine at a fixed point and to keep it that way to maintain some semblance of intellectual certainty. Doctrine can then turn into dogma. It no longer encourages creative thinking about the function and nature of military activity, but forces that activity into a particular mould, which may be more or less suitable for the current situation. More commonly history has shown that a dogmatic attachment to strategy inhibits the creativity and responsiveness essential to military thought; it generates a cast of mind that is conservative, uncritical, or, at times, ideologically inspired. Doctrine becomes not a means to an end, but an end in itself.

There are no shortages of examples in twentieth century military history to support the contention that doctrine tends to solidify like a slowly moving lava flow. The very idea of doctrine – as a set of formal, written, guidelines on the organization and function of an armed service in pursuit of certain stated strategic objectives – is to a large extent a twentieth century development, it owed a good deal to the emergence of military aviation, because air forces, more than armies and navies, were forced to justify their independent existence by adopting a doctrine distinct from the more senior services. The formulation of air doctrine had the effect of encouraging the rest of the military machine to think harder about its own strategic outlook.





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In Trenchard's view the impact of bombing owed more to its moral effects than its power of physical destruction. He suggested the untested, and untestable, hypothesis that the enemy could be defeated by destroying the will to fight, rather than the means to fight, became a central tenet of British air power strategy. In 1928 the British Chiefs of Staff began a searching inquiry into the nature of air doctrine. It gave Trenchard the opportunity to define his terms more clearly. He took as his starting point the view that unlike the other two services, the air force could not very easily pursue the classic counter-force objective. The RAF took the view – which was maintained right through to the Second World War – that an enemy air

This was the situation that faced the infant Royal Air Force (RAF) when it found itself in the early 1920s under strong pressure from both the army and the Royal Navy to abandon an independent organization in favour of the close support of surface forces. The *raison d'être* of the RAF as an independent force lay in the circumstances of the final years of the Great War. Aircraft were organized independently as a defence force against German bombing of London and the coastal towns. More significantly, the RAF established in 1918 a so-called

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of General Hugh Trenchard, whose purpose was to mount a bombing campaign against German cities and military installations 'independent' of the conduct of the group war. Trenchard emerged in the 1920s, despite his initial scepticism, as the foremost champion of an independent air force, and of a strategy of aerial bombardment against targets other than those in the immediate battle zone.

force presented a target that was too dispersed and fleeting to be defeated by other aircraft. Unlike a conventional force, Trenchard argued that air power ought to be directed at the enemy's willingness or capacity to make war at all. Of air attack he wrote that 'the moral effect is very great', even incalculable. He continued:

'it is clear that such attack, owing to the crushing moral effect on a Nation, may impress the public opinion to a point of disarming the Government and thus become decisive'.¹

The argument could be supported by the experience of the RAF in what was called 'Empire policing', where political results were cheaply obtained by attacking rebel tribesmen with a handful of aircraft and low-calibre bombs.

The Chief of the Naval Staff took a different view. In the naval response to Trenchard it was forcefully suggested that the RAF ignored the traditional principles of concentration of effort for the direct attack of the enemy armed forces, whose defeat alone would produce the desired political effect.² Trenchard won the day. The Chiefs agreed that the RAF could specify the strategy which made best use of air resources and promised the best strategic results. An independent assault on the war-willingness of the enemy became the centre piece of British air doctrine. It is what British airmen – and much of the British public – expected the enemy to do. The RAF War manual opened with the words: 'The bomb is the chief weapon of an air force and the principal means by which it may attain its aim in war'.³ The pursuit of independent bombing was done at the cost of a serious counter-force strategy, or even an effective strategy of defence, until the radar chain was built in the late 1930s. Cooperation with the navy and army was not regarded as a significant strategic objectives by the RAF, and very little was done to prepare for such an eventuality.

