REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.
PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)*
19/Feb/2002

2. REPORT TYPE
DISSERTATION

3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
MARSHAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE SIR JOHN COTESWORTH SLESSOR AND THE ANGLO-AMERICAN AIR POWER AIR POWER ALLIANCE, 1940-1945

5a. CONTRACT NUMBER

5b. GRANT NUMBER

5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

5d. PROJECT NUMBER

5e. TASK NUMBER

5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)
MAJ CONNOLLY CORVIN J

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
CI02-19

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
AFIT/CIA, BLDG 125
2950 P STREET
WPAFB OH 45433

10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)

11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Unlimited distribution
In Accordance With AFI 35-205/AFIT Sup 1

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

20020305 171

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A
Approved for Public Release
Distribution Unlimited

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE		316	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER *(Include area code)*

ABSTRACT

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Cotesworth Slessor and the Anglo-American Air Power Alliance, 1940-1945. (December 2001)

Corvin J. Connolly, B.A., Assumption College;

M.S., Troy State University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. R. J. Q. Adams

Sir John C. Slessor (1897-1979) was one of Great Britain's most influential airmen of the Second World War. He played a remarkable and extensive role in building the Anglo-American air power partnership as an air planner on the Royal Air Force Staff, the British Chiefs of Staff, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff. In these capacities he was a significant coalition builder that coordinated military strategy with America in 1940-41, helped create an Anglo-American bomber alliance in 1942, and drafted the compromise formula at the Casablanca Conference breaking the deadlock in the Anglo-American debate on strategy. Slessor was also instrumental in defeating the U-boat menace as RAF Coastal Commander, and later shared responsibility for directing Allied air operations in the Mediterranean. Few aspects of this vast worldwide association escaped some manner of his influence. The training of pilots, the procurement of aircraft, and the interchange of operational intelligence and information on countless subjects—all of these depended in varying degrees on Slessor. His efforts in Anglo-American operational planning paved the way for a degree of cooperation and combined action never before equaled by the military forces of two great nations.

Slessor's influence had a lasting effect on the conduct of military relations between the United States and Great Britain. The passing of time has obscured his name and the significance of the wartime 'special relationship'. This is the first major examination of Slessor, and is intended to rectify serious historical neglect.

MARSHAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE SIR JOHN COTESWORTH SLESSOR AND THE ANGLO-AMERICAN AIR POWER ALLIANCE, 1940–1945

A Dissertation

by

CORVIN J. CONNOLLY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2001

Major Subject: History

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government

MARSHAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE SIR JOHN COTESWORTH SLESSOR AND THE ANGLO-AMERICAN AIR POWER ALLIANCE, 1940-1945

A Dissertation

by

CORVIN J. CONNOLLY

Submitted to Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Approved as to style and content by:

R. J. Q. Adams
(Chair of Committee)

Joseph G. Dawson, III
(Member)

Roger R. Reese
(Member)

James S. Burk
(Member)

Julia Kirk Blackwelder
(Head of Department)

December 2001

Major Subject: History

ABSTRACT

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Cotesworth Slessor and the Anglo-American Air Power Alliance, 1940-1945. (December 2001)

Corvin J. Connolly, B.A., Assumption College;

M.S., Troy State University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. R. J. Q. Adams

Sir John C. Slessor (1897-1979) was one of Great Britain's most influential airmen of the Second World War. He played a remarkable and extensive role in building the Anglo-American air power partnership as an air planner on the Royal Air Force Staff, the British Chiefs of Staff, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff. In these capacities he was a significant coalition builder that coordinated military strategy with America in 1940-41, helped create an Anglo-American bomber alliance in 1942, and drafted the compromise formula at the Casablanca Conference breaking the deadlock in the Anglo-American debate on strategy. Slessor was also instrumental in defeating the U-boat menace as RAF Coastal Commander, and later shared responsibility for directing Allied air operations in the Mediterranean. Few aspects of this vast worldwide association escaped some manner of his influence. The training of pilots, the procurement of aircraft, and the interchange of operational intelligence and information on countless subjects—all of these depended in varying degrees on Slessor. His efforts in Anglo-American operational planning paved the way for a degree of cooperation and combined action never before equaled by the military forces of two great nations.

Slessor's influence had a lasting effect on the conduct of military relations between the United States and Great Britain. The passing of time has obscured his name and the significance of the wartime 'special relationship'. This is the first major examination of Slessor, and is intended to rectify serious historical neglect.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the preparation of this dissertation I have been fortunate to have the kind and generous help of many people. I warmly thank Texas A&M University and the Department of History for the opportunity they afforded me to study and grow as a scholar. I am appreciative for the help given me by the archivists where I pursued my research. In particular, I wish to thank Joe Caver, Essie Roberts and Denis Case of the United States Air Force Research Agency at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. I am also indebted to the staff at Christ Church College, Oxford, and the Public Record Office for their assistance. I am very grateful to Sebastian Cox of the RAF Historical Branch for his encouragement and counsel.

I am especially thankful to Sir John Slessor's son, Group Captain and Mrs. J. A. G. Slessor. They graciously welcomed me into their home and provided me with interesting and valuable anecdotes about the Air Marshal that improved my work and added to its pleasure. Others who aided me along the way include Colonel Richard Kozik, Lori Cagle, Professor Brian Linn, Dr. Richard Oehling, and Group Captain Barry T. Dingle. Professor Roger Beaumont introduced the idea for the study of Sir John Slessor to me. I am eternally grateful for that suggestion and his friendship. Whitelaw Reid made himself available to me for an interview, which provided information and insights unavailable elsewhere. To the United States Air Force I owe a great debt of gratitude for enabling me to pursue this endeavor.

To my dear mother, [redacted], my three sisters and the [redacted] family, I extend my loving thanks for without their support and encouragement over the years I would never have reached this goal. I must acknowledge the very significant debt I owe to my father, [redacted], who fired me with a delight in history that has absorbed my mind and enriched my life.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor R. J. Q. Adams for his guidance as my Committee Chair. His patience, inspired teaching, good cheer and friendship sustained me through this arduous process. As important, his persistent demand for high quality, in substance and style, improved this study immeasurably. I also extend my thanks to the other members of my dissertation committee: Professors Joseph G. Dawson III, Roger R. Reese, and James S. Burk. All were helpful and sensitive in their criticisms of the manuscript, and gave me enormous freedom to write the dissertation in my own way.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank my wife [redacted]. She was more patient than I had a right to expect; I am grateful for her love, support and motivation through three lengthy years of hard work, absence, and late hours.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
ABSTRACT		iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		v
TABLE OF CONTENTS		vii
CHAPTER		
I	INTRODUCTION: SLESSOR AND THE HISTORIANS	1
II	BACKGROUND AND PRELUDE TO WAR	14
III	BRITAIN ALONE, MAY 1940 – OCTOBER 1940	50
	The Fall of France	50
	Army Air Corps Observers	59
	Lord Lothian's Initiative	66
	The Donovan Mission	72
	Anglo-American Standardization of Arms Committee	76
	Aircraft Production in America	85
IV	SLESSOR MISSION TO AMERICA, NOVEMBER 1940 – APRIL 1941	94
	Aircraft Requirements	94
	Aircraft Ferry Operations	107
	Anglo-American Staff Conversations	111
	General Arnold's Visit to Britain	137
	Conclusion	143
V	ANGLO-AMERICAN AIR POLICY, 1942 – 1943	147
	Introduction	147
	The USAAF in Britain	149
	Aircraft Allocations to the RAF	155
	American Daylight Bombing	173
	The Casablanca Conference	181

CHAPTER Page

VI ATLANTIC AIR POWER COOPERATION, 1943..... 193

Introduction..... 193
The Atlantic Convoy Conference..... 198
Attempting a Unified Atlantic Command..... 202
Aircraft Allocations and the Bay of Biscay Offensive..... 212
Conclusion..... 230

VII THE MEDITERRANEAN ALLIANCE, 1944 – 1945..... 233

Introduction..... 233
MAAF Organization and the Command Structure..... 237
Operational Planning..... 250
Monte Cassino..... 253
Operation STRANGLE..... 257
Strategic Air Operations..... 266
Conclusion..... 268

VIII CONCLUSION: AN AIR FORCE PARTNERSHIP..... 272

Military Cooperation: 1945-2001..... 272
Summary..... 284

WORK CITED..... 296

APPENDIX A..... 307

APPENDIX B..... 309

APPENDIX C..... 310

APPENDIX D..... 312

VITA..... 316

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: SLESSOR AND THE HISTORIANS

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Cotesworth Slessor's memorial service was held in the Royal Air Force (RAF) Church, St. Clement Danes, London, on 25 September 1979 and attended by numerous American and RAF officers, past and present. Marshal of the RAF Sir Dermot Boyle represented Queen Elizabeth II. Among Slessor's family and friends, were his two children and the legendary American World War II commander, General Ira Eaker; General John W. Fauly, Commander, United States Air Forces in Europe, represented the Chief of Staff, United States Air Force. The Bishop of Shrewsbury, representing the Governors of Haileybury and the Imperial Service College, pronounced the blessing. The lessons were read by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Beetham, Chief of the Air Staff, and Sir John's son, Group Captain J. A. G. Slessor. Marshal of the RAF Sir William Dickson gave the address to a congregation numbering more than two hundred and fifty.[1]

On 23 July 1979, General Eaker's letter to Slessor's son expressed deep sorrow over his father's death. Eaker wrote, "It was a rare experience of a lifetime to have known and cooperated with Sir John Slessor," he added: "I shall never forget his friendship and never cease to admire his great qualities of mind and heart."[2] In another

---

This dissertation follows the style and format of the *Journal of British Studies.*

[1] *The Times*, 26 September 1979.

[2] Letter, Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker to Group Captain J. A. G. Slessor, 23 July 1979, Air Force Historical Research Center (AFHRC), MICFILM 23290, Frame 266.

informed tribute to the Slessor family, Air Marshal Sir Roy Austen-Smith of the British Defense Staff in Washington wrote: "he had a very fine analytical mind, great integrity and industry and a rare personality, especially suited to contacts and conferences with war leaders at all levels, political and military."[3]

Yet, Slessor obituarists have struck an insistently negative and parsimonious tone, well recapitulated in *The Dictionary of National Biography*. British historian Max Hastings' lengthy essay provides a meager one-sentence commentary on Slessor's contribution to the Anglo-American air power alliance: "At the end of 1940, Slessor went to the United States to take part in the 'ABC' staff conversations."[4] Hastings omitted in his historical summation any mention of Slessor's skill in shaping Allied air strategy. The author asserted in a backhanded commentary that: "Slessor stood foremost among the second rank of airmen of World War II, behind Portal, Tedder, and Sir Arthur Harris."[5] Hastings blamed Slessor for the inadequacies of the RAF during the appeasement years: "Slessor must share responsibility with his generation of airmen for the lamentable shortcomings of the RAF."[6] He maintained that Slessor was predisposed to the execution of a terror bombing campaign during the Second World War: "here was the core of the strategic theory which would lie at the heart of the British bomber offensive against Germany, and of which Slessor was among the most articulate

---

[3] Air Marshal Sir Austen-Smith to Group Captain J. A. G. Slessor, 18 July 1979, Slessor Family Records.
[4] Lord Blake and C. S. Nicholls, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography: 1971-1980*. (Oxford, 1986), Max Hastings' essay, p. 783, ABC refers to the American British Staff Conversations that took place in Washington from January-March 1941.
[5] Ibid., p. 783.
[6] Ibid., p. 783.

proponents."[7]

This examination contends that Slessor was instrumental in creating the World War II Anglo-American air power partnership, and that his influence had a lasting effect on the conduct of military relations between the United States and Great Britain. It will focus on Slessor's military career and his contributions to the British and American air power relationship from 1940 to 1945. The Anglo-American air power alliance was an integral component of the Allied war-winning strategy during the Second World War and had ramifications lasting far beyond the conflict. The intimacy and effectiveness of Anglo-American cooperation was, from many points of view, the most remarkable political and military achievement of the war. Yet the passing of more than fifty-five years has obscured Slessor's name and the significance of the Anglo-American partnership.

Sir John Slessor had an attack of poliomyelitis as a young boy, but despite two disabled legs, flew for three and a half years during the First World War and won several citations for bravery. He was a close associate of Marshal of the RAF Lord Trenchard, and was at the center of events during the appeasement years. During the Second World War, Slessor was an air planner on the RAF Staff, the British Chiefs of Staff, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff. In these capacities he drafted or helped to draft most of the Anglo-American directives on air power employment. Few leaders have the opportunity to execute the plans they initiated, yet as RAF Coastal Commander, Slessor participated in the destruction of the U-boat menace, and later shared the responsibility for directing

---

[7] Ibid., p. 782.

Allied air operations in the Mediterranean. In 1950, Slessor was appointed Chief of the Air Staff and promoted to Marshal of the Royal Air Force, its highest rank.

In view of Slessor's great importance to the Anglo-American alliance, the absence of any study of his career signifies the need to reevaluate the Second World War historical record. This project will investigate Slessor's interaction with the United States military in areas of air power strategy, operations, and aircraft production. This study asserts that Slessor played a major role in the RAF's mentoring of United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) leadership in the overall planning of the air war. Slessor and the American air commanders carefully coordinated strategy and tactics during the war, often together in opposition to the army and naval leaders of their countries. His efforts in Anglo-American operational planning paved the way for a degree of cooperation and combined action probably never before equaled in modern times by the military forces of two great nations.

The Allies won the air war in large measure because they were more successful than their enemies in mobilizing their industrial, scientific, technical, and engineering resources. One of the critical factors to the Allied success was the free flow of ideas between political and military elites in Britain and America. The 'Slessor Mission' to America in 1940 marked the beginning of an air power cooperation between the United States and Great Britain. An independent thinker of vigorous personality, Slessor impressed everyone by the thoroughness of his survey of war needs. His arrival in America inaugurated the open exchange of top secret military technology, release of aircraft production figures and strategic planning to the great benefit of both countries.

