

1989

### "Bomber Harris: The Story of Marshall of the Royal Air Force," and "Iron Eagle: The Turbulent Life of General Curtis LeMay"

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#### Recommended Citation

Mets, David R.; Saward, Dudley; and Coffey, Thomas M. (1989) ""Bomber Harris: The Story of Marshall of the Royal Air Force," and "Iron Eagle: The Turbulent Life of General Curtis LeMay"," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 42 : No. 2 , Article 12.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol42/iss2/12>

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would see or listen critically. Manchester describes the policy of appeasement, the avowed policy of the British government whose efforts in that regard bordered on the obsequious. He presents Churchill's ability to see the fallacies in that policy. They were evident to him at the time; to the others—only in retrospect. Churchill's power to listen, keep his own counsel, and make up his own mind is impressive.

Hitler was intent upon *lebensraum*. Churchill knew it and because he had learned all he could about the man, knew he had to be stopped. Patton is reported to have said about Rommel, "I read his book." Churchill said the same about Hitler. The mystifying fact is that few others appear to have done so. Chamberlain thought Hitler could be satisfied or diverted.

In spite of, or more likely because of, his prescience, Churchill suffered the loneliness and the social ostracism of a prophet in the wilderness. He was considered an unreliable maverick in light of the great problems of the day; irrelevant, practically senile; and out-of-touch. He was often told so. But the author's admiration for his subject clouds the reader's ability to understand the fact and the reasons for Churchill's enforced isolation.

There are other lessons here, too, which are known widely but bear repeating. Churchill's implacable opposition to Hitler was caused, in part, by his realization of what Hitler was doing to the Jews. And although a weak case could, on

occasion, be made for other aspects of the Nazi government, Churchill knew that the indefensible could not be defended.

Manchester's description of a typical Churchillian day at Chartwell is full of charm. From the magnificent, relaxed nudity of the morning, to the pervasive sociality of the crowded lunches and dinners, Churchill dominates an impressive house. The cataloging of the subject's smoking and drinking habits and his bizarre work schedule—dictating his books from 11 at night until 3 in the morning—is fascinating. It calls into question all recent health and "early to bed" advice.

Further information and insight into Churchill and the prelude to World War II can be obtained from Martin Gilbert's recently completed multivolume biography, and Anthony Read and David Fisher's new *Deadly Embrace*, a description of Hitler, Stalin, and the Nazi-Soviet pact.

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Saward, Dudley. *Bomber Harris: The Story of Marshall of the Royal Air Force*. New York: Doubleday, 1985. 368pp. \$19.95

Coffey, Thomas M. *Iron Eagle: The Turbulent Life of General Curtis LeMay*. New York: Crown, 1986. 480pp. \$18.95

*Bomber Harris* is a book that suffers from many of the defects found in most biographies. Its main theme is that Sir Arthur Harris was one of the greatest air leaders of all time and if we had listened to him, we certainly would have won World War II with less blood and pain. Dudley Saward was a group captain on Bomber Harris's staff throughout World War II. As the chief electronics officer he is especially well-equipped for this work. His technical competence goes far beyond that of the usual biographer, and his long friendship with Harris gives him insights that few others would have. Too, as seems typical with RAF officers, his command of the written language is fully up to the task.

To develop his theme, Saward asserts that area bombing was really far more effective than the RAF official historians have allowed. Too, Harris's contribution to the naval war through mining was far more significant than has been recognized, and the degree to which the Bomber Command absorbed German defense resources was another decisive factor often overlooked. Saward makes the worthy point that Bomber Command stood practically alone against the *Wehrmacht* for a year and led the other services and other nations into battle against Hitler. He is careful to recognize repeatedly that the USAAF made a contribution to the air war but makes it clear enough that it did not get on the scene in force until very late. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Saward

argues that not only was the postwar British government ungrateful toward both Bomber Command and Harris, but history, too, has not recognized their contribution sufficiently. In truth, *Bomber Harris* is more a testimonial to "correct" the record than it is a scholarly biography—but Saward does not pretend it to be otherwise.