The Trenchard doctrine was modified in the late 1930s when the RAF began, on the instructions of the Chiefs-of-Staff, to prepare a plan for the long-range bombing of German industry. When the economic strategy failed in 1940-1, largely for technical reasons, the Trenchard view was resurrected, despite the fact that it remained unproven. British morale had not cracked in the Blitz in the decisive sense implied by Trenchard, and there was little to suggest that it would do so in Germany. In the summer of 1941 Trenchard wrote a strong letter to the Air Ministry, which was widely circulated. He urged the RAF to concentrate on the morale of the German people by attacking it by night and day continuously. On the specious grounds that the German people 'remain passive and easy prey to hysteria and panic', while 'History has proved that we have always been able to stand our casualties better than other nations', Trenchard suggested that the German population would simply stand no more and end the war.⁴ It was a view strongly supported by the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Charles Portal, and by Churchill's scientific adviser, Lord Cherwell. The Trenchard doctrine triumphed again as dogma.

This time the response of the other service chiefs was more forthright. Admiral Sir Dudley Pound condemned Trenchard's paper as 'a complete overstatement'. He continued: 'The danger of hard and fast priorities unintelligently interpreted has often been exemplified'.⁵ He knew dogma when he saw it. None the less the Chiefs-of-Staff endorsed a new strategy for Bomber Command in July 1941 in which the assault on German morale was given pride of place. This was the strategy inherited by Air

Marshal Arthur Harris when he was appointed commander of Bomber Command in February 1942. Although he has been popularly viewed from a quite different perspective, it is to Harris' credit that he recognised dogma too. When he assumed command the force was drifting, politically vulnerable because of its poor performance, quite unequal to the task of breaking the German will to resist. He regarded morale as such as an absurd objective in a state 'with the concentration camp around the corner'.⁶ He believed, as he had done as Deputy Director of Plans in the mid-1930s, that air power had one purpose, given the current state of technology, and that was to destroy the physical base of German war production by hammering the most important centres of production heavily and repeatedly. Whatever the drawbacks of such a campaign, which are well-known, Harris did set up a clear strategic objective, created the force structure and technology necessary to achieve it, and rejected the dogmatic assertion that morale was the key. The US 8th Air Force broadly followed the Harris line. US practice differed only in the belief that specific target systems could be hit with accuracy, rather than entire industrial cities.

The Trenchard view is hard to justify. It was accepted dogmatically and in the face of circumstances which should have encouraged a doctrinal revolution in the RAF. There were strong political constraints on a bombing strategy. When the RAF entered war in 1939 the prevailing instruction was to avoid any bomb attack in which there was the slightest chance of injury to a civilian. The British government, like the American, was among those exploring throughout the 1930s some means of outlawing the use of aircraft against anything but military targets in the strict meaning of the term. There were self-evident practical constraints. The prevailing technology might well have been equal to the tasks of subduing poorly armed colonial

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Stirling bombers en route to target

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rebels; it was inadequate for the kind of operations needed to subdue an enemy population on almost every count. Nor was there any conclusive evidence that bombing had the moral effects claimed for it. The bombing of Ethiopian villages in the Italian-Ethiopian war, or later the bombing of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War, were evidently demoralising but politically indecisive. The belief in the power of the bomb to affect the outcome of war remained, in the words of Marshal of the RAF, Sir John Slessor, a 'matter of faith'.

Why did British air doctrine develop in this way? The answers to that question, and there are many, provide important indicators to the factors that influence the

development of doctrine more generally. Political factors played their part, quite aside from the military issues involved. In the first place the RAF did need to justify its existence as a separate force, not only in 1919 when post-war retrenchment made the RAF a prime target for cutting, but throughout the inter-war years. An independent and unique doctrine, one which stressed the modernity and originality of air strategy, was regarded as essential to the political survival of the force. In addition, air doctrine was inseparable from the conditions of inter-service rivalry in the inter-war years. That rivalry was based on competition for scarce resources of money and industrial capacity for defence purposes. The senior services developed strong intellectual grounds for dismissing the idea of an independent air arm, but much of the rivalry between the services was based on material issues, or relative status. The RAF required a strong sense of what it was there for, in order to convince successive Chancellors of the Exchequer that the force was worth funding. As a result, the force was perhaps over-reliant on the strength of Trenchard's personality. The development of doctrine was difficult to separate from the political will and capability of the individuals involved in its formulation.