This exchange was thoroughly unique in history. Great Britain was at war with Germany and Italy, but the United States remained neutral. There was no formal alliance between Britain and the United States, and each country harbored considerable suspicion about the other's goals and capabilities.

By correcting years of deep Anglo-American mistrust and ignorance, Slessor played a critical part in building the 'special relationship' which would later characterize the Western Alliance. Some of Slessor's significant contributions concerned the famous ABC Staff Conversations and the Casablanca Conference. The major strategic and administrative principles agreed upon in Washington and Casablanca were those that guided the actual Anglo-American conduct of the war, and provided the basic framework for military cooperation.[8] The close connections facilitated by Slessor with the USAAF allowed for the training of RAF aircrews in America, intelligence collaboration, and the establishment of Military Missions in London and Washington. Slessor was also instrumental in persuading the Air Ministry and Prime Minister Winston Churchill to support American daylight bombing of Germany.

From the outbreak of hostilities in September 1939 Slessor was actively involved in the War effort not only through his position as RAF Director of Plans, but also, as the manuscript record clearly shows, through personal interactions with the leading individuals in British and American political and military life. Slessor corresponded and met with almost every Anglo-American political and military figure of influence in the

---

[8] William Hardy McNeill, *America, Britain, and Russia: Their Co-operation and Conflict 1941-1946.* (New York, 1970), p. 8; Henry Probert, *High Commanders of the Royal Air Force* (London, 1991), pp. 42-43.

period, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill. His special relationship with the United States Army Air Forces lay at the heart of the Anglo-American air power alliance. Its breadth and familiarity mark it as remarkable even in the context of the wider "special relationship". Slessor's outstanding personality and magnetism captivated the American military and made them feel a sense of relief that there was now this sympathetic figure at the Air Ministry, a man of piercing perception that was ready to further the Anglo-American air power alliance. By educating senior American officers on the importance of maintaining close contact with the British armed forces, Slessor played a key role in sweeping away the chauvinism of the prewar era.

In dealing with Allied air strategy, Slessor was particularly concerned with the deficiencies of Anglo-American collaboration. In 1943, for instance, there was a near complete breakdown in cooperation during the Battle of the Atlantic. Slessor assisted Chief Air Marshal Portal at the Casablanca Conference in achieving an Allied consensus on the immediate need to give absolute priority to convoy protection. Following the Casablanca Conference, Slessor took charge of Coastal Command and immediately addressed the appalling number of North Atlantic sinkings, and inadequacies in American cooperation. In June 1943, Slessor's dramatic negotiations with President Roosevelt and Admiral Ernest King reflected his desire for effecting a unified effort in the Atlantic campaign against the German submarine threat.

There is voluminous manuscript evidence available regarding Slessor and the Anglo-American air power alliance. Most of Slessor's military and private papers are

contained within one hundred and forty-three files designated as the Air Marshal Sir John Slessor Collection in the British Public Record Office.[9] Significant Slessor material is contained within the papers of Marshal of the RAF Lord Portal of Hungerford at Christ Church College Library, Oxford University.[10] The United States Air Force Historical Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, also holds Slessor material along with the papers of significant American air power leaders.[11] A final repository of Slessor material examined for this work were the personal papers of Slessor's son, retired RAF Group Captain J. A. G. Slessor.[12] The family provided personal correspondence allowing this work to be based on evidence not previously published. The variety and number of British and American papers consulted for this study, encompassing many of the principal military and political figures of the Second World War, leave no doubt about the influence of Slessor on the 'special relationship'.[13]

Scholars have formerly considered Slessor mainly in the light of his high-level RAF staff work during the interwar period. Williamson Murray is sharply critical of Slessor in *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939* and the role played by the British military during the appeasement years:

---

[9] Public Record Office (PRO), Air Ministry Records (AIR) 75: Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor Papers; additional AIR resources include: Chief of the Air Staff Records, Director of Plans Records, Air Department Papers and RAF Narratives and Monographs.
[10] Christ Church College Library, Oxford University, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Portal of Hungerford Papers.
[11] The AFHRC Collection gives important insight into Slessor and the Anglo-American air power alliance and include: Interviews, Annual Reports, Unit Histories, Manuscript Collections, and the Ira Eaker Collection.
[12] This consists of a deposit of previously unseen papers from the Slessor family, viewed on 23 May 2000.
[13] Also valuable were the Marshal of the RAF Viscount Trenchard Papers at the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon; Henry J. Morgenthau Papers at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York.

> The responsibility of Chamberlain, Halifax, Hoare, Daladier, and Bonnet for the disaster of 1940 was clear almost from the start of the Second World War. But the military planners and leaders of Great Britain and France, the Chatfields, the Slessors, the Newalls, the Gorts, the Gamelins, and the Weygands bear an equal share of the responsibility. At every turn in the long road from the Abyssinian crisis to the beginning of the Second World War, they had preached caution, seen dangers where none existed, prophesied doom, and agreed to the abandonment of every position. Largely because of their self-fulfilling prophecies Britain and France faced Germany alone in May 1940. [14]

Malcolm Smith, however, provides in *British Air Strategy Between The Wars* a valuable historical survey of Slessor's RAF involvement during the interwar period. He contends that as Deputy and then Director of Plans, Slessor was "the leading British theorist on air force and army cooperation. Slessor refused to accept the more radical claims for air power . . . ."[15] American historian Philip Meilinger asserts in *Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory* that: "The RAF thinker who emerges from the interwar years looking most prescient is Jack Slessor."[16]

Other authors have commented on Slessor's involvement during the Second World War. In *Business in Great Waters: The U-Boat Wars 1916-1945*, John Terraine criticizes Slessor's strategic focus during the U-boat campaign: "His heart was in the bombing campaign, and it is this author's belief that he never really understood the significance of Coastal Command's role. He saw it as a defensive weapon, an essential part of what could later be called Britain's 'survival kit'."[17] Hastings attacks Slessor in *Bomber Command* (1979) for his postwar commentary of RAF strategic bombing: "In

---

[14] Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939: The Path to Ruin* (Princeton, 1984), p. 369.
[15] Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars* (Oxford, 1984), p. 39.
[16] Philip S. Meilinger, ed, *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower History* (Maxwell AFB, 1997), p. 72.
[17] John Terraine, *Business in Great Waters: The U-Boat Wars, 1916-1945* (London, 1989), pp. 522-523.

the years that followed, many of the airmen who wrote their memoirs--Tedder and Slessor prominent among them--prevaricated about both area bombing and their part in it. Harris alone never sought prudent cover, nor made any excuse or apology for what his forces had done."[18] Slessor's multiple roles are not adequately covered in numerous books about Allied air power in World War II. Many published works have dealt with aspects of his military career, but no separate study exists of the broad survey of Slessor's activities in World War II.

During the Cold War, Slessor has been widely acknowledged for contributions to British military policy and nuclear strategy. John Baylis states in his work *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy 1945-1964* (1995) that Slessor's "strategic values were of key importance in the development of defence planning at the time. In many ways, the new Chief of the Air Staff was a product of his generation. He had experienced the horrors of wars twice in his lifetime and like many of his contemporaries he was anxious to avoid what were regarded as the mistakes of the 1930s."[19] Andrew J. Pierre, *Nuclear Politics: The British Experience with an Independent Strategic Force 1939-1970* (1972) assesses Slessor's contributions in his critically acclaimed account of British nuclear strategy during the Cold War: "The Global Strategy Paper of Churchill and Slessor, which predated and subsequently influenced the adoption of Eisenhower's 'New Look' was motivated by the desire to project nuclear deterrence as the way to reduce forces while remaining at least equally

---

[18] Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (New York, 1979), p. 344.
[19] John Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy 1945-1964* (Oxford, 1995), p. 111.

strong."[20]

There are two classic military and political works of the Second World War that have undervalued Slessor's contribution to the creation of an Anglo-American air power alliance. The consensus among scholars of World War II seems to be that R. J. Overy's *The Air War, 1939-1945* (1981) stands first among best air power histories. This work is distinguished by its breadth of outlook, and its comparative analysis, but does not address Slessor's imprint or influence. David Reynolds' critically acclaimed work on the 'special relationship', *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-41* (1982), articulates the significance of the strategic accords contained within the ABC-1 Agreement, but makes no reference to Slessor's contribution.

Slessor's multiple roles are not adequately covered in the numerous books about Allied air power in World War II. Recently, with the growth of war and societal studies, air histories have focused increasingly on social issues, politics and strategies than on individuals. Scholars such as John Buckley, in *Air Power in the Age of Total War* (1999) have concentrated on the aircraft production battle, technologies and doctrine. The structuralist history of Stephen Garrett's *Ethics and Airpower in World War II: The British Bombing of German Cities* (1993) discuss air power in the context of its social environment: political agendas, moral and public influence. The portrayal of Slessor throughout these studies has been similar - he has been seen as a tangential figure to the air power story. As this examination of Slessor will demonstrate, however, he was more

[20] Andrew J. Pierre, *Nuclear Politics: The British Experience with an Independent Strategic Force 1939-1970* (London, 1972), p. 308.

than a peripheral figure in the military history of the Second World War.[21]

The starting point for any discussion of historical literature on the subject of the Royal Air Force during the Second World War must be Slessor's *The Central Blue* (1957) completed after his retirement from the RAF. As usual with Slessor, this autobiography contains elucidate and forceful expression of his views, and is well worth studying for evidence of his outlook and character. Whatever its shortcomings, it is still the finest of all World War II memoirs, British or American. The balance between the values and perspectives of academic scholarship on the one hand and the practical experience of operations on the other produced a first-class account of the British strategic air war. *The Central Blue* has held its own against all the monographs and articles researched and written since its original appearance more than four decades ago.

Some excellent biographies, memoirs, monographs and articles are available that cover in detail many subsidiary themes of this work. Biographies of the major characters of the Anglo-American air alliance are available, though their quality is uneven. At the top rests Richard G. Davis' *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe* (1993). Based on an exhaustive analysis of the Spaatz papers, it is the best single volume work on Anglo-American relations in the cause of tactical and strategic

---

[21] For examples, see the 1988 Bancroft Prize Winner in History, Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, 1987); 1997 Society for Military History Winner Distinguished Book Award, Mark K. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War* (London, 1995); Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II* (Kansas, 1993); Ian Gooderson, *Air Power at the Battlefront: Allied Close Air Support in Europe 1943-1945* (London, 1998); Sebastian Ritchie, *Industry and Air Power: The Expansion of British Aircraft Production, 1935-41* (London, 1997).

belief in Anglo-American cooperation as the decisive element in world security was fundamental to Slessor's thinking from 1937 until his death in 1979.

This work will represent the first detailed examination of the life and career of Air Marshal Slessor. What follows is not a biography but an analysis of Slessor's influence and leadership in various RAF positions during World War II. The dissertation will focus on his many wartime experiences in coalition building: strategic planning with America in 1940-41, creating an Anglo-American bomber alliance in 1942, drafting the compromise formula at the Casablanca Conference that broke the deadlock in the Anglo-American debate on strategy, reorganizing maritime air power in the Atlantic to defeat the U-boat threat; and deputy commander in 1944-45 of the world's largest air force, the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces.

The manuscript record makes it clear that Slessor's efforts in the Second World War transcend easy categorization. As did Slessor then, this study also crosses historical lines by intertwining the 'special relationship' with military areas. When examined, Slessor's wartime achievements, particularly the undervalued mission to America constitutes a substantial addition to the previously published record on Anglo-American collaboration. After some needed background, the remainder of this work examines Slessor's contribution to the Anglo-American air power alliance during World War II.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND PRELUDE TO WAR

Before addressing Slessor's role as an important Allied leader in the Second World War, it is important to examine several significant aspects of his background. These include Slessor's battle with polio, his public school education, the First World War experience and his close association with Lord Trenchard. Furthermore, it will be worth considering the historical significance of Slessor's role as the Air Ministry Director of Plans, and Joint Planning Council (JPC) representative during the appeasement period.

John Cotesworth Slessor was born in Rhanikhet, India, on 3 June 1897. Son of Major Arthur Kerr Slessor of the Sherwood Foresters and Adelaide Cotesworth, "Jack" Slessor became the oldest of a family of three boys and one girl.[1] His parents' successful marriage was to provide a stable and loving environment for their four children.[2] Both Major Slessor and Adelaide's family background were predominately military.[3]

Slessor's father retired from the British Army in 1903 after a distinguished career of service in India, the Gold Coast, and West Indies.[4] He happily returned to England with his family and took a position as the Steward of his alma mater, Christ Church College, Oxford: "One of his most satisfactory memories in after days was of when he

---

[1] Blake and Nicholls, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Max Hastings' essay, p. 782, the Sherwood Foresters were an elite regiment in the regular British Army.
[2] Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: The Autobiography of Sir John Slessor, Marshal of the Royal Air Force* (New York, 1957), p. 2.
[3] Blake and Nicholls, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography*, p. 782.
[4] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 3.

was asked shortly before the first war to deliver the annual oration in Latin in praise of Sir Thomas Bodley -- not a bad compliment for a retired regular soldier."[5] With a certain degree of elegance and wit Slessor provided a wonderful description of his father: "a good classical scholar, in addition to being a good soldier, an excellent gardener and a sound judge of vintage port."[6]

While a young child at the Dragon School in Oxford, Slessor suffered an attack of poliomyelitis. This serious and debilitating medical condition permanently weakened his legs, and necessitated the requisite cane and braces for walking.[7] At age thirteen, Slessor enrolled at Haileybury, the famous residential public school situated just 20 miles north of central London.[8] The school was founded during the nineteenth century and intended from the start to educate the rising and ambitious British middle-class.[9] The school has furnished Britain with an awe-inspiring host of Air Marshals, bishops, ambassadors, cabinet ministers, and one Prime Minister. Slessor recalled: "Haileybury in the nineteen-hundreds produced a good many more than its fair share of men who were to achieve some distinction in the Royal Air Force. At the R.A.F. exercise 'Pandora' at Old Sarum in 1948, there were six of us who were at Haileybury together, with a seventh, Mr. Atlee, who was then Prime Minister." Slessor continued: "The six R.A.F. officers included three Commanders-in-Chief, the Commandant of the Imperial Defence College … There were many other Old Haileyburian airmen -- Brooke-Popham

---

[5] Ibid., p. 3.
[6] Ibid., p. 3.
[7] Ibid., p. 2; Interview with Group Captain J. A. G. Sleesor, 23 May 2000.
[8] Ibid., p. 2; Haileybury website: www.haileybury.herts.sch.uk
[9] Geoffrey Walford, *Privatization and Privilege in Education* (New York, 1990), pp. 22-23.

and Leigh-Mallory among the most distinguished."[10]

Haileybury did indeed bring out the best in young Jack Slessor. Despite the occasional lapse in concentration, his academic record was excellent. He described himself in his memoirs as being: "rather an idle boy with a capacity for making friends and getting a good deal of fun out of life."[11] When he was not studying, most of Slessor's out-of-class time at Haileybury was spent playing cricket. Through sheer determination and practice Slessor molded himself into a superior batsman. Haileybury instituted new rules that allowed for a designated player on Slessor's team to run to the opposite wicket in his place.[12] The ability to battle and succeed against polio did not desert Slessor in later life, either in big things or small.

