

**BOOK REVIEW BY  
GROUP CAPTAIN PETER W GRAY  
DIRECTOR OF DEFENCE STUDIES (RAF)**

**ALANBROOKE BY DAVID FRASER**

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On Monday 18th of October 1999 Viscount Alanbrooke, son of Field Marshal the Viscount Alanbrooke KG GCB OM GCVO DSO, opened the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre named after his father. The citation that accompanies the portrait of the Field Marshal points out that he succeeded Dill as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in December 1941. It goes on to state that 'In this appointment he embodied the concept of operating in both the joint and international environment and was responsible for turning Churchill's political strategic decisions into military strategy throughout the remainder of the war'. As David Fraser makes abundantly clear in this eminently readable biography, this is only part of the story. It was in fact Alanbrooke's role as Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee that made him so suitable a contender for the Centre, rather than his position as professional head of his own Service. Alanbrooke admirably fulfilled the role of 'first among equals', working closely with his fellow Chiefs, Pound (later Cunningham) and Portal. When the three Chiefs were given the Freedom of the City of

London after the war they symbolically rode through the City in the same car demonstrating with conviction their existence as a 'Trinity'.

Fraser, a soldier of some distinction, does not attempt to portray Alanbrooke as an early paragon or disciple of 'jointness'. In the fascinating review of Alanbrooke's experiences in the trenches as an artillery officer, the role of air power is acknowledged, not surprisingly, in its support functions. In later discussions Alanbrooke comes over very much as the professional soldier. On the premise that an enemy can be defeated by naval blockade (which had been a significant factor in reducing German will in 1918), by strategic bombardment or in the field of battle he has little sympathy with the Navy and none at all with disciples of Douhet and Trenchard.

The statue to Alanbrooke that is situated outside the Ministry of Defence in London includes the epithet 'Master of Strategy'. Fraser makes it clear that Alanbrooke was not an innovative strategic level thinker. His strength was in consistently applying military reality to the thinking of others – Churchill in particular. Alanbrooke's grasp of detail was impressive and his delivery of information rapid – often to the discomfiture of the interlocutor (especially the Americans).

This book is well written and easy to read. It does not purport to be an essay in 'jointness', nor does it attempt to portray its subject as a 'purple officer'. It is however evident that the nation was fortunate to have someone of Alanbrooke's ability both as the senior soldier and as primus inter pares.

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