In the second place, doctrine suffered from a relatively poor level of evaluation and review. Of course, the military services between the wars lacked the kind of management skills and apparatus which forces in the late twentieth century take for granted. None the less, there was strikingly little serious discussion about air doctrine. The commitment to bombing was based on only the slenderest foundation of military experience. The post-1918 survey of the effects of bombing Germany in the last year of the war was pessimistic and inconclusive.⁷ It was not a sufficient basis on which to erect a strategy of independent air power. The experience of Empire policing, in which many senior officers in the 1930s had been engaged at some time or other, supported the idea of independent bombing in a context unlikely to be replicated in a European war. Consider a case published in the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* in 1938, 'Air Control in Ovamboland'. The author described the suppression of a rebel headman in southern Africa, who was brought to heel with the use of three aircraft bombing his kraal

and his cattle.⁸ The lesson to be drawn from the experience was that the moral pressure exerted by air attack was sufficient to achieve a political outcome. It was an assumption which could be, and was, extrapolated by the RAF to explain the offensive posture of the force and the central role assigned to bombing.

Clearly, from this example, the formulation of doctrine cannot be regarded as autonomous. Personalities, politics, technology, and experience combined in an intricate web of influence whose effects on doctrine were diverse but often profound. In this case doctrine ran ahead of what experience had taught, or the technical threshold would permit, or political circumstances make possible. The result was an attitude to air warfare that left the RAF after the outbreak of war in 1939 with a wide gap between ambition and capability. It might well be argued that some combination of these factors will usually influence the choice and development of doctrine under any circumstances, particularly in peacetime. Where a service has a powerful political interest to protect, as did the RAF between the wars, the prospects of doctrinal distortion, even of dogmatism, are likely to be more pronounced.

Doctrinal rigidity is more likely to occur, as with air power, at points where there appears a radical shift in military technology. The change from cavalry to tanks, or from conventional to nuclear bombs, are obvious examples. In the case of sea power, the transition from the age of battleships to the age of aircraft carriers, radar and air-sea collaboration was exceptionally rapid, and led in some cases, to a temporary gap between doctrine and military capability which was the reverse of the experience of the RAF. For naval staffs the aircraft threatened two things: the end of the battle fleet and the big gun engagement at the core of naval doctrine, and, more dangerously, the rapid eclipse of navies as a factor in war. The advent of air power made conventional naval doctrine unstable, even redundant in the eyes of aviation radicals, and invited a response that bordered on the dogmatic.

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The Royal Navy did not ignore aircraft. The Royal Naval Air Service under Churchill's leadership pioneered independent air activity in the early stages of the Great War. Yet in the inter-war years aircraft were given a largely subsidiary tactical role. Until 1931 British naval doctrine assigned to aircraft a role in fleet reconnaissance. They were not expected to play a role in the big gun engagement; it was expected that the traditional maritime duel would decide the outcome of the naval war. From 1931 with the creation of command for aircraft carriers the situation began to change. But in 1935, when naval air doctrine was more clearly defined, aircraft were still regarded as auxiliary. The functions aircraft

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were to perform reflected this subordination. They were to conduct fleet reconnaissance; during the big gun actions they were to act as artillery spotters. They were to protect the fleet from enemy air and submarine attack, and attack enemy capital ships to reduce their speed and make it possible for a big gun engagement to finish the job. Little thought was put into the role of air power in trade protection, and less into the effects of air attack on shipping. Naval vessels were expected to be able to defend themselves from air attack by concentrated shipboard anti-aircraft fire. The development of a separate RAF Coastal Command in 1936 did not produce an effective air-sea cooperation. Coastal Command was regarded as a sophisticated reconnaissance organization, spotting the enemy's ships so that the navy could destroy them.