Slessor graphically summed up the immediate effect of the First World War on Haileybury in his memoirs: "The Kaiser's war took a terrible toll of those who were at Haileybury with me in those days . . . . No less than five hundred and seventy Old Haileyburians were killed in the Kaiser's War -- from a school which numbered only about five hundred. Of the forty-six boys who were in Lawrence House with me in 1912, twenty were killed."[13]

Filled with patriotism and yearning for excitement, Slessor went off to London and attempted enlistment in the army. He was rejected as unfit for military service in 1914 because of the frightful effects of polio: "Back at the War Office, damp with sweat

---

[10] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 3.
[11] Ibid., p. 2.
[12] Interview with Group Captain J. A. G. Slessor, 23 May 2000.
[13] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 5.

and pink with excitement, I was ushered into a Medical Board, by whom I was instantly rejected with contumely, my form of application for a commission being annotated 'totally unfit for any form of military service'."[14]

But, a family friend responsible for selecting officers for the Royal Flying Corps enabled him to circumvent regulations. On his eighteenth birthday he was presented with orders to join No. 1 (Reserve) Squadron R.F.C. at Brooklands for four months of pilot training. Slessor learned to fly a strange assortment of pusher and tractor training planes. Aerial training was very rudimentary: after a brief period of dual control instruction, pupils effectively taught themselves through experience, moving up to more advanced aircraft as they progressed. The quality of instruction was inevitably limited by the capabilities of the aircraft. Slessor received his pilot's certificate in August 1915, with a total of twelve hours in the air.[15]

Slessor must have done well at Brooklands, for he was sent to a squadron of single-seat fighter aircraft, held to be much more prestigious than the squadrons of two-seaters which worked in close cooperation with the artillery: "For some odd reason I was then regarded as a good pilot . . . . As a matter of fact I was never a good pilot. I suppose I must have been reasonably adequate, or I should not be alive today."[16] Slessor was posted to No. 14 and then to No. 23 Squadron where he received an additional thirty-five hours of solo training.[17]

---

[14] Ibid., p. 7.
[15] Ibid., p. 8.
[16] Ibid., p. 8.
[17] Ibid., p. 9.

The Royal Flying Corps and No. 23 Squadron was charged with defending London from the Zeppelins -- Germany's latest development in air warfare for carrying the offensive right into the civilian heart of England.[18] The war on the Western Front was already doing much to undermine the morale of the civilian populations as the massive German war machine rolled forward, destroying cities, towns, and villages with its artillery. The Channel, however, had until then preserved Britain from the horrors of the conflict.[19] Jack Slessor was handpicked for night flying and on 13 October 1915, he became the first British pilot to battle the Zeppelins. His recollection was "to patrol for as long as my petrol would permit at 10,000 feet -- a prodigious altitude for those days . . . I saw above me the impressively vast bulk of the airship -- like a cod's-eye view of the Queen Mary . . . I was climbing as hard as my 90-h.p. R.A.F. engine would serve in an effort to get into position above the Zeppelin. I was the only pilot to be fortunate enough to make contact with a Zeppelin that night."[20]

The German air attack resulted in civilian panic in the bombed areas of London. Slessor had the unfortunate experience of driving the Mile End Road in East London the next morning and was set upon by a terrified and angry mob. His memory was vivid: "I was to remember for many years what followed. One of the fears that haunted me as Director of Plans while Europe moved inexorably into the Second World War in 1939, was of the reactions of our civil population when they found, as of course I knew they

---

[18] Ibid., p. 9.
[19] Raymond H. Fredette, *The Sky on Fire: The First Battle of Britain 1917-1918* (Washington, D. C., 1991), p. 255; Henry A. Jones, *The War in the Air,* vol. 3 (Oxford, 1931), pp. 127-128.
[20] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 12-13.

would find, that the R.A.F. could not prevent them being bombed on a scale beside which the few puny raids of the First World War were a flea-bite." He concluded: "The extraordinary thing to me was that in the event the morale of the people of the East End in 1940 was incomparably better than it had been in 1915." The police intervened and rescued Slessor uninjured.[21]

The advent of the Zeppelin caused an uproar in Parliament, and several squadrons already in France, or destined for France, were reallocated to the defense of Britain. In point of fact the Germans, with their city-busting techniques, achieved some of the success they had been looking for - the diversion of aircraft and guns away from the Western Front. But the scars of World War I's bombings were never healed in the British mind. The bombings, though minor as an attrition factor compared to the inferno of the Western Front, left traumatic memories in Britain. Militarily, strategically, geopolitically Britain, in the dawning of air power, was now virtually a part of the continent of Europe. The Channel moat had been crossed.[22]

Slessor received new orders to take part in the Gallipoli campaign, and left Britain on the troopship *Scotian* in November 1915. Slessor enjoyed the voyage to the Mediterranean and was in good spirits when he reached the crowded Mudros Harbor in the Aegean.[23] Because of the failure of the Dardanelles effort, Slessor was immediately directed to Egypt and disembarked at Alexandria on 16 January 1916, and instructed to

---

[21] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[22] Jones, *The War in the Air*, pp. 127-128.
[23] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 15.

join the No. 14 Squadron in the Sinai.[24]

Slessor took part in regular reconnaissance flights over Turkish outposts to keep the British Army well informed of enemy troop movement. He also gallantly participated in the successful bombing of the Turkish post at Hassana.[25] Slessor reminisced in his memoirs: "I flew some hundreds of hours in the Middle East and in France, and dropped some scores of little bombs and fired some hundreds of rounds from my Lewis gun at Turks in the hills of the Sinai and in the stony desert east of the Canal, and at the Dervishes in the Sudan."[26]

The direction of operational flying absorbed a considerable amount of Slessor's time, but a wide range of sporting activities were available: "I was lucky enough to get a certain amount of sport during that war. Duck and snipe shooting in the big *jheel* at Gabbari outside Alexandria; guinea-fowl and the succulent little grey doves (for the pot) in the Sudan. I got my first buck near Jebel Hilla."[27]

Slessor was reassigned from the Sinai to take part in the spring 1916 Darfur expedition. Flying operations were in support of Brigadier-General Kelly's efforts to suppress the Ali Dinar rebellion in the Sudan.[28] Since most of the tribesmen had never seen an airplane, their mere appearance had a significant effect. Slessor was recommended and received the Military Cross for heroism in combat. He was invalided

---

[24] Ibid., p. 15.
[25] Anthony Furse, *Wilfrid Freeman: The genius behind Allied survival and air supremacy 1939 to 1945* (Kent, 1999), p. 32.
[26] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 16.
[27] Ibid., p. 16.
[28] Ibid., p. 16.

home to England with a "hole from a Dervish bullet in his thigh".[29]

He was posted as a Flight Instructor on Shorthorn aircraft at Northolt.[30] The techniques of flying training had hardly changed since Slessor's time at the Central Flying School.[31] Still, unable to recover from spins, flying instructors concentrated on teaching pupils to control aircraft within safe flying speeds, stunting was frowned upon.[32] Six months away from operational duty gave Slessor time to reflect on his experiences in the Middle East.[33]

Slessor returned to the Western Front in January 1917 as a Flight Commander in No. 5 Reconnaissance Squadron.[34] The RFC was a young and growing corps: promotion stemmed from both the rate of expansion and from aircrew losses.[35] No. 5 Squadron provided support for the medium and heavy artillery of British XIII and Canadian Corps.[36] The nature of air warfare had changed considerably by this time with the development of forward-firing machine-guns. They had soon proved that flying in fast, maneuverable aircraft gave a clear advantage in air-to-air combat, and the casualty rate of the obsolete aircraft was becoming calamitous.[37]

The first year of the war had quickly made clear the vital importance of gaining air superiority. Only if the balance were tilted firmly in one's own favor could

---

[29] Ibid., p. 16; Blake and Nicholls, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography,* p. 782.
[30] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 16.
[31] Ibid., p. 18.
[32] Ibid., p. 24.
[33] Ibid., p. 16.
[34] Ibid., p. 16.
[35] Furse, *Wilfrid Freeman*, p. 37.
[36] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 16.
[37] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

reconnaissance and bombing take place against the enemy without grievous hindrance and losses. By 1916, it had become clear that in the achievement of air superiority, reconnaissance and bombing would have their part to play, but that the main role would at first fall on the specialized fighter.[38] It had also become evident that in a contest between well-matched opponents, air superiority would have to be constantly fought for, both in the air and on the drawing board. Slessor emphasized: "In consequence, the four-year campaign in France saw several marked fluctuations in the air fighting as one side and then the other was able to put into the line new aircraft of performance superior to those of the enemy . . . . Thus within a period of two years, air superiority passed four times from one side to the other -- on each occasion due in the main to the appearance in the line of superior types of aircraft."[39]

The daylight bombing by German Gothas in June and July 1917 publicly demonstrated the unsatisfactory organization of British air defense. Field Marshal Christian Jan Smuts was appointed by Prime Minister David Lloyd George to make a report on all matters pertaining to the air. He recommended the amalgamation of the different naval and military air forces, and the formation of an Air Ministry. The necessary bill was passed through Parliament in November 1917 and the Royal Air Force was officially born on 1 April 1918 with Major-General Sir Hugh Trenchard appointed the first Chief of the Air Staff (CAS).[40]

Slessor was appointed to command A Squadron in June 1918 at the Central

---

[38] Ibid., pp. 18-19; Furse, *Wilfrid Freeman,* pp. 39-41.
[39] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* pp. 19-20.
[40] Fredette, *The Sky on Fire,* p. 255; Furse, *Wilfrid Freeman,* pp. 45-46.

Flying School: "The function of C.F.S in 1918 was to train single-seater fighter pilots from the egg to the point where they were ready to go to a short course at a gunnery School before joining squadrons at the front."[41] He was promoted to Assistant Commandant in July and Commandant of the Central Flying School at the end of September 1918.[42] Slessor was a major when the war ended and it was his firm intention to remain in the service.[43] The war had shown clearly that he was a courageous pilot and a man of action, but a serious altercation with a superior officer over the administration of duties at RAF Druid's Lodge resulted in his resignation in 1919 and a return to civilian life: "I thoroughly enjoyed myself, spending my war gratuity on riotous living, and at last after four gay but not very profitable months, was given the opportunity of returning to the R.A.F. with a short service commission."[44]

Slessor returned to the RAF in early 1920 and was posted to No. 1 Squadron at the Flying Training School at Netheravon.[45] The newly formed RAF introduced its own ranks and badges of office, choosing titles which were more appropriate to the type of formation that made up this new service. Slessor's wartime rank of major was reduced to flight lieutenant.[46] In the spring of 1921, Slessor was assigned as flight commander in No. 20 Squadron in western India.[47]

The hasty demobilization of the RAF, as soon as the Armistice was signed, was

---

[41] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 25.
[42] Ibid., p. 24.
[43] Ibid., p. 32.
[44] Ibid., p. 33.
[45] Ibid., p. 33.
[46] Ibid., p. 32.
[47] Ibid., p. 35.

part of the general disarmament of the forces. In 1919, the War Cabinet, as part of an economy campaign, instructed the service departments that their financial estimates should be based on the assumption that the British Empire would not be engaged in any major war for the next ten years. The dictum was first suggested by Winston Churchill and came to be known as 'The Ten-Year Rule'.[48] The RAF at the end of the war had been the most powerful air force in the world, had by 1923 dwindled to insignificance.[49]

As late as July 1919, there were no permanent officers: those forming the RAF were either seconded from the Army or Navy or held temporary commissions in the new service. Eventually, the cabinet decided to sanction a maximum of 1,500 permanent commissions and because of budget constraints the Air Ministry could offer these to just 1,065 of the 6,500 officers who had applied.[50] Slessor was among the first generation of permanent air officers that would later emerge as air leaders in World War II.[51]

Returning from India in 1923, Slessor was assigned his first staff appointment in the Air Ministry.[52] Slessor's overseas experiences certainly allowed him to make valuable contributions on a wide variety of RAF missions. The main operational experience of the air force derived from policing duties in far-flung colonial outposts.[53] Air Control, as it was known, helped give the RAF a desperately needed rationale for continued existence and funding, but it did little to help prepare pilots and planners for wars between industrialized states. Slessor observed: "The squadrons of the overseas

---

[48] Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars,* p. 22.
[49] Probert, *High Commanders of the Royal Air Force*, p. 6.
[50] Furse, *Wilfrid Freeman*, p. 47.
[51] Denis Richards, *The Royal Air Force, 1939-1945*, vol. 1: *The Fight at Odds* (London, 1953), p. 29.
[52] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 39.
[53] Ibid., pp. 51-53.

