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MCFARLAND, STEPHEN, AMERICA'S PURSUIT OF PRECISION BOMBING, 1910 - 1945.
WASHINGTON, D.C., SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE PRESS, 1995. ISBN 1-56098-407-4.
ILLUSTRATIONS. FIGURES. TABLES. APPENDICES. NOTES. BIBLIOGRAPHY. INDEX. PP.XVIII, 312. £23.25 (CLOTH)

This work is of considerable value to air power and Second World War scholars, and those who have read Stephen McFarland's earlier excellent study of the air superiority battle over Germany, *To Command the Sky*, will be interested to see how he deals with this subject. This the first large study of the U.S.'s pursuit of precision bombing, although other scholars should be acknowledged for having made important contributions to the historiography also within the last few years, particularly Tami Davis-Biddle and Hays Parks (*Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 18, No. 1, March 1995*).

Stephen McFarland concludes, like Davis-Biddle and Parks, that 'precision' was relative, and demonstrates how the available bombsighting technology failed to meet the expectations of U.S. strategic bombing doctrine. McFarland's book begins with an examination of the bombing experiments done in the U.S. prior to 1918. This is reminiscent of Neville Jones's book. The Origins of Strategic Bombing, which focuses on British air thought and practice up to the end of the First World War. However, the comparison leads the reviewer to wish that McFarland had devoted more attention to the doctrinal thought processes in the U.S. The author spends too much time detailing the various bombsighting developments, without significant mention of the doctrinal debates and wider influences on U.S. strategic bombing theory which shaped the doctrine with which the U.S. Army Forces went to war in 1941. Although McFarland acknowledges some British influence on early American bombsighting technology, one would have expected a discussion of the U.S.'s observations of British bombing during the First World War, as the British were, after all, the chief bombing practitioners,

The reviewer would also have liked more discussion of the type seen in Chapter Four, where McFarland raises the fundamental question of why the U.S. opted for precision attack of industrial targets, while the Royal Air Force believed attacks on enemy morale were more efficacious. McFarland states (p.82) that 'Americans had a traditional reverence for marksmanship and a deep rooted opposition to making civilians targets in war'. Leaving aside the fact that Britain, too, had a tradition of marksmanship (as exemplified by the 'Old Contemptibles' who helped to stall the Schlieffen Plan), where did this 'deep rooted opposition to making civilians targets in war' come from? Was it, as some have suggested, because of the comparatively recent experience of the American Civil War? Did this differ substantially from Britain's own recent experience of civilians being bombed by the Germans? McFarland's treatment of these

fundamental wider issues is disappointingly brief. One of the principal reasons the British emphasised the morale effect of bombing and the Americans clid not was the RAF's empire policing experience during the interwar period. Success in this role reinforced Trenchard's view, expressed as early as 1919, that the morale effect of bombing stood to the material effect in a proportion of twenty to one'. This remained gospel for as long as Trenchard was Chief of Air Staff (until 1930), and remained a feature of British bombing doctrine thereafter.

Having said all this, McFarland makes a significant contribution to our understanding of American bombsight development during the interwar period, particularly the work done by Carl Norden. The author shows how, in spite of the advanced bombing technology offered by Norden's bombsight, the Americans were unable to achieve the desired precision, in either the European or Pacific theatres during the Second World War. McFarland does an excellent job of digesting the wartime and post-war bombing analyses, and shows how for most of the war the USAAF achieved bombing accuracy comparable to the results of the British night bombing campaign. Until the end of 1944, an average of no more than one-third of bombs dropped hit within 1,000 feet of their intended targets.

While some scholars may find the above mentioned deficiencies, and occasional lax referencing (Chapter Three's endnote 47, for example), distracting, this is still an important book. McFarland helps us to start thinking about the reasons why the need for precision has become so ingrained in U.S. military culture, and why it is dangerous to seek 'silver bullet' solutions. McFarland demonstrates that this is the period when the U.S. started to believe that technological excellence would overcome most operational problems. Although this philosophy was dented by the Vietnam war, it continues to underpin U.S. military doctrine.

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