HMS Achilles with aircraft-catapult facility and RAF personnel.



All of this was some six years before Pearl Harbour and before the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* in the South China Sea. Only seven years separated this evaluation from the Battle of the Coral Sea and Midway which were decided by aircraft without a single ship-to-ship salvo. To be fair, the Royal Navy was not alone in this assessment of the transforming effects of maritime air power. When the German Navy began in the late 1930s its plans for major expansion, the force was divided between those who wanted a slim offensive force, composed of submarines and supported by aircraft, and those who wanted a large battle fleet based around a core of major battleships. In 1939 Hitler opted for the latter to meet what he perceived to be Germany's long term strategic interests as a global power, but also because he associated naval power, as did so many of his contemporaries, with its symbolic expression: the big-gun battleship.⁹ The battleship school within the German Navy had its own position to consider within the service hierarchy. To have embraced the 'slim navy' would have required close collaboration, even perhaps a dependence, on the new German Air Force which neither service found congenial.

In Japan a paradoxical situation developed. The Japanese navy was at the forefront in the development of aircraft carriers and of offensive naval aviation. Naval aircraft equipped with good quality armament were developed to sink fleet units, and to prevent the enemy from doing the same to the Japanese fleet. Yet Japanese admirals remained wedded to the idea of the large battle fleet and the super-battleship. The Battle of Midway was planned as a major fleet engagement, in which the main task

force would pursue and destroy the outgunned remnants of the US Pacific Fleet. The big guns were never fired in anger. Nor were they for most of the Pacific War. The *Yamato*, the world's largest battleship, was sunk by a hail of aerial bombs in 1945 when it sailed out for a final defiant flourish, a swansong for the battleship age.

It could be argued that the failure to react more effectively or more rapidly to the advent of maritime air power, for offensive or defensive purposes, was not an expression of self-interest or dogmatism, but was the product of a rational assessment of the relative future development of naval and air technology, and of the immature state of naval aviation in the 1930s. From this

perspective, the plans to build a large German battle fleet, or Royal Naval plans to build and update its capital ships during the 1940s – the Naval Race that never was – were rational medium-term ambitions. On the other hand, the argument that aircraft could inflict serious damage on shipping, in the absence of the array of anti-aircraft defences that developed after 1945, was not lacking by the 1930s. In 1935 the Royal Navy exercises in the Mediterranean produced the conclusion (from an airman) that 'aeroplanes are certain to find and locate a hostile fleet ... and would probably inflict heavy losses'. The technology was immature but not lacking. The United States Navy made much more progress in the inter-war years in this direction than did European navies. Naval air armament was in many cases not much more effective than the low-calibre bombs with which Trenchard's strike force was

furnished, but effective aerial torpedoes were developed, and deck-piercing bombs. The best naval aircraft by the outbreak of war were capable of inflicting fatal damage on ships. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that European naval commanders were slow to adapt doctrine to match new technical capabilities. Aircraft did not make navies redundant after 1945, but they forced a major reorientation. The process of adaptation might well have been less costly in men and ships if the navy (and, it should be added, the air force too) had demonstrated greater doctrinal openness.

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There are more general lessons to be learned from these examples. In any organization there is a persistent tension between convention and innovation. The presumption is that innovation will always be progressive, and that existing structures, procedures and practices are in the nature of things a barrier to progress. Innovation for its own sake, however, has little more to commend it than a reactionary commitment to established behaviour. The critical issue in military institutions is the achievement of balance: a weighing of existing organization and ideas against the pressures for change, in order to achieve at any given time something close to the optimum. History demonstrates that the greatest pressure to change is generated under conditions of actual combat. Dogmatic thinking has usually failed the test of war.

In prolonged periods of peace the tendency to consolidate or to conserve is magnified. This is not to argue that military innovation is dependent on war alone; it is to suggest that to prevent doctrine from becoming dogma is a singularly challenging task under all conditions short of major war.