Commands were engaged in a wide range of essential duties; patrols on the desert frontiers of the Middle East and India; anti-slavery patrols in the Persian Gulf; photographic survey; evacuation of civilians; the development of Imperial air routes; famine relief, fishery protection. It saved a lot of money and not a few lives."[54] Slessor was a proponent of policing the British Empire from the air. Cheap, effective and relatively bloodless, Slessor asserted that: "Air Control . . . . the aeroplane and the bomb enabled us for the first time to enforce submission upon people without killing them." The RAF would preannounce their bombing attack to allow for an evacuation of the village; the bombing demonstrations were an effective means of tribal control and kept casualties to a minimum.[55]

In little over a year later he was transferred to the RAF Staff College: "There was much that today seems quaint and primitive in the teaching at the Staff College in those early courses under [Air Marshal Sir Robert] Brooke-Popham. We had to feel our way towards a doctrine of air warfare . . . . But for those who had the faith and vision to see them, the indications were there; and under Trenchard's inspiration there evolved the theory of air warfare, based on the supremacy of the offensive, which was to be triumphantly vindicated twenty years later."[56]

Three and a half years in an Army Co-operation Squadron followed the Staff College. Slessor was assigned to No. 4 Army Co-operation Squadron, stationed at Farnborough, attached to the 2nd Division at Aldershot: "one of the nicest commands any

---

[54] Ibid., p. 53.
[55] Ibid., p. 54.
[56] Ibid., p. 41.

man could have, and incidentally one which gave the best possible training for a junior commander... In retrospect, those years 1925 to 1928 were a very happy time. We had an interesting job, plenty of flying, and ample leave and opportunities for sport."[57]

Squadron Leader Slessor transferred to the Air Ministry in 1928 and served directly under Lord Trenchard: "The Plans Branch of the Air Staff, to which I was appointed at the end of 1928 to relieve Squadron-Leader Charles MacKay . . . was then a very modest affair. It comprised two officers, Wing-Commander R. H. Peck and a squadron-leader, myself, with the able assistance of a junior civil servant, Mr. W. H. Scudder."[58] During the 1920s, Trenchard gathered around himself promising young officers with strong, independent turns of mind, who were influenced by his articulation of air power.[59] Slessor became an active participant in the Trenchard circle of passionate disciples who were convinced that the air doctrine of strategic counter offensive was the most effective instrument for Britain's defense.[60] During the interwar period, Trenchard's doctrine had become a 'matter of faith' within the Air Ministry.[61] The Air Staff defined air power during the 1930s almost entirely in terms of "strategic bombing." Slessor noted that "our belief in the bomber, in fact, was intuitive - a matter of faith. The strategic principles were there all right, and there was a tactical doctrine laid down in the Manual; but the practical means of putting them into effect were then sadly lacking." [62]

It has been given to few men to make so creative a contribution to Britain's

---

[57] Ibid., pp. 42-43.
[58] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 60.
[59] Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (New York, 1979), p. 40.
[60] Robin Higham, *The Military Intellectuals in Britain: 1918-1939* (New Brunswick, 1966), p. 139.
[61] Williamson Murray, *The Luftwaffe, 1933-45: Strategy for Defeat* (Washington, 1996), p. 324.
[62] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 204.

national defense, as did Trenchard.[63] As the Chief of Air Staff from 1919 to 1929 it was his task to devise a small permanent Air Force about one-tenth the final size of its wartime predecessor. Slessor wrote later: "There are some rare people in whose presence one instinctively and immediately feels: Here is a really great man. Not a great soldier or airman or statesman, but a great man. They are very rare, but when one meets them they are unmistakable. Smuts was one of them, Trenchard another." Slessor described his first impressions of Trenchard: "I felt it when, as a flight commander in France, I first met him in the Kaiser's war, and I have felt the same about him ever since. It is difficult to define that quality of real greatness. Self-confidence without a trace of arrogance; a contemptuous yet not intolerant disregard for anything mean or petty; the capacity to shuffle aside the non-essentials and put an unerring finger on the real core of the problem or the true quality of a man, a sort of instinct for the really important point; a selfless devotion to the cause of what he believed to be true and right." He believed that Trenchard had all those characteristics along with a "shining sincerity." Slessor explains that many people have disagreed with Trenchard but "some of them have lived to admit with the passage of time that he was right and they were wrong. None of them will suggest that he is ever anything but entirely disinterested and sincere."[64]

Trenchard's greatest contribution to British history lay in protecting the RAF from degradation during the 1920s when there appeared to be little strategic or operational rationale why Britain should persevere with the world's only independent air

---

[63] Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars*, pp. 31-33.
[64] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 45.

force: "The R.A.F. was an infant Service, still going through the growing pains of youth and subject still to external pressures which would have destroyed it had a lesser man been at its head."[65] Equally important was the fact that Trenchard actively sponsored the careers of airmen who provided the RAF's leadership in World War II. Historian Williamson Murray asserts that:

> If Trenchard can be accused of taking a too single-minded approach to the question of air power, his accomplishments in defending the independence of the Royal Air Force is his greatest monument. Moreover, he identified and supported such strong personalities in the RAF officer corps as Hugh Dowding, Arthur Tedder, Charles Portal, and John Slessor among others. They and their service would be Trenchard's contribution toward winning the Second World War.[66]

Trenchard's air theory is difficult for historians to assess. A non-intellectual, Trenchard used ghostwriters to explain cogently his pronouncements on doctrine and strategy: "He used always to have someone whom he called 'my English merchant' to translate his thoughts into readable English. I had the good fortune", Slessor wrote later, "to fill that role for some years -- and in fact, Richard Peck and I in Plans were really in the main his official 'English merchants', though he always welcomed original ideas."[67] It may well be that Trenchard's theories were actually the result of subordinates like Slessor. In his memoirs, Slessor asserted that Trenchard encouraged debate within the close-knit Air Staff (numbering no more than 400) on subjects ranging from Air Control to Strategic Bombing.[68] This inspired officers like Slessor to develop their own ideas of air power.[69] In a memorandum, written in March 1930, Slessor compared the

---

[65] Ibid., p. 50.
[66] Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939*, p. 80.
[67] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 47.
[68] Ibid., pp. 48-49; Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars*, p. 42.
[69] Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars*, p. 57.

performance of the British Bulldog, a single-seat fighter, and the Hawker Hart, a two-seat bomber: "we shall very likely always have to have single-seat fighters for our own specialized problem, the defence of London, where the time factor is everything."[70] Slessor clearly annunciated Trenchard's doctrine of the strategic air offensive in a 1931 article: "Purely passive self-protection, that is to say waiting for an enemy's attack and then attempting to repel it, has never been the British conception of national defence, and is peculiarly ineffective in the three-dimensional battlefields of the air." Slessor noted that "it must therefore be apparent that to afford us any sort of protection against air forces that could now be directed against us, we should require a force of fighters immeasurably greater than we could afford in peace." He believed: "the policy is to provide the essential minimum of fighters for close defence in co-operation with the ground anti-aircraft defences, and to concentrate the bulk of our resources on the maintenance of a formidable striking force of bombers, the positive proportion of the defences, to enable us to launch a counter-offensive if we are attacked."[71]

At the end of 1930 Slessor was transferred to the Army Staff College at Camberley. He attended one term as a student and then replaced Squadron Leader Trafford Leigh-Mallory as the Air Force representative on the College Staff: "Thus began four very happy and I think on the whole rather fruitful years. We lived in a fools' paradise of course. Not that we only played hard -- we did, and thoroughly

---

[70] Air Staff memo by Squadron Leader J. C. Slessor, 24 March 1930, PRO AIR 9/8.
[71] Slessor lecture, "The Development of the RAF", US Attaché Col J. Thomas to Chief of Staff, 6 June 1931, Air Corps Tactical School Collection, AFHRC file no. 248.501-53.

enjoyed ourselves; we also worked quite hard."[72] The course at Camberley lasted two years, and contained two senior and the junior divisions with sixty students in each.[73]

Wing Commander Slessor was assigned in 1935 to command an Army Co-operation Wing in Quetta, India, one of the largest military stations on the Indian subcontinent.[74] He wrote his seminal work, *Air Power and Armies* in 1936, as an examination of the limited use of tactical air forces on the Western Front during World War I.[75] His book was the end product of Army Staff College lectures edited and compiled while stationed in India. *Air Power and Armies* was a textbook designed to teach those who would conduct tactical air operations the basic structure of such work. Slessor examined actual military events and made assumptions for the future.[76] In assessing this book, Slessor acknowledged that a primary function of airpower is strategic bombing, but he intended to discuss how "airpower could complement surface operations."[77]

Philip Meilinger postulates that Slessor's *Air Power and Armies* is a masterful historical treatise on air power. Meilinger contends that Slessor's historical approach to the interpretation of military events is significantly different from most air power theorists. Slessor stated that "if there is one attitude more dangerous than to assume that a future war will be just like the last one, it is to imagine that it will be so utterly

---

[72] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 83.
[73] Ibid., p. 85.
[74] Ibid., p. 101.
[75] Higham, *The Military Intellectuals in Britain: 1918-1939,* p. 164.
[76] Ibid., p. 207.
[77] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 94.

different that we can ignore all the lessons of the last one."[78] Meilinger asserts that Slessor was more willing to recognize the potential of air superiority than most of his military contemporaries. He argues that Slessor recognized that air interdiction was the key to army support.[79]

Malcolm Smith asserts that Slessor's *Air Power and Armies* is the sharpest rendition of Trenchard's doctrine of air power: "Slessor's view, as in Trenchard's, the distinction between 'strategic' and 'tactical' air power was positively misleading; the true role of air power was neither independent nor auxiliary but part of an integrated war plan for all the services."[80] Murray contends that Slessor's *Air Power and Armies* mirrors Trenchard's view of maintaining air superiority through strategic bombing: "Even Slessor, for the most part a perceptive thinker on military matters before the war, could not avoid arguing in his book *Air Power and Armies* in 1936 that the coming war would involve mainly aerial warfare and that Britain could gain and maintain air superiority through a "resolute bombing offensive"[81]

Max Hastings postulates that Slessor's *Air Power and Armies* is a blueprint for the bombing of the poorer and more urban segments of the population. In his account of RAF's Bomber Command, Hastings presents comments attributed to Slessor providing the hidden intent of RAF doctrine. Slessor stated that: "In air operations against production the weight of attack will inevitably fall upon the vitally important, and not by

---

[78] Meilinger, *The Paths of Heaven,* pp. 61-64.
[79] Ibid., p. 66.
[80] Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars,* p. 60.
[81] Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939,* p. 83.

nature very amenable, section of the community - the industrial workers, whose morale and sticking power cannot be expected to equal that of the disciplined soldier.[82]

During the 1930s there was an unrealistic attitude towards air power. British defense policy planners were dominated by the fear of an air attack on their major cities. The RAF's counter-offensive strategy became the centerpiece of rearmament policy. The ordinary person began to contemplate seriously the possibility that one day an air attack would strike Britain.[83] Stanley Baldwin, Britain's preeminent statesmen, was also fearful of air attacks on the United Kingdom. On 12 November 1932, Baldwin addressed the House of Commons and expressed his historic opinion that "the bomber will always get through."[84] Cabinet discussion revealed the air menace was at the heart of disarmament discussions. Uri Bialer states in *Shadow of the Bomber* that "both disarmers and rearmers based their conclusions on the same well-known and widely shared fears of an airborne knockout blow."[85]

Group Captain John Slessor returned to Britain and the Air Ministry in May 1937, and became the Deputy Director of Plans and in effect, the central pivot of all planning and coordination for Air Staff Departments. He was directly responsible to the CAS for the development of Air Staff policy, and as the Air Ministry representative for the Joint Planning Committee, he advised the Chiefs of Staff on current and future strategic problems.[86] Slessor was especially concerned with the growth of the Luftwaffe

---

[82] Hastings, *Bomber Command*, p. 47.
[83] Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars,* pp. 109-110.
[84] Stanley Baldwin quoted in Telford Taylor's, *Munich: The Price of Peace* (London, 1979), p. 211.
[85] Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber* (London, 1980), p. 2.
[86] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* pp. 144-145.

and the failings of the RAF to maintain parity with Germany. Air Ministry Intelligence estimated that Germany already had:

> 800 bombers technically capable of attacking objectives in this country from bases on German soil, by September, 738 were identified in units, but the estimate of those actually serviceable was put at 500-600. In addition, Italy was credited with a long-range striking force of over 400 bombers. ...Against this we could mobilize in Bomber Command only ninety-six corresponding "long-range" bombers - thirty-six each of Blenheims and Wellesleys and twelve each of Battles and Harrows, pretty poor stuff compared with the Ju 86, He 111 and Do 17, of which we knew some 250 were mobilizable in Germany. Our nominal bombing strength was 816 in the Metropolitan Air Force; but the remaining 700 odd were mostly obsolete short-range types like Heyfords, Hinds, Audax and Ansons, and in any event over 30 per cent of the squadrons would have to be "rolled up" on mobilization to provide some reserves for the remainder. Here was something to keep one awake at night.[87]

In March 1936, Sir Thomas Inskip was appointed to the unenviable position of Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence to help reconcile the strategies and financial requirements for the three services. During the latter half of 1937, Inskip undertook a review of defense policy, resulting in what became known as the Inskip Report, which Malcolm Smith correctly calls "the single most important document produced on defence matters in the 1930s."[88] The report, which became a blueprint for British grand strategy, took on the strategic air offensive policy of the RAF. Inskip, whose experience in defense policy was limited, argued what he believed to be a common sense approach to national security; he asserted that Britain should initially adopt a defensive posture in a war with Germany, endure the Luftwaffe attempts at a knockout blow, and prevail through a long-term strategy of attrition warfare based on the economic strength of the British Empire. The report reconciled air power with the traditional tenets of British

---

[87] Ibid., pp. 157-158.
[88] Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars,* p. 183.

military strategy, and put the spotlight on air defense.[89]

Inskip confronted the Air Staff on the question of the counter-offensive. In preparing for war through rearmament, Inskip looked to fighter defense instead of "strategic bombing". Inskip argued that "you can devise a revised program based on the conception that at the start of a war our first task is to repulse a knockout blow within the first few weeks . . . . the fighter force should be made as strong as possible."[90] The RAF's mission, theorized Inskip, "is not an early knockout blow . . . . but to prevent the German's from knocking us out."[91] Inskip's reappraisal of the knockout blow was a direct challenge to the Air Staff's view of strategy.