Upon evaluation of *Bomber Harris*, on Saward's own grounds, it appears to me that he does not make his case. No one can question that the RAF was on the cutting edge and stood practically alone for a long time. But it seems that Saward never does meet the critics of Bomber Command head on. Rather, he tends to bury us in statistics of sorties flown, tonnage dropped, and areas burned. He does deal with the impact of bombing on production, but lumps the contribution of Bomber Command and the U.S. Army Air Force together in such a way as to obscure the issue. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) asserted that the area bombing had little impact on production. The morale of the German worker did decline, but that made little difference because he kept on doing his job until the end. The USSBS asserts that it was the precision bombing that had the greatest impact on production, albeit very late in the game.

Saward's use of sources is annoying. The memoirs of Albert Speer, as an example, are quoted far and wide in the United States in support of the wisdom of precision, daylight strategic bombing. Yet Saward finds it

possible to marshal quotes from *Inside the Third Reich* to support his point, which really is the opposite. He seldom uses a footnote for documentation, choosing to give his sources in the text. Too often they are in the character of commendations or citations that would be expected as a matter of courtesy from political superiors or people from the services of other nations. Not only is the practice as wearying as the excessive use of numbers, but one is bound to worry that he gives those courtesies more weight than they deserve.

German war production did not begin its precipitous decline until the last half of 1944. By then the USAAF was on the scene in force. Saward offers up a ton of production figures, but he does nothing to show that part of the decline was due to precision bombing in daytime and fails to evidence what part was due to Bomber Command area bombing at night. Also, Harris is criticized far and wide in the British sources for dragging his feet in joining the USAAF, as ordered, in the campaign against German oil. Saward again merges things to obscure the issue. He cites the immense tonnage that the RAF is supposed to have dropped on the oil targets, but does not relate that directly to losses in oil production nor to the time when the fuel shortages had a direct effect on the German armed forces. Saward does not make his case because he does not directly answer the issues raised by Harris's critics—most of whom are British. The American professional officer may find *Bomber*

*Harris* interesting reading—as much for what it implies as for what it says about wartime decision making and service politics. But unless he is already quite familiar with the arguments that have long raged in the United Kingdom about the Combined Bomber Offensive, he will want to study some of the works hostile to Harris and the RAF official histories along with Saward's defense.

It is no credit to us that the air marshals and British scholars of air warfare have been more prolific writers than have their American counterparts. We have had only a few biographies and memoirs written on USAAF leaders and none of them measures up to Forrest C. Pogue's work on General George C. Marshall. A new biography of General Curtis E. LeMay does nothing to change that. Thomas M. Coffey has produced two earlier works on the USAAF. One was about the famous Schweinfurt attacks of 1943, and the other a biography of General Henry H. Arnold. The current work is an improvement over the earlier ones. Still, if one is not turned off by the title, *Iron Eagle*, then he may be stopped short by an assertion that: "the fact that in the minds of most military experts, Gen. Curtis E. LeMay is the greatest air commander the United States has yet produced. . . ." Coffey offers no footnote to substantiate that as the opinion of "most military experts" and I am quite sure that he could never produce such documentation. As a

former SAC pilot I might be prepared to subscribe to "one of the greatest" myself, but to assert that case as *the* greatest will not get a majority vote among the "military experts," whoever they are.

A part of the difficulty may arise from the sources used for *Iron Eagle*. Coffey uses interviews heavily and uncritically, and almost all of them come from Air Force veterans, usually long after the events described. Research of any kind must be repeatable to be valid. The oral histories used are cited in such a format that the ordinary reader would have little guidance as to where they might be found. The chief documentary sources in the Library of Congress that Coffey uses seem to be the interviews conducted by Dr. Bruce Hopper. But there is neither indication that these are in the Library of Congress nor that they are in the Spaatz collection. There are over 100,000 items in that collection, and the boxes in which the Hopper interviews are filed are not identified. Beyond that, Coffey occasionally refers to a letter or a cable, apparently in the Arnold Collection, but he gives no further identification than the date. Only one or two of his sources are of British origin, and none of them are from the U.S. Navy. The result is a superficial work that is highly biased in favor of its subject.