At the risk of appearing too categorical, there are at least five (there may well be more) elements to be taken into account in the formation and development of doctrine which can be regarded as decisive. They operated to a greater or lesser extent in the examples already examined. Briefly summarised these elements are: the impact of politics, broadly conceived; the role of technological change; the ability to absorb the lessons of experience; effective conditions for review; and finally, what might be called the 'eccentricity factor'. Each of these elements will be elaborated in turn.

1. The impact of politics

The history of the inter-war RAF shows that self-interest can also be self-defeating. The isolation of the RAF from the navy and army and its pursuit of an independent strategy left it able to do very little in 1939

Political factors affect the formulation of doctrine in a number of ways, and are more likely, on the evidence already looked at, to distort doctrine and its application than any other factor. The political context cannot be ignored in the formulation of doctrine, particularly where a regime is committed to particular long-term strategic goals, or is intent on expanding or contracting the arms base to a significant degree. The wider political context can be mediated to an extent – if, for example, the military themselves play a substantial part in determining that context – but it cannot be ignored, least of all by retreating into dogmatic positions. A recognition of political realities may well make it easier to adapt doctrine in creative ways, as the German military did in the 1920s under the exceptional conditions of enforced disarmament.

The second political element is more tractable. It is possible, and evidently desirable, to reduce political conflict between the services to a minimum. Self-interest is hard to resist, given the competition for scarce resources, and the understandable desire to maintain the prestige and capability of the force. The history of the inter-war RAF shows that self-interest can also be self-defeating. The isolation of the RAF from the navy and army and its pursuit of an independent strategy left it able to do very little in 1939. Active collaboration between the forces in the formation of doctrine, or simply the absence of a clear antagonism, is preferable to continuous rivalry. The kind of lateral thinking that this promotes may lead to the situation where a service is arguing away its *raison d'être*, as the RAF was forced to do when manned bombers gave way to Polaris submarines. At the least, doctrine should be examined with the following questions in mind: *to what extent has the formulation of doctrine been governed by self-interest of the force, and does it matter?*



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2. The role of technological change

There is no simple answer to the issue of whether doctrine should be driven by technological change or vice versa. Technical innovation can profoundly influence the development of doctrine. Historically, technological change has produced occasional abrupt breakthroughs which lead to a short period of doctrinal instability – for example, the introduction of combat aircraft in the First World War, or atomic weapons at the end of the Second – and interrupt a more gradual process of development. The impact of a sudden change can be either overestimated, as it was with strategic bombing, or underestimated, as it was with maritime air power. In general, doctrine should match the current level of technology which is capable of effective deployment. The contrast between Soviet practice in the Second World War, where a small group of robust, technically advanced weapons was mass-produced for the kind of battles being fought on the eastern Front, and the German preference for smaller numbers of optimum-quality weapons at the forefront of development, which were over-complex and expensive, demonstrates the danger of being technology-led. The new generation of German weapons – jets, long-range rockets, ground-to-air missiles – provided the weapons for the Cold War confrontation of the 1950s, but they were not strategically significant for World War II. Optimum technology is not always, in this sense, usable and effective – an observation that might be applied to the nuclear weapons programmes generated by the super-powers since 1945. On the other hand, the optimum doctrine, as the RAF found in the 1930s, is not attainable if the technological base is not yet sophisticated enough to support it. Doctrine has to be steered between these two extremes.