Slessor believed that Inskip's proposal of scrapping the counter-offensive was a profound mistake: "But no; Sir Thomas Inskip came down against Scheme J, on the grounds that our economy and financial position were not equal to it. He accepted only our proposals for an increased number of fighters."[92] Slessor postulated in his memoirs that Britain's political and military policy should have been adjusted to confront the German threat of 1937: "Looking back on it now in the atmosphere of 1953, it is almost impossible to believe the extent to which financial considerations were allowed to exert such an influence in bringing us to the very lip of disaster in the face of the Nazi menace, in the years immediately preceding Hitler's war."[93]

---

[89] Ibid., p. 183.
[90] Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany,* vol. 1 (London, 1961), p. 76.
[91] John Terraine, *A Time for Courage: The Royal Air Force in the European War, 1939-1945* (New York, 1983), p. 51.
[92] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 160; see Appendix A for detailed summary of RAF Schemes.
[93] Ibid., pp. 160-161.

From the moment Slessor entered the Air Ministry in May 1937, he was a strong supporter of closer relations with the United States and an advocate for the purchasing of American military aircraft. In November 1937, Slessor "suggested buying some hundreds of aircraft from abroad -- such as the Douglas D.B.1 bomber from America; and, in particular, let ourselves go on the principle of 'non-interference with the flow of normal trade."[94] In May 1938, he encouraged the British purchase of American high-speed engines and fuselages. Slessor hoped that British orders would force the American aircraft industry for the first time since 1918 into a position where future orders necessitated a major investment for expansion. Also, he postulated that British orders encouraged President Franklin D. Roosevelt to develop procedures facilitating British and French efforts to further utilize the American arsenal for their defense.[95]

Slessor helped author a 1938 Air Staff paper outlining RAF bombing policy towards civilians. The paper noted that there was no agreed international covenant regarding air bombardment. The central premise of his plan prohibited the wanton assault on civilians: "A direct attack upon an enemy civilian population . . . is a course of action which no British Cabinet would sanction."[96] Slessor rejected indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations and incorporated this philosophy into Anglo-American relations:

> We were all all-too-familiar with the arguments about the odium we should incur by being the first to cause casualties to a civilian population, and were impressed (unduly so, I think) with the importance of securing neutral, and especially American opinion firmly on our side ...But that is how it looked to us at the time and obviously the

---

[94] Ibid., p. 159.
[95] Air Ministry Report, "Investigation of Possibilities of Aircraft Purchases in the U.S.A.", May 1938, PRO AIR 19/39.
[96] Air Ministry Paper, "The Restriction of Air Warfare", 14 January 1938, PRO AIR 20/284.

> importance of securing American sympathy could hardly be exaggerated.[97]

The fear of the knockout blow was a dominant theme in British Government policy debates. The Luftwaffe's rate of growth had turned the knockout blow from a discussion topic into a threatening expectation. Air propaganda and a hostile Germany effected the decision-making process of the RAF leadership. Chief Air Marshal Sir Cyril Newall issued a gloomy appraisal of Britain's defense posture in an April 1938 note to Lord Swinton, the Secretary of State for Air:

> I feel strongly that the time for mincing words is past and that the Air Staff should state their view of the situation plainly. Their view is that unless the Cabinet are prepared to incur at the very least the full expenditure required for Scheme L and possibly more, we must accept a position of permanent inferiority to Germany in the air. In that event we must be prepared to accede to any German demand without a struggle, since in the event of war our financial and economic strength, which the preset financial limitations are designed to secure, will be of no use because we shall not survive the knock-out blow.[98]

Slessor believed it was the duty of the military to provide the worst-case scenario for the Government. He argued that underestimating German capabilities and not providing for shelters, hospital beds, evacuation procedures, fighters and the infant but promising technology of radar would have been a dereliction of duty.[99] The Air Staff's exaggeration of the effects of bombing on an industrial society and a belief in the "knockout blow" clouded the judgement of the Cabinet's when deciding the fate of Czechoslovakia.[100]

Many in the country were concerned about the lethargic attitude of the British people. Slessor described the public mood in those perilous times:

---

[97] Ibid., p. 215.
[98] Ibid., p. 152.
[99] Fredette, *The Sky on Fire*, p. 257.
[100] Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power*, p. 83.

> There was among the people none of the proud, confident morale of pre-1914 Britain -- nothing of the spirit which would tolerate nothing short of a two-power standard fleet and which was solidly behind the 'We want the eight and won't wait' agitation of Dreadnought days. There was the Peace Ballot, and the motion of the Oxford Union by a lot of silly little undergraduates --many of whom were soon to die gallantly in the Battle of Britain or on the battlefields of North Africa and Burma -- against fighting for King and Country.[101]

The Czech crisis of August and September 1938 was the most difficult period in Slessor's life: "It weighed like a ton of lead upon one's mind and conscience."[102] He prayed that Britain would never again be put in such a weak position: "The sense of urgency crowded upon one and I was soon to know for the first time the meaning of fear -- I had been frightened out of my wits any number of times -- but the gnawing dread of national shame and disaster that curdles the tummy and wakes one up at three in the morning to lie tossing and wondering what can be done and what will happen."[103]

At the same time, Charles Lindbergh, America's legendary aviator, visited Britain following an extensive tour of Germany. Slessor had dinner and a lengthy conversation with Colonel Lindbergh on 22 September 1938. "He is convinced that our only sound policy is to avoid war now at almost any cost."[104] Lindbergh stressed to Slessor that Germany was a formidable nation with the world's most powerful air force.[105] Lindbergh's discussions with British officials are analyzed in Telford Taylor's *Munich: The Price of Peace*: "Despite his unquestioned sincerity, what he brought back to England at this critical juncture was a mass of misinformation and misjudgment, the

---

[101] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 155.
[102] Ibid., p. 217.
[103] Ibid., pp. 153-154.
[104] Ibid., p. 219; R. J. Q. Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39* (Stanford, 1993), p. 112.
[105] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 220.

product of his lack of military experience, gullibility, susceptibility to certain aspects of German life. . . . what Britain needed at that moment was the capacity for calm and informed appraisal of the many factors in this crisis."[106]

Failure to match the growing power of the German Air Force stimulated the pursuit of an appeasement policy, resulting in the Munich betrayal of September 1938. Slessor asserted that the RAF was not ready for war during the Munich Crisis:

> In September 1938 came the nightmare of Munich. Even in the full light of after-knowledge I find it impossible to convince myself that any British Government could have brought itself to face taking the country into war in our then shocking state of unpreparedness in the air - indeed anywhere but at sea where the Royal Navy had for generations enjoyed the lion's share of the defence estimates, three times as much as the R.A.F. in the previous twenty years.[107]

The upgrading of the air defense network was in its infancy. Bomber Command was without an effective four-engine aircraft capable of bringing offensive action to Germany. Fighter Command had just five squadrons of Hurricanes, and they could not function effectively at altitudes higher than 10,000 feet. Spitfires were in the final stages of development and not yet operational.[108]

Slessor acknowledged in retirement that the RAF must accept some responsibility for the failed policies of the appeasement period:

> We must bear our share of the blame for this appalling state of affairs, but in the main it was the inevitable outcome of Government policy in the preceding years, with its complete lack of urgency, its unrealistic attitude towards foreign affairs, and its insistence on economy and non-interference with the normal process of industry, regardless of the international situation at the time. It is really a waste of breath discussing what Mr. Chamberlain should or should not have done *at Munich* itself. That surrender was the inevitable Nemesis that overcame us as a reward for the follies of the years before.[109]

---

[106] Taylor, *Munich*, p. 852.
[107] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 178.
[108] Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power,* p. 247.
[109] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 224; Slessor also quoted in Terraine's, *A Time for Courage*, p. 53.

This unfortunate policy in many ways allowed for the British to pursue the air defense option at the expense of a failed strategic bombing doctrine.

Participants and observers of the Munich Crisis have debated the relative merits of Britain and France confronting Nazi aggression in 1938. Winston Churchill postulated that: "The German armies were not capable of defeating the French in 1938 or 1939. . . . the French with nearly sixty or seventy divisions could most certainly have rolled across the Rhine and into the Ruhr." Opposing views have been vigorously stated; Slessor, for example, disagreed with Churchill: "I believe he always gravely overestimated the value of the French Army. That Army under Gamelin was useless in 1939, and . . . I do not believe (it) would have been much better in 1938 that it could have 'rolled forward across the Rhine and into the Ruhr', even against the relatively weak German opposition at the time of Munich."[110]

Slessor was the first member of the Air Staff to identify and articulate the many weaknesses of Bomber Command. He wrote in October 1938 that: "We appear to be neglecting practical research and experiments bearing on the relative vulnerability to air bombardment of various kinds of targets and on the types of bombs and tactics, which will bring about the destruction with the least expenditure of effort of each type of target."[111] Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland describe in their official history the Air Staff's recognition of Bomber Command's deficiencies: "it is surely remarkable that

---

[110] Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* p. 65; Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 1 (London, 1948), p. 304 and p. 311; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 146.
[111] Air Ministry Minutes, Slessor to DCAS, 19 October 1938, PRO AIR 2/2604.

it was less than a year before war broke out that the Air Staff realized that the RAF's most treasured instrument was incapable of carrying out the operations on which the Air Ministry had based its strategy for the last four years".[112]

Slessor energetically supported Scheme M, the last of the pre-war expansion programs, which called for enhancement of RAF front-line fighter and bomber strength, along with a build-up of Fighter Command reserves.[113] Slessor also recognized that at some point expansion schemes would have to give way to the training of pilots and the development of a logistical infrastructure to support the acquisition of new aircraft. He wrote in 1938: "If we constantly go on expanding in breadth, we shall never reach the stage when we can consolidate, put some depth behind the façade and put our force on a footing of readiness for war. The fact is we cannot be constantly expanding our nominal first line (which does not in any case represent our true war first line) and at the same time have a force fit to go to war."[114] Slessor realized that the RAF must protect Britain from a devastatingly quick defeat: "what we had to consider was how we could ultimately defeat Germany in what -- if we could avert the 'knock-out blow' -- was almost sure to be a long war. We never had the least doubt that sooner or later the gloves would come off; but our policy was to gain time -- to improve our own defences and to build up the great force of heavy bombers of the Scheme M programme."[115]

Slessor asserted in his 12 November 1938 plans document, "American Co-

---

[112] Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* p. 91; Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, vol. 1, p. 101.
[113] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 180, Approved by the Cabinet on 17 November 1938.
[114] Ibid., p. 169.
[115] Ibid., p. 214.

operation with Great Britain in the event of War with Germany: The Neutrality Act and War Debt Settlement", that Britain must secure America's active support in its contest with Nazi Germany. Slessor believed that American public opinion was hostile to Germany, but was also registering disappointment with Allied resolve at Munich. He recognized that the Neutrality and Johnson Act stood in the way of Anglo-American cooperation. The Neutrality Act placed a mandatory embargo on the export of arms, munitions and implements of war to belligerents and empowered the President to extend the embargo to the exports, in excess of 'normal commerce', of other articles or materials used 'in the conduct of war', except on a 'cash and carry' basis. The Johnson Act precluded foreign powers that had defaulted on their debt to the United States or to American citizens from borrowing money on the American security markets.[116]

Slessor believed that annulment or modification of the Neutrality and Johnson Act would benefit Britain, and be in the interest of world peace: "It would, in present circumstance, proclaim probably more than anything else could, the common interests of the democracies of the world in resisting the aggressive policies of the dictatorships; and would constitute a powerful added deterrent to war." He stressed that settlement of Britain's First World War debt was singularly important to rearmament: "If we are to take advantage of the immense war potential of the United States, we must be able to borrow money on Wall Street. This we cannot do until we have settled the war debt question."[117]

---

[116] Air Ministry Plans Document, "American Co-operation with Great Britain in the Event of War with Germany. The Neutrality Act and War Debt Settlement", 12 November 1938, PRO AIR 75/65.
[117] Ibid., AIR 75/65.

The Director of Plans authored a 9 January 1939 memorandum to Sir Kingsley Wood, the Secretary of State for Air of the day, on American Neutrality. Slessor again stressed that War debt settlement and the consequent escape from the Johnson Act would be of immense importance to British rearmament: "we should have behind us the gigantic and invulnerable war potential (admittedly now in an undeveloped state) of America." He asserted to Wood that American industrial strength would prove decisive in a British conflict with Germany.[118]

Slessor prepared a detailed bombing proposal for Bomber Command in the event of war with Germany.[119] He stated that although "we have located no key industrial group, the destruction of which would dislocate the whole of German War Industry . . . there is a key service, Power, which is mainly electricity, the dislocation of which would bring about a very important reduction of all German War Industry'."[120] The majority of the Air Staff believed in the efficacy of independent bombing operations against enemy industrial targets. Their motivation was to avoid a repetition of the slaughter of World War I: "Do we envisage winning the war in the same way as the last time -- a series of land battles over a period of years, a succession of Passchendaele's leading to military occupation of Germany? . . . I cannot feel any confidence that the method of military occupation is the right answer as to how to win this war ...."[121]

The German annexation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 highlighted the urgent

---

[118] Air Ministry memorandum, Slessor to Secretary of State for Air, 9 January 1939, PRO AIR 75/65.
[119] Letter, Slessor to Ludlow-Hewitt, 17 January 1938, PRO AIR 14/131.
[120] Air Ministry paper, Slessor to CAS, 3 February 1939, PRO AIR 2/2805.
[121] Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* pp. 552-553; Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, 1986), p. 633.

need for Anglo-French military discussions. The British and French Air Staff talks opened on 5 April 1939 in London between Commandant Bailly of the French Air Force and Air Commodore Slessor, Director of Plans at the Air Ministry. Slessor was surprised and disappointed with the initial conduct of the conference. He wrote: "It seems strange now that international discussions of such far-reaching importance should have been conducted on anything but the highest level." Slessor added that there "was still this extraordinary feeling that public opinion must not be upset and we must not be too provocative to Hitler, and for that reason the conduct of the discussions were entrusted to the less conspicuous Joint Planners - Captain Danckwerts for the Admiralty, Brigadier Kennedy for the War Office and myself for the Air Ministry."[122]

Slessor briefed Air Marshal Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt, Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command, on the substance of the discussions with Commandant Bailly and the Air Staff's reaction to them. 'The French Delegation', he wrote, "showed a preoccupation, amounting almost to an obsession, with the probability of the German initial course of action consisting of a major land and air offensive against the Low Countries and France. The French fear that German armies might achieve surprise in a sudden attack on Southern Holland and Belgium and might, by a rapid advance through those countries, be able to outflank the Maginot Line."[123] Both delegations agreed on a policy regarding the bombing of civilians: "neither would initiate air action against anything but purely military objectives in the narrowest sense of the word, i.e., Naval,

---

[122] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 228-229.
[123] Letter, Slessor to Ludlow-Hewitt, 17 April 1939, PRO AIR 2/2884.

