



Tedder: Quietly in Command

By Vincent Orange

Publisher: Frank Cass Publishers

ISBN: 0714648175

Price: £55.00 (480 pages hardcover)

ISBN: 071464367X

Price: £19.99 (472 pages, softcover)

Reviewed by Sebastian Ritchie

As Eisenhower's deputy and Air Commander during the liberation of Europe between 1943 and 1945, and as Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Middle East from 1941-1943, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Tedder fully earned his reputation as one of the outstanding Allied high commanders of the Second World War. Although an early biography by Roderick Owen was published in 1952, and Tedder's memoirs, *With Prejudice*, appeared in 1966, there has long

been a need for an updated biography drawing on archival sources released since the 1960s and on the enormous volume of research and writing on the war undertaken since that time. Vincent Orange's eagerly awaited study — *Tedder: Quietly in Command* — will therefore be welcomed throughout the military history community, and particularly by students of air power history.

Arthur Tedder was born in 1890 and was educated at Whitgift School and at Cambridge University, where he read history. He was commissioned into the Dorsetshire Regiment in 1915, and joined the Royal Flying Corps in the following year. He was appointed squadron leader in the Royal Air Force in 1919 and then rose steadily through the ranks during the 1920s and early 30s, to reach Air Commodore in 1934, when he became the Air Ministry's Director of Training at the beginning of the first of the pre-World War Two RAF expansion programmes. In 1936 he became AOC Far East, based in Singapore; he was promoted Air Vice-Marshal in 1937, and returned to the Air Ministry in 1938 to become Director General of Research and Development, during which time he helped to initiate such war-winning aircraft as the de Havilland Mosquito, and actively promoted the development and production of Whittle's jet engine. After some difficult months under Beaverbrook in the Ministry of Aircraft Production, he was promoted to the acting rank of Air Marshal and sent to the Middle East as Deputy AOC in November 1940; he was then appointed AOC in June.

Although tipped as a future CAS in the mid-1930s it was to be in the desert war between 1941 and 1943 that Tedder first proved his exceptional qualities as a high commander. Assuming his appointment under immensely difficult operational circumstances, with scarce resources and under constant criticism from the other armed services, Tedder transformed the RAF in the Middle East into a formidable fighting machine — flexible, highly mobile, capable of winning and maintaining control of the air, and of providing ample support to land and maritime forces. Indeed, he proved a master of the joint environment, ultimately winning the backing of his army and navy counterparts to uphold the

fundamental principle of centralised command and control of air assets. Under Eisenhower, first as Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean, then as Deputy Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force (in North-West Europe), Tedder would subsequently display a no less exceptional ability to operate in a coalition environment. Indeed, Orange shows that Tedder was in many ways the lynchpin of the Allied high command in Europe between 1943 and 1945. The importance of his role in integrating Allied air power into Operation Overlord, and in resolving inter-service tensions and strained relations within the alliance (which became acute late in 1944) can hardly be exaggerated.

Tedder was promoted Air Chief Marshal in 1942 and became a Marshal of the Royal Air Force in September 1945. In January 1946 he succeeded Portal as Chief of Air Staff and afterwards, in conditions of desperate economic stringency, presided over not only the post-war contraction of the wartime RAF, but also over the beginning of its adaptation to the demands of the Cold War. After his retirement in December 1949 he became a governor of the BBC, Chancellor of Cambridge University, and Chairman of the Standard Motor Company. He died in 1967.

In this very important and highly readable biography, Vincent Orange set himself the difficult task of portraying Tedder the *man* — childhood, character, and private life — as well as Tedder the *commander*. But the result is an eminently balanced narrative which succeeds in its principal objective. It was clearly *not* the author's intention to upset this balance by embarking on a particularly detailed analysis of the command techniques and processes that lay behind Tedder's remarkable accomplishments. For the most part, the reader is left to draw conclusions about how and why Tedder achieved what he did. This book nevertheless adds much to our understanding of the British and Allied high commands in the Second World War, of relations between Allied high commanders, and of the top-level direction of operations, particularly in the desert and broader Mediterranean theatres. The lessons that it contains on joint and coalition warfare remain supremely relevant to today's commanders.

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