3. The lessons of experience

Doctrine does not emerge in a vacuum. It is profoundly affected by historical experience. The evaluation of the experience is critical to the formulation of effective doctrine. The process of evaluation is common to all armed forces, but it carries within it a number of dangers. It is difficult to examine past experience without bringing to that process a particular cast of mind, a predisposition to interpret the material in particular ways. Professional historians are no more exempt from these tendencies than military staffs. Evaluation is a matter of sound judgement; it requires real candour, a genuine detachment, and, above all, a scientific approach. Slessor's description of air strategy in the 1930s as 'a matter of faith' may well reflect the historical reality, but it was not a sound basis for doctrine. The tendency for evaluation to reflect the eye of the beholder was evident in the different responses to the air battles of the 1930s. The bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War drew entirely different responses from those who observed its effects. The German Air Force, whose planes attacked Guernica, were unimpressed by the effects of urban bombing and stuck to a tactical air doctrine until the technology might permit something different. Soviet observation of the bombing in Spain ended the experimental development of heavy bombers and long-range aviation, and pushed the Red Air Force towards a rather narrow conception of tactical air power. The RAF on the other hand saw Guernica, together with Italian experience in Ethiopia, or Japanese bombing of Chinese cities, as confirmation that bombing was effective against civilian morale. Paradoxically, the RAF did not draw lessons from the German bombing of Britain during the Blitz, which confirmed that economic targets were difficult to destroy permanently, and that civilian morale could survive over 40,000 deaths. Instead they launched their own bombing offensive with poorer resources against a well-defended enemy state, with the object of smashing German industry and undermining German war-willingness to the point of collapse. In this case, of course, much more was at stake. If the RAF had admitted the drawbacks of bombing doctrine the bombing offensive would never have been attempted. The improved performance of Bomber Command over the war was entirely a product of tactical and technological improvements learned in the hardest of all schools, combat itself.



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This example illustrates the importance of applying the principle of 'appropriateness' in making evaluations from experience. There are evident dangers in extrapolating from small wars to large wars, or vice versa. Bombing in Spain was not like a bombing war between major states. Bombing Vietnam or Korea was not the same as bombing Germany or even Japan. Doctrine should, and usually does, reflect a variety of different contexts and environments for the likely conduct of operations.

4. The conditions for review

Since doctrine is from its nature impermanent, it must be the subject of almost perpetual review. Here once again there are problems of balance between what should be conserved and what should be revised. The existence of some kind of effective review body with the right to treat doctrine irreverently must in itself promote the desire to demonstrate change. Review bodies have their own interests to promote, not least of which is a justification of their existence and their budget. Change is not for its own sake. It may be desirable under certain circumstances for a review body to conclude that current doctrine stays as it is, and it justifies its existence no less by doing so.

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The exact nature of the process of review cannot be prescribed in every case. But some process of regular scrutiny, when doctrine is re-assessed in the light of fresh ideas or new experience, or a political sea-change, is a significant step towards identifying the elements of dogma. It might well be objected that regular monitoring on this scale would render doctrine unusable, because it would exist in a permanent state of uncertainty; this would make it difficult to plan the long-term development of technology or force structures if doctrine were subject to unpredictable and possibly radical alteration on a regular short-term basis. The evidence from the Second World War suggests that, if anything, the opposite is the case. Under conditions of extreme instability the Red Army tore up its manuals in 1942 and initiated at the highest level a thorough review of everything from the mission of the armed forces down to battlefield tactics.¹⁰ The results produced a remarkable revival in Soviet fighting power. Over the rest of the war period the Soviet General Staff were open to change. The flexibility of the Soviet military machine was the opposite of the popular image of the Soviet regime – totalitarian, ideologically driven, dogmatic – and its responsiveness surprised the German forces who had taken advantage of the many Soviet weaknesses in 1941. The pressure of war produced in this case a willingness to adapt doctrine to circumstances with remarkable effect. Both the Soviet and British forces in general performed better during the war when they were forced to make their doctrine up as they went along. The history of British tactical air power is probably the most obvious example. The RAF's dogmatic rejection of counter-force strategy and hostility to air-army cooperation meant that tactical air doctrine had to be formulated and practised under wartime pressure.