Army and Air Forces and their establishments; and that, as far as possible, it should not involve loss of civilian life." [124] Slessor later postulated that French politico-military relations handicapped the conference: "The French delegation made no bones about distrusting their politicians and said they told them as little as possible."[125]

Slessor realized that neither the French nor British General Staff had any intention of opening a second front on behalf of the Poles. Slessor reported to the CAS: "The two-front war might well be a less formidable affair for Germany than it might appear at first sight -- particularly if the Germans stood entirely on the defensive in the West till they had settled with Poland. In that event the initiative in the West could be left entirely with the Allies and, without, I hope, being unduly pessimistic, it is very difficult to see what we could do that would be any use." Slessor "therefore suggested to the C.A.S. that [Colonel] Beck should be warned that as far as we were concerned, the Poles would have to rely entirely on their own resources to defend their own territory."[126] Newall passed the suggestion to the Cabinet, but no warning was ever conveyed to the Poles.[127]

During the Anglo-French staff talks in May 1939, Slessor faced an Anglo-French delegation more concerned with establishing an Eastern European alliance than planning a military response to German aggression. The French Generals were imbued with a defensive outlook upon the war, and showed little enthusiasm for offensive action.

---

[124] Summarised History of Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939, PRO AIR 9/105.
[125] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 230.
[126] Ibid., pp. 230-231.
[127] Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1980), p. 308.

Brian Bond contends that: "the French were relying on an Eastern Front to take pressure off themselves, whereas the British through military weakness were obliged to rely on the French to hold the Western Front for them. Neither delegation favored creating a genuine Western Front by an immediate land offensive against Germany."[128]

The French were also concerned with British pronouncements about choice of targets and possible German retaliation. The French feared that Britain would use their air assets to conduct a strategic bombing campaign of the Ruhr. They believed this formula would not contain a German invasion and invite Luftwaffe retaliation against French cities. Slessor reassured the French General Staff that the RAF would concentrate its air assets at the 'decisive point'. He stressed that the RAF would use Bomber Command in cooperation with the French Air Force to halt a German offensive.[129] Slessor remarked in his memoirs that the French military was not convinced: "We thought we could best delay the invasion by going for the Ruhr, combined with more direct support by the mediums against tactical objectives in Belgium; Gamelin apparently was against this because he thought it would result in retaliation against French cities and factories."[130]

Strategic bombing represented the raison d'être for the RAF. But Bomber Command failed in the 1930s to improve their tactics and technical capabilities to meet their wartime requirements.[131] The Air Staff did little to foster the flexibility that air

---

[128] Ibid., p. 314.
[129] Smith, *The Strategy Between the Wars,* p. 304.
[130] Ibid., p. 295; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 252.
[131] Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power,* p. 81.

power requires in its application. The RAF was without an institutional mechanism that would have subjected their bombing philosophy to honest evidentiary tests.[132] Smith argues that the Air Ministry: "was overtaken by the size and speed of the development of the administrative problems entailed by the expansion, and the consequent simplification of opinion as to the role of air power in war."[133]

Slessor concurred with some of the negative charges that historians have leveled at the Air Ministry: "A legitimate criticism of the Air Staff before the war is that we paid insufficient attention to the technique of bombing. Our almost passionate faith in the efficacy of the bomber offensive as a major war-winning factor was in the long run vindicated by results. But there is no doubt that we did underestimate the technical difficulties of modern air bombardment, and might have been more far-sighted in our effort to develop the major weapon of air power, the bomb."[134] Webster and Frankland provide a clear analysis of the RAF's capabilities in their official history: " . . . when war came in 1939 Bomber Command was not trained or equipped either to penetrate into enemy territory by day or to find its target areas, let alone its targets, by night . . . . This seems a strange result after twenty years of devoted work."[135] Slessor confirmed that Bomber Command still had tactical and operational deficiencies. He wrote: "It must be admitted that our imagination was not sufficiently flexible and our experience too limited to comprehend quickly enough the far-reaching technical requirements of a

---

[132] Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, eds. *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 143.
[133] Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars*, p. 304.
[134] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 203.
[135] Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany*, vol. 1, p. 125.

modern striking force, capable of operating -- of finding and hitting targets - at long range in bad weather." Slessor added that the RAF "attached insufficient importance to things which afterwards became a commonplace, like bombing and navigational aids, signals equipment, D/F [direction finding], homing beacons and blind landing systems."[136]

Slessor authored a September 1939 Plans memorandum arguing for an aggressive air offensive against Germany. He stated: "Although our numerical inferiority in the air is a most important factor it should not be allowed to obscure other potent considerations. We are now at war with a nation which possess an imposing façade of armed might, but which, behind that façade, is politically rotten, weak in financial and economic resources, and already heavily engaged on another front." Slessor added: "The lessons of history prove that victory does not always go to the big battalions. At present we have the initiative. If we seize it now we may gain important results; if we loose it by waiting we shall probably loose more than we gain. . . ." [137] He opposed the bombing of German civilians but still pressed for more aggressive policies to aid the Poles. In his memorandum to the Chiefs of Staff on 7 September 1939 he wrote that 'indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations as such will never form part of our policy'.[138] He postulated that British bombing of oil refineries and electrical power stations would result in German retaliation: "It seemed unlikely that the plan to which

---

[136] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 205; Slessor also quoted in Cargill R. Hall, ed., *Case Studies in Strategic Bombardment* (Washington,D.C., 1988), p. 67.
[137] Slessor's Plans memorandum quoted in Hastings', *Bomber Command*, p. 54.
[138] Ibid., p. 55.

we attached most value - that of attack on the Ruhr - would be authorized, not only because of our own shocking weakness in the event of retaliation, but also because it involved a British Government taking the initiative at the outset in a new form of warfare inevitable bringing in its train heavy loss of life to civilians."[139]

Murray believes the military disasters that beset the Allies in 1940 were the result of a complex set of political and military mistakes occurring during the 'locust years'. He is especially captious of RAF leadership for permitting this lamentable state of affairs to arise. He writes: "The great defeat came in May-June 1940. In every respect it should have been avoided." Murray believes "the diplomatic and strategic policies of the West, especially of Great Britain, the delusions of a British government firmly convinced that wars were something twentieth-century statesmen did not consider, and the strategic advice of a military that saw every situation in the darkest light led to Dunkirk and the defeat of France."[140]

Slessor takes his full share of any blame for allowing the more extreme claims for air power to come to the fore. He was preoccupied with two shortcomings in particular; first the rate of production of new aircraft, and secondly Britain's weakness in striking power relative to the Luftwaffe. Slessor asserted that: "It had always been an article of faith with the Air Staff that the counter-offensive was the most important element in our own defence. I think it must be admitted that we overstressed that doctrine to the extent of seriously underrating the efficacy of fighter defence and

---

[139] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 213.
[140] Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power*, p. 369.

providing inadequate numbers of fighters in all but the last pre-war expansion schemes." Slessor adds: "I have already emphasized our understandable ignorance, due to the lack of practical experience, of air warfare. Before the days of eight-gun monoplane and - more particularly - of radar early warning."[141]

The attitude and support of the United States was critical to the survival of Britain. In this period of crisis Slessor urged the Air Ministry to place contracts for every available American plane and engine suitable for the RAF. Future British orders would require heavy investment in the further development of America's aircraft industry. The achievements of Allied purchasing missions also contributed to the further expansion of this industry, for President Roosevelt, influenced partly by Anglo-French investments and partly by the repeal of the arms embargo, ordered the liberalization of tax write-offs. The numbers of planes and engines which the British ordered from the United States in the fall of 1939 and early 1940 were limited, not by British demands, but by the productive capacity of the United States.[142]

---

[141] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 166-167.
[142] Ibid., p. 272; Message on Aircraft Procurement, Lothian to Air Ministry, 17 January 1940, PRO AIR 8/293.

CHAPTER III

BRITAIN ALONE, MAY - OCTOBER 1940

THE FALL OF FRANCE

On 10 May 1940, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain resigned and Winston Churchill was called to form a government. The portents of the moment were ominous. The occasion for Chamberlain's resignation had been the bitter expression of Parliament's dissatisfaction with his war leadership, following upon his woeful mishandling of the Norwegian campaign. On the same day, 10 May 1940, Hitler unleashed his Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe in a massive attack on the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.[1]

The Allied military setbacks in the Low Countries and the deepening crisis in France caused a sudden shift in the attitude of the British concerning collaboration with the Americans. In an internal Air Ministry memorandum Air Commodore Slessor asserted: "First of all, we must decide what forces we consider essential for the security of the United Kingdom. To reduce them below this figure would be fatal, since the loss of United Kingdom, means the loss of France also, whereas the converse is not necessarily true ... If the Germans decide to attack France, I find it hard to believe that she will remain an effective ally for long." Slessor believed "the only practical course

[1] Winston S. Churchill, *Their Finest Hour* (Boston, 1949), pp. 8-10; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. 6, *1939-1941 Finest Hour* (London, 1983), pp. 306-307.

seems to be for France to issue a formal appeal to the U.S.A. An appeal from us is out of the question, but coming from France, its effect would be quite different."[2]

Prior to May 1940 there was little desire by either President Roosevelt's Administration in Washington or His Majesty's Government in London for full-scale commitment; indeed, they deemed it hardly necessary. Each preferred limited cooperation with the other and conjectured this would be sufficient to oppose the Nazi threat. As the scope of the calamity in France increased, however, greater assistance from the United States became more attractive. In the corridors of the Air Ministry it was increasingly argued that early entry of America into the war was essential to Britain's survival.[3]

With the Wehrmacht's sweep across the Low Countries and the British retreat to the Channel in May, Slessor and the Air Ministry urgently requested aircraft from the United States' own arsenal to be replaced later by planes already on order from Britain.[4] The requests included the entire frontline inventory of the Army Air Corps, and British orders soon reached 14,000 planes. The Roosevelt administration continued its policy after Dunkirk of filling Britain's immediate combat needs over U.S. Army Air Corps expansion.[5] On 15 May, having described the desperate situation in the British Isles,

---

[2] Air Staff policy paper by Air Commodore Slessor, May 1940, PRO AIR 75/5.
[3] David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-1941: A Study in Competitive Co-operation* (Chapel Hill, 1982), p. 95.
[4] Mark S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Pre-War Plans and Preparations* (Washington, D.C., 1950), p. 305.
[5] Richard G. Davis, "Carl A. Spaatz and the Development of the Royal Air Force-U.S. Army Air Corps Relationship, 1939-1940," *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 54 (October 1990), p.456; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1948), pp. 128-129.

Churchill asked the President to do everything possible "short of actually engaging armed forces."[6]

Some convergence of the two countries' interest in matters relating to the production of aircraft was a natural consequence of Britain buying aircraft from the United States. In the early months of the war, France was a partner with Britain in purchasing aircraft and war materials from America. In March 1940, the Anglo-French Purchasing Board was established in Washington, D.C., and Jean M. Monnet and Canadian businessman Arthur B. Purvis were appointed directors. After the fall of France, Britain assumed control of all outstanding French contracts, Purvis then became Director General, and soon afterwards the Anglo-French Purchasing Board was dissolved. The British Purchasing Commission was responsible for placing all British orders in the United States, including those for munitions, materials, and machine tools. Negotiations for aircraft purchases on the British account were the responsibility of the British Air Commission, which was under the direction of Sir Henry Self. In addition, the Ministry of Aircraft Production had Morris Wilson as their representative in North America.[7]

Hitler's military successes of May 1940 pushed the Roosevelt Administration toward an air power agenda. Addressing a Joint Session of Congress on 16 May, Roosevelt emphasized the danger of air attacks from hostile nations and urged increasing

---

[6] Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942* (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 20; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York, 1979), p. 221.
[7] John McVickar Haight, Jr., *American Aid to France* (New York, 1970), pp. 233-235.

military aircraft production. The President's request to Congress was partly in response to impassioned Allied requests for quicker and greater assistance. FDR called for a then astonishing production capacity of 50,000 aircraft with a standing force the same size. General Arnold, Chief of the War Department's Air Corps, later explained, "In forty-five minutes, I was given $1,500,000,000 and told to get an air force."[8]

Roosevelt asserted in his speech that providing aircraft to the Allies was a measure of self-defense that increased the security of the Western Hemisphere. Robert Dallek postulates that the President was convinced that air power in the hands of the allies would deter aggression because "American planes in Allied hands were a prime weapon of self-defense", he asked the Congress not to do anything "which would in any way hamper or delay the delivery of American-made planes" to Britain and France. "That," he said, "from the point of view of our own national defense, would be extremely shortsighted."[9]

Roosevelt and his administration were enthusiastic supporters of air power. Like many in the Royal Air Force (RAF), some in the U.S. military believed that strategic bombing alone could win the war.[10] Roosevelt conjectured that Germany's military success was attributed to their strength in the air. The outrageous proposal for 50,000 aircraft was intended to jolt the American public from their isolationist posture and acknowledge the international threat posed by the Luftwaffe. Historian I. B. Holley

---

[8] Arnold quoted in Kent Roberts Greenfield, *American Strategy in World War II: A Reconsideration* (Baltimore, 1963), p. 89, see Appendix B for a comparison of RAF-AAC/AAF ranks.
[9] Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 221.
[10] John Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War* (Bloomington, 1999), p. 156.

recognized that there was enormous difference between declaring an objective of producing 50,000 planes a year and actually achieving the goal. It is clear from Roosevelt's pronouncement that this was a political determination ignoring the advice of his senior military advisors General Marshall and Admiral Stark: "No doubt the President's appeal for more aircraft expressed in round numbers served as a stimulating psychological target to raise the sights and fire the imagination of the nation. The big round number could serve equally well as a political symbol."[11] Michael Sherry notes that Roosevelt's speech "was sprinkled with references to the 'swift and deadly' attacks across vast expanses that airplanes could launch. As dramatization of the primacy of air power, the message was Roosevelt's boldest."[12]

Providing aircraft and munitions for the Allies was the most effective mechanism for America taking action short of war. The frantic Allied requests conflicted with the planned expansion of the U.S. Army Air Corps and the productive capacity of the American armament industry. Because the American munitions industry was not yet at peak performance, an inevitable conflict between the demands of the U.S. military services and the Allied nations arose.[13] Under great pressure from the White House, largely conveyed through the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry J. Morgenthau, the Roosevelt Administration released considerable quantities of munitions urgently needed by the British, who had abandoned a great part of their own supplies at Dunkirk. The

---

[11] Irving Brinton Holley, Jr., *Buying Aircraft Materiel Procurement for the Army Air Forces* (Washington, D.C., 1964), p. 229.
[12] Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, 1987), p. 91.
[13] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 1, p. 127.