There are few factual errors in *Iron Eagle*. Much of the difficulty arises from interpretations, some of which defy logic. General LeMay seems to get the credit for being the driving

force behind the Berlin Airlift. Harry Truman gets no credit at all; still less does LeMay's Air Force. But when we come to Vietnam, McNamara gets all the responsibility for what took place there. Coffey does not allot a share of blame to any of the military leaders. Victory has a thousand fathers; defeat is an orphan. Finally, Coffey seems unduly preoccupied with the "bomb them back into the stone age. . . ." remark. Though the quotation appears in *Mission with LeMay* (and Coffey admits that), and though General LeMay had the opportunity to review that manuscript before it went to the printer, Coffey says that the remark was inadvertently overlooked by the General and he should not have been faulted on it. It is an excuse that General LeMay would not have accepted from one of his SAC aircraft commanders and Coffey does not serve the dignity of one of America's greatest combat air leaders by dwelling upon it. The final flaw in *Iron Eagle* is the index which contains only names of people. It is not very useful, and the publishers would have been well advised to drop the inadequate footnotes and expend their efforts on a more viable index. In any event, there is little in this work that is not also in *Mission with LeMay*—and MacKinlay Kantor put that book in language that is just as easy to read as Coffey's. Since General LeMay is carried on the title page as one of the authors, it has the stature of being a primary source and the professional officer might just as well use it as *Iron Eagle*.

If the student of war wishes to pursue an interest in the history of strategic bombing, he probably will not want to take the time to use either of the works under review since both require substantial supplementary reading. A recent book which is superior to both and covers much of the same ground is the biography of General Ira Eaker, *Air Force Spoken Here*, by James Parton. Parton was Eaker's aide during World War II and is a primary source well acquainted with his subject. It is quite clear that he, too, is favorably disposed toward his hero, but he is much more careful in his use of the sources, more thorough in his research, and clearly better balanced in his approach than either of the two authors under review here. Parton is a literate man and his prose is a pleasure to read.

Forrest Pogue and Stephen Ambrose (on Eisenhower) have amply proven that biographies can be useful instruments for the study of war. But the study of air war has not matured to the degree that have military and naval history. *Bomber Harris* and *Iron Eagle* are two examples of that point. There is an inversion in the field of the history of air power. Usually, official history is not deemed to be as valid as unofficial work. But if one wants the best approach to the study of war in the air, he should go through the official works first. For example, on the War against Hitler and the Japanese, the seven-volume *The Army Air Forces in World War II* is

several other official works on other periods that seem destined to gain that status. Raymond Bowers's volume on tactical airlift in Vietnam is one example. But there are inhibitions to the official publication of biographies—and yet, it does not seem likely that support for private work on air figures competitive with that of Pogue and Ambrose will soon be found. That is regrettable, for as Napoleon once said, "he who would be a warrior should above all study the lives of the Great Captains."

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Schull, Joseph. *The Far Distant Ships: An Official Account of Canadian Naval Operations in World War II*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press/Toronto: Stoddart, 1988, 528pp. \$21.95

During the Second World War, Canadian warships and sailors were drawn—or managed to insinuate themselves—into virtually every major theater of war. The scope and variety of activities were unprecedented in the annals of Canadian naval history, from escorting the Russian convoys to battling kamikazes off Okinawa. They included landing operations in the Aegean and the Aleutians, MTB and destroyer engagements in the English Channel, escort duties in the Caribbean and the familiar convoy operations of the North Atlantic. By the end of the war the miniscule small-ship navy of