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Review raises the issue of reviewers. Should they be independent? How independent should they be? There has been historically an obvious reluctance to import outside expertise into areas properly regarded as military. During the Second World War relations between the

British military authorities and the Operational Research teams, which had a large complement of external academic expertise, were strained. The German armed forces made significantly less use of independent expertise than other armed forces, and resented civilian intervention. Yet civilian evaluation, however hard to swallow, could have a serious effect on the conduct of operations. The Butt Report on the performance of Bomber Command produced in 1941 almost led to the eclipse of bombing strategy, and forced a hard rethinking of bombing doctrine. The ideal lies perhaps somewhere in between, in the development of an intellectual community part military, part civilian, capable of generating an effective exchange of ideas and competence. Academic disciplines operate in a perpetual state of self-critical but constructive review. These are transferable practices. Doctrine is not inscribed in stone; it calls for constant and critical interrogation.



The Fairey Battle light day-bomber is the story of a promising aircraft that tragically failed to perform its task in war.

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5. The 'eccentricity factor'

Coping with eccentric interventions in the formulation or practice of doctrine might seem on the surface no more difficult than Air Marshal Harris found it to be. He had the habit of showing every amateur expert the door. Yet eccentricity, quite literally the property of deviating from the norm, plays its part in military affairs. The revolutionary insight, like the transforming invention, is rare. More common is the ability of a particular individual from sheer strength of character, or quality of leadership, to distort or ignore existing doctrine and to impose his own solution. Winston Churchill is almost certainly the most obvious example. Time and again his interventions were talked down by the Chiefs of Staff; occasionally he prevailed. The effect was at times damaging. What Churchill did do was to sharpen the military minds around him by forcing them to think differently, to deviate occasionally from the norm.

A cynic might suggest at this point that wars are not won by doctrine at all, but through qualities of political leadership or generalship and the effect of both upon the state of morale, none of which can be easily incorporated, if at all, into written doctrine. There is no formula for coping with the eccentric, beyond a willingness to remain open to the unorthodox idea or the military firebrand. Harris was no doubt wrong to show everyone the door, but right to be sceptical. But in his own way he too was an eccentric; he put his own stamp on Bomber Command and turned it into a much more effective force than it had been for the first two and half years of war, but he did so in regular defiance of colleagues in the RAF, and senior commanders and politicians outside it. There is a long and distinguished list of others who, like Harris, imposed their personality on the rule-book. The random factor does not render doctrine redundant. The long-term development of military thought and military organization has continuities which transcend the impact of the eccentric. Doctrine is not simply about winning battles; it is about the construction and development of peace-time forces. It helps them to define their function and shape and to make both clear to their paymasters and the wider public. The five factors explored here, in the harsh light of historical experience, illustrate the many ways in which military doctrine can avoid the pitfalls of dogmatism, while remaining receptive to innovation and capable of absorbing sudden shocks or arbitrary intervention. Military doctrine is neither ideal nor universal; it is historically specific and in flux, and the best doctrine reflects that reality.

NOTES

- 1 Public Record Office, Kew, London, AIR 9/8, memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff, 'The War Object of an Air Force', 2nd May 1928.
- 2 PRO AIR 9/8, Note by the First Sea Lord, 21st May 1928.
- 3 PRO AIR 9/8, 'Air Policy and Strategy', lecture at the Royal Naval Staff College, Greenwich, 23rd March 1936, p.1.
- 4 Memorandum by Lord Trenchard on 'The Present War Situation', 19th May 1941, in C. Webster & N. Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany*, London, 1961, volume 4, pp. 195-6.
- 5 Note by Sir Dudley Pound on Lord Trenchard's memorandum. 2nd June 1941, Webster & Frankland, iv, p. 198.
- 6 A.T. Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, London, 1947, p. 97.
- 7 Air Ministry, *Synopsis of British Air Effort During the War*, HMSO, Cmnd 100, April 1919.
- 8 H. G. Wilmot, 'Air Control in Ovamboland', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* '83, 1938, pp. 823-9.
- 9 See C. Thomas. *The German Navy in the Nazi Era*, London, 1990, pp. 177-9.
- 10 For example L. Rotundo (ed), *Battle of Stalingrad: The 1943 Soviet General Staff Study*, Washington, 1989.



RAF Harrier GR7 with LGB
Photo Sgt Jack Prichard

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