Army objected to several of these transactions on the grounds that they jeopardized United States national security.[14]

Prior to the defeat of France, Slessor prepared a somber appreciation of Britain's strategic position: "This is unquestionably the most serious paper ever produced by the J.P.C. [Joint Planning Committee]." He analyzed Britain's probability for survival in relation to assistance from the Empire and the United States, and investigated whether there was any chance of defeating Germany: "We were writing this paper before the evacuation from Dunkirk began, and no one could foresee the miracle which brought 340,000 men away; we said that if a German army got ashore in England, we should be unable to deal with them." Slessor believed the "crux of the problem was air superiority. And though we gave top priority to the production of fighter pilots and aircraft, it is worth noting that even in this extremity the Planners warned against neglecting the bomber force.[15]

The collapse of France was a catastrophe for Britain; as a result Nazi Germany controlled most of continental Europe, from the Bay of Biscay to the Black Sea. France was defeated and partially occupied, whereas Russia was bound by treaties of friendship and economic cooperation to Germany. Slessor described the mood as the JPC received news of the final and complete debacle in France: "It was a grim moment when, on June 14, a meeting of the Joint Planning Committee was interrupted … with a laconic message from our liaison mission with General Georges: 'Organized resistance in

---

[14] Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942*, p. 16.
[15] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 298; The Slessor memo is included in the Prime Minister's "Memorandum on the Munitions Situation", May 1940, PRO AIR 75/5.

France is at an end.' But the prevailing sensation in that neon-lighted room under the War Cabinet office was one of relief--a feeling that at last we knew the worst, and our salvation now depended on ourselves alone."[16]

France's surrender after only forty days of fighting forced the British to reappraise and restructure their military strategy. Greatly concerned for his country's prospects, Slessor presented his thoughts to a colleague:

> Everything had to be thought out afresh in the lurid light of the new and intensely grim situation in which we found ourselves alone--our only major ally overwhelmed, our enemy in possession of the whole coastline of Europe from the North Cape to the Bay of Biscay, and possibilities of further calamity looming in the Near and Far East. With the Luftwaffe concentrating for the knock-out blow and the invasion barges beginning to pile up in the Channel ports, the task of the planners was to free their minds from these immediate perils and turn them to long-term consideration of future strategy, of the probable future threats that we must be ready to counter, and of the means to which we must look for the ultimate defeat of Germany.[17]

Slessor was altogether aware that Britain's salvation lay in the assistance that the United States could provide. The Joint Planning Committee postulated that the future conduct of the war was supportable only through unlimited aid in war materials from across the Atlantic and ultimately the participation of the United States. The need for closer Anglo-American relations was evident, and during June 1940 various intimations of a British desire for secret and informal conversations reached Washington "with what may now appear rather unjustified optimism - that Germany might still be defeated by a combination air attack, economic pressure and revolt in the occupied territories. Here the crux of the matter was the full financial and material support of the United States and

---

[16] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 297.
[17] Ibid., p. 303; Minute Sheet, Slessor to Air Marshal Sir Richard E. C. Peirse (VCAS), 19 June 1940, PRO AIR 75/5.

of the other North and South American countries which would follow her lead. And we thought that the best way of securing that support (which we quite realized was far from certain) was to fight on against apparently hopeless odds."[18]

Many in America believed that Great Britain was in imminent danger of defeat; few people thought they could best hope for anymore than a stalemate. In fact, as long as enemy morale remained intact, British victory over Germany by direct action on the Continent seemed hardly possible.[19] In June, the Prime Minister required Slessor to articulate in broad terms British policy for the future conduct of the war and project the necessary program of expansion for the armed forces. These subjects were fully examined in his Chiefs of Staff memorandum "Future Strategy", outlining the roles of each service in winning the war and dealt at considerable length with their armament production programs.[20]

The "Future Strategy Paper" allowed for long-term consideration of Britain's ability to defeat Germany. To complicate matters, in June Italy entered the war against Britain, and a still-neutral Japan threatened European possessions in Southeast Asia. Slessor revealed the practical benefit of such a strategic assessment: "And in the summer of 1940 we could not possibly foresee events which profoundly changed the whole strategic outlook and supply situation, such as Lend-Lease, Hitler's attack on Russia, and—above all - the intervention of the United States on our side. Nevertheless, we had to take things as we found them at the time, and the 'Future Strategy Paper' was

---

[18] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 298.
[19] Richard Lamb, *Churchill as War Leader* (New York, 1991), p. 75.
[20] "Future Strategy Paper" by Air Commodore Slessor, June 1940, PRO AIR 75/5.

far from being a waste of effort." He added that this military analysis had a therapeutic effect on British leadership: "It did at least clear our minds, and it provided a broad basis of strategic policy which had an influence that endured long after many of the basic premises had been profoundly altered, and set a pattern for the future development of supply policy - at least as far as the RAF and the Army were concerned."[21]

Slessor believed that the RAF could lose the war for Britain unless two conditions were satisfied: 1) maintaining aircraft superiority and a high level of morale and training for RAF crews and 2) numerical increase of the RAF through an Anglo-American air power alliance. Slessor's prescient acknowledgment of America's importance is evident in the strategic memorandum prepared for the Prime Minister: ".... we have open to us the potentially enormous capacity of the U.S.A. But if we are to exploit this vast advantage it is absolutely essential that we should insist in the production in America of the very best and newest types of aircraft. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this; to accept American types of inferior fighting value actually in replacement of our own would be fatal." He added that the "difficulties in this respect are well known; but the question is of such vital importance that we should dispatch to America a mission of the very highest caliber to bring it home to the U.S. authorities and secure their assent to the production of our own superior types."[22] Slessor hoped the RAF would be afforded the highest priority in labor, raw material,

---

[21] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 304-305; "Future Strategy Paper", June 1940, PRO AIR 75/5.
[22] Note by the Air Staff in the Prime Minister's Memorandum on the Munitions Situation, June 1940, PRO AIR 75/5.

machine tools, and factories to rapidly increase the military capacity of Bomber Command.

The fall of France along with Britain's uncertain future forced the Air Ministry to review established policy objectives and goals. This period witnessed new and emerging patterns in the evolving Anglo-American air power liaison. While the value of a good formal working relationship between the RAF and Army Air Corps cannot be overemphasized, the pattern of unofficial contacts between the two air forces was of equal significance. Slessor played a crucial role promoting these contacts with his constant cultivation of relationships with American air observers and others who enjoyed an entrée to American decision making processes.[23]

ARMY AIR CORPS OBSERVERS

The Army Air Corps (AAC) queried the British Government in February 1940 about sending officers to observe RAF operations and new technical inventions. They petitioned that the air observers be accorded military attaché status.[24] Although Slessor supported this engaging request, many in the Air Ministry were suspicious of American motives. Historian Richard Davis describes the reaction of Air Chief Marshal Cyril Newall: "What guarantee have we that this information will not find its way back to our enemies?" Newall added, "I am not prepared to be rushed by the Americans, who, as always, wish to have the best of both worlds. They would like to be our allies, but

---

[23] Mark M. Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision: American War Planning and Policy Process, 1937-1942*, vol. 1 (New York, 1988), p. 371.
[24] Richard G. Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe* (Washington, 1992), p. 24.

without any obligations, and they are not blind naturally to the pecuniary advantages of such a state of affairs."[25] Increasing the number of American attachés in Britain was actually the first move from across the Atlantic towards that closer Anglo-American air cooperation, which later was to provide the wherewithal for the ultimate defeat of the Luftwaffe.

In May 1940, Colonel Carl Spaatz and Captain Benjamin S. Kelsey were the second set of approved Military Air Observers sent to Britain or as Spaatz described his new position, "a high-class spy." Davis notes that Spaatz and his fellow Assistant Attachés were officially charged to examine RAF operational tactics, but unofficially "went to discuss British aircraft requirements in light of U.S. production and training programs. Spaatz had unique knowledge of the status of the Air Corps' capabilities, including its readiness, training, procurement, and war plans. This knowledge would be invaluable in assessing the British experience, while whatever he learned from the RAF could be immediately applied by him to the Air Corps' programs."[26]

On 1 June 1940, Spaatz arrived in London, was presented to the American Ambassador, Joseph P. Kennedy, and lunched with Air Chief Marshal Newall. Spaatz arrived during one of Britain's blackest hours. The Allies had been unable to match the power and punch of the German attack on the Low Countries, and the main body of British forces, the flower of her professional army, had been forced to retreat to the open

---

[25] Newall quoted in Ibid., p. 41; Memorandum of Slessor's Conversation with American Assistant Air Attaché, Major George C. McDonald, 8 March 1940, PRO AIR 75/5.
[26] Davis, "Carl A. Spaatz and the Development of the Royal Air Force-U.S. Army Air Corps Relationship, 1939-1940", quoting Spaatz on p. 457.

beaches of Dunkirk and were trapped between the English Channel and the pursuing enemy. Two days later, Spaatz lunched with Slessor, who briefed him on recent RAF combat experiences with the Luftwaffe. Spaatz was concerned with Britain's failure to attempt a strategic bombing campaign, but Slessor blamed the successful German offensive in France and the Low Countries for interrupting Bomber Command's timetable. Davis notes that Spaatz was particularly impressed with Slessor's commitment to offensive air action: "He also learned that the RAF 'apparently thinks as we do, but (has) been hindered by higher-ups' with regard to the feasibility and desirability of strategic bombing of the German economy."[27]

During the period before the Battle of Britain, Slessor began a close personal and professional relationship with Colonel "Tooey" Spaatz. They both were directors of their respective plans divisions and their conversations ranged over a wide range of military topics. Slessor recalled: "The Air Force team was headed by Colonel Carl Spaatz - that 'Tooey' Spaatz who was destined to command the huge American Air Forces in Europe during the last eighteen months of the war against Germany ... I saw a lot of him in those summer months and thus began another treasured friendship--I remember him turning up one day when I was enjoying forty-eight hours' leave, carting corn in Oxfordshire, and we lay on our backs in the stubble chewing straws and looking up at the summer sky where the Battle of Britain was then being fought away to the south-east." Slessor emphasized that Spaatz was "Pennsylvania Dutch, a man of few

---

[27] Davis, *Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, pp. 42-44; DeWitt S. Copp, *Forged in Fire: Strategy and Decisions in the Air War over Europe 1940-45* (New York, 1982), p. 44.

words but with a dry sense of humour that can reduce me to a state of schoolboy giggles quicker than anything I know. He was one of their earliest airmen, with a fine record in the Kaiser's war, and has other characteristics in common with our Lord Trenchard—a man of action rather than of speech, rather inarticulate but with an uncommon flair for the really important issue and a passionate faith in the mission of air power."[28]

The developing seriousness of the military situation led Spaatz and his colleagues at the U.S. Embassy in London to speculate on the possibility of direct United States air involvement in Europe. On 13 June, Air Commodore Boyle notified Slessor that Major McDonald had raised the possibility of American air participation in the war with Germany. Acting on the assumption that entry of the United States into the war was "almost inevitable," McDonald suggested that plans be prepared for the dispatch of fifty B-17s to Britain. If the proposal received a favorable hearing in the United States, then pilots could be trained and special targets studied.[29]

Three days later, on 16 June, the proposal was discussed fully at a conference between McDonald, Spaatz, and Slessor. They agreed that a preliminary plan should be prepared for the reception, accommodation, and operation of one United States heavy bomber group consisting of four squadrons of Flying Fortresses (B-17 B's) and one group of single-seat fighters. The plan would outline all details, including arrangements for airfields, signals, routing on arrival. They decided that a nucleus of ground personnel

---

[28] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 316.
[29] Davis, *Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, p. 45; Minute, Director of Intelligence to Slessor, 13 June 1940, PRO AIR 2/7230.

should travel to Britain immediately and the RAF would provide the balance of personnel required for the operation of the Group.[30]

The conference participants discussed how the American air contingent should be integrated with the RAF to form a combined striking force. Slessor believed it was desirable for the United States squadrons to have their own independent command structure but operate under RAF Groups and share RAF Stations. He asserted that when they had accumulated adequate experience, American airmen would take over and run their own stations. The priority targets would be oil refineries, and aircraft factories. The targets suggested by the RAF included oil plants at Vienna, Regensburg, Leuna, Stettin, and Magdeburg; aircraft factories at Munich, Berlin, Magdeburg, Dessau and Kassel; and industrial targets in northern Italy. Slessor expressed to the Americans his doubts about the effectiveness of the B-17 for long-range bombing. He felt that in spite of its high-altitude potential and its array of weapons, the Flying Fortress might prove vulnerable to the heavily armed Me-110, Germany's vaunted fighter. Slessor noted that operational experiences to date indicated that bombers should operate by night. The RAF "Heavy Bombers" of that time were two-engined aircraft of the type subsequently classified as "Medium Bombers", e.g. Wellingtons, Hampdens, and Whitleys."[31]

The origin of exchanging operational air intelligence lay in the contacts maintained between the U.S. Embassy and the Air Ministry. Slessor recognized that in discussions with American military officers, handling of classified issues and the

---

[30] Minute, Slessor to Deputy Director of Plans, 17 June 1940, PRO AIR 2/7250.
[31] Minute, Deputy Director of Plans to Slessor, 22 June 1940, PRO AIR 2/7250.

protection of national secrets would be an area of concern: "One important decision will have to be taken and that is the question of secrecy and how much we are to divulge to the Americans about things like R.D.F. [Radar]... My own view is that we have now got everything to gain and very little to risk by being completely frank with them. In spite of the precautions that we attempted, I feel that it is almost certain that the Germans will have got a great deal of secret information from the French. At the same time I do not believe, in the present temper of the United States, that there is likely to be any very serious leakage to Germany ... and I feel, therefore, that it would pay to come clean."[32] There is no doubt that Britain and America were conscious of the countervailing advantage accruing from pooling of intelligence and other secret information.

Slessor understood that Spaatz played a pivotal role in air force policy and planning at the War Department. The Air Commodore observed that "another point is that the United States Air Attachés and Colonel Spaatz are very anxious to spend a few days at operational stations; it would be difficult and embarrassing if we had to try and conceal from them things like R.D.F. and the stabilised bomb sight. Spaatz, who is, I gather, a sort of mixture between D. of Plans and D.D.W.O. in the United States, came over in a slightly critical frame of mind, but I understand he is already immensely impressed with the efficient and fighting value of the Royal Air Force, and there would be some virtue in impressing him still further." Slessor was hopeful that "the initial conversations were on a joint basis with all three services represented, i.e. when discussing strategy and general terms, which must form the background to detailed

[32] Slessor memo on Staff Conversations with America, 28 June 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.

discussions ... followed by detailed discussions within the departments, in the same way we did with the French."[33]

Slessor and Spaatz both agreed that aircrew training would prove decisive in upcoming campaigns. Britain's inclement weather would pose a drawback in turning out badly needed pilots and aircrews. They discussed using training schools in the United States. Slessor queried Spaatz about the use of American military and civilian instructors at warm-weather flight schools.[34]

Colonel Spaatz's main interest during his series of summer visits to RAF units were British methods of flight training. On 26 June, Colonel Martin F. Scanlon, the American Air Attaché in Britain, sent a letter to the Air Ministry requesting arrangements be made to assign Spaatz, McDonald and American observer Colonel Frank Hunter to operating units for a period of a week or two. Air Ministry agreement to this request involved departure from precedent, as representatives of foreign powers were not allowed to stay for a prolonged period with RAF units. However, an atmosphere of mutual confidence then prevailing in Anglo-American relations made the Air Ministry's acquiescence easier. The observers had the opportunity to see and study the RAF from all angles at the time of what was probably its greatest test -- the Battle of Britain.[35]

Slessor and the Joint Planning Committee suggested in June 1940 that the guiding principle in Anglo-American strategy should be air power employment: "We

---

[33] Ibid., 28 June 1940.
[34] Copp, *Forged in Fire*, p. 65.
[35] Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, pp. 49-51.

welcome any reinforcement that U.S. could make available to our long-range bomber force operating against Germany. It is suggested that plans should be based on an initial contingent of four heavy bomber (B-17) squadrons, which could be flown across the Atlantic, to operate from bases in U.K."[36] The JPC suggested to the Chiefs of Staff that the United States should "reinforce or even replace British forces in those areas where America's own interests lie and in areas where they have bases from which they could secure British interests within their orbit." More specifically, they proposed that the United States should assume responsibility for the whole Pacific, including the British China station, while the British would cover the Atlantic. Under this arrangement Singapore would become part of the American command area. They also placed on record the "great importance" they attached to holding conversations at the "earliest moment."[37]

LORD LOTHIAN'S INITIATIVE

Consideration of the problems of closer Anglo-American collaboration in the rapidly changing wartime environment was not confined to the staffs of the U.S. Embassy and Air Ministry. Other more highly placed persons were thinking on similar lines. Already senior British officers were extending feelers regarding the possibility of

---

[36] Slessor quoted in Staff Conversations with U.S.: Strategic Background to Upcoming Talks, June 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.
[37] Ibid., June 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.

fully authorized staff conversations so that the wider aspects of strategy could be explored.[38]

Lord Lothian, former Philip Kerr and key World War I planner under Prime Minister David Lloyd George, now the British ambassador in Washington, proposed Anglo-American military staff conversations to President Roosevelt on 17 June 1940. The Ambassador asserted that the conversations to discuss naval issues should take place as soon as possible: "I spoke to the president tonight once more … I then asked him whether he did not think that the time had come for further secret staff talks as to how the British and American navies, and if necessary air forces should deal with the various situations which might arise in the near future. The president said he thought that this would be a good thing and that it ought to take place at once. Personally I think that it would be all to the good because it would help to bring home to the United States the gravity of the position it stands in itself and the truth that the sooner it throws itself into the business of defending Great Britain the more likely it is to avoid disaster to itself."[39] Mark M. Lowenthal postulates that Lothian pressured President Roosevelt: "to make the basic decision about the relationship of Britain's survival and American security…."[40] Richard G. Davis asserts that Lothian used the uncertainty of the French Fleet as a major argument for staff conversations.[41]

---

[38] Ibid., June 1940.
[39] Telegram from Ambassador Lothian to Air Ministry describing his meeting with President Roosevelt, 17 June 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.
[40] Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision: American War Planning and Policy Process, 1937-1942*. vol. 1, pp. 325-326.
[41] Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, p. 46.

On 24 June, in a telegram to the Air Ministry, Lord Lothian commented on the prospects for RAF aircrew training in the United States: "President has, however, indicated that he feels it would be better for British or Canadian civil air students to be trained in Canada where American air instructors could be employed and where American training aircraft owned by private interests could be rented or purchased by Canadian authorities. President's reply to Mr. Welles ended by saying: 'I do not mean to indicate that training Canadian civil pilots in this country should not be done but I am merely advising you that in my judgement it would be better if it were done in Canada.' In view of the President's attitude I fear there is no use pressing matter for the moment: "I propose however to pursue it with new Secretaries for War and Navy who, we know, are anxious to help."[42]

Slessor authored a memorandum on 28 June addressing the need to expedite military staff conversations with America. His plans staff had received the original Lothian letter detailing President Roosevelt's interest in Anglo-American discussions. Slessor was incredulous over the lack of a British response: "It is now over a fortnight since Lothian suggested to the President that it might be a good thing to have Naval and Air conversations and the President thought it would be a good thing and they ought to take place at once." He believed that Britain's obvious tactic "would have been immediately to follow this up by a signal asking them to nominate representatives, but, as far as I know, nothing whatever has been done and I am very much afraid that we

[42] Letter from Ambassador Lothian on American support, 24 June 1940, PRO AIR 8/338, Sumner Welles was United States Under-Secretary of State.

might be missing a golden opportunity."[43] Slessor articulated intense displeasure over the Admiralty's handling of the matter: "The thing has been very badly handled at this end. The Admiralty have treated it as a purely naval matter--without ever consulting the Air Ministry. No one in the War Cabinet Secretariat has taken a hold and done any coordination. We ourselves have considered it and should be ready at any time to begin discussions … I understand that last Saturday the Admiralty sent a draft telegram to the Prime Minister for transmission to Lord Lothian in which the Air was not mentioned. … I am told, however, (but I cannot vouch for this) that the Prime Minister has decided that the moment would be premature to have conversations with the United States. I am at a loss to understand this point of view and think the Chiefs of Staff should urge very strongly that we should strike while the iron is hot and get down to conversations at once."[44]

Lord Lothian's suggestion that Britain and the United States begin staff conversations was something that Slessor had long seen as a minimal prelude to collaboration. Thus, he was surprised and disturbed by the reluctance on Churchill's part:

> It is a measure of our preoccupation with the more immediately pressing problems of life and death … that we did not grasp more eagerly than we did at the first hint from across the Atlantic of the Americans' willingness to undertake some kind of staff conversations. Even Sir Winston Churchill does not mention in his book what seemed to me at the time a most important and hopeful development when, in response to a suggestion by Lord Lothian early in June 1940, President Roosevelt agreed that it would be desirable to have conversations on naval and air subjects between British and United States officers. The Ambassador's original telegram on this subject laid the heaviest emphasis on the naval side--perhaps naturally in view of the strong naval interest, President Roosevelt, with whom the Prime Minister had already been corresponding on

[43] Slessor memo on Staff Conversations with America, 28 June 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.
[44] Ibid., 28 June 1940.

> the subject of the loan of the fifty old American destroyers. The Admiralty rather took the line that this was a Naval matter only and even, after some delay, produced a draft telegram to Washington which did not refer to air conversations at all. It was a curiously muddled business and for several weeks no reply was sent to Lothian at all, in spite of several reminders from him, which in retrospect seems a most extraordinary lapse, though perhaps not so odd when one considers what was happening this side of the Atlantic in June 1940. Toward the end of June I drew the C.A.S's attention to it, saying I was afraid we were being too slow and should strike while the iron was hot, and eventually the Joint Planners produced a memorandum to form the basis of staff conversations, which was approved by the Chiefs of Staff.[45]

Churchill remained suspicious of American intentions and preferred to tailor British concessions to tangible evidence of United States help. The Prime Minister feared that any talks would result in pressure to transfer British bases to America.

On 2 July 1940 Lord Lothian dispatched a telegram to the Air Ministry, describing the political constraints facing President Roosevelt in what was a crucial election year for an unprecedented third term: "I saw the President this afternoon. He agrees that it was very important to have technical discussions as soon as possible ... He thought it imperative however that there should be no publicity especially owing to election. He is consulting the Secretary of State and Chief of Staff tonight as to the best method of holding discussions in London."[46]

Slessor postulated that staff talks would give the United States a greater appreciation of the gravity of its own position and thus prod it towards helping Britain avoid defeat. On 7 July 1940 Slessor telegraphed a memorandum to the CAS pleading for immediate RAF inclusion in the staff conversations:

> I must draw your attention to the manner in which the question of staff conversations with the United States is being handled - a manner in which it is moderate to describe as most unfortunate. Briefly, about a month ago, Lothian suggested to the President that it

---

[45] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 314.
[46] Ambassador Lothian telegram on talks with President Roosevelt, 2 July 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.

> would be a good thing to have naval and air conversations, with which the President entirely agreed. The Admiralty elected to treat this a s a purely naval matter ... meanwhile no reply was sent to Lothian for several weeks, in spite of several reminders from him. Ultimately the Admiralty produced a signal to Lothian which did not refer to air conversations at all ... It seems to me there is a grave danger that by this fantastic and typically naval procedure we may be missing a great opportunity. We must include the air in these conversations ... Previous staff conversations with the French, Poles, etc. have always been conducted by the Chiefs of Staff and I cannot imagine why the Admiralty should have been allowed to behave this way. I would urge most strongly that you should insist on having this matter put on a proper footing and handled by the Chiefs of Staff Organisation; we should immediately signal the States saying that we assume that they are willing to hold air staff conversations and not merely naval alone; and to ask them to nominate someone to deal with the air side of it.[47]

Slessor believed that no time should be lost preparing for these Staff Conversations and that the War Cabinet should instruct Lord Lothian to "tell the President that we assume that air matters are to be discussed in addition to purely naval questions, and to ask that an Officer qualified to discuss air matters should be nominated." Arguing that the conversations should be conducted in the same way as the Anglo-French Conversations in March 1939, Slessor postulated that concurrent, detailed conversations between representatives of the Services should be held in different ministries. He recognized that special measures would be essential to ensure secrecy for these conversations, and in particular, the circulation of papers on the subject would have to be rigorously restricted.[48]

---

[47] Slessor memo to CAS on Staff Conversations with America, 7 July 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.
[48] Slessor memo for Joint Planning Sub-Committee on Staff Conversations with America, 9 July 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.

THE DONOVAN MISSION

Colonel William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan's mission to Britain in July 1940 was of vital consequence to the development of the Anglo-American air power alliance. Donovan was the famous commander of "the fighting 69th" in World War I, a Medal of Honor recipient, a successful New York lawyer, a former Assistant Attorney General (1924-1929), and a student of military affairs who had seen modern warfare first hand in Abyssinia and Spain. He was an internationalist, Irish-Catholic, Republican, and anti-New Deal to boot. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox had asked his friend Bill Donovan to fly to London and view present conditions, estimate Britain's chances of holding out against Germany, and conference with the British military. When President Roosevelt heard of the mission, he insisted Donovan travel as his personal but unofficial representative. Roosevelt believed that the defeatist attitude that gripped many in Washington and the London Embassy could be countered with an optimistic eyewitness report from an independent source.[49]

The fifty-seven year old Donovan left Washington on 14 July, flying to Lisbon by Pan American Airways Clipper. The U.S. Embassy was not informed of Donovan's arrival or the purpose of his journey. Ambassador Kennedy had consistently advised President Roosevelt that Britain's chances for survival against Germany were extremely limited and viewed the Donovan Mission as a reflection of his own waning influence. Kennedy's opposition to the trip further guaranteed the Colonel's warm welcome in

---

[49] James R. Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy: Anglo-American Naval Collaboration, 1937-1941* (Chapel Hill, 1977), pp. 97-98; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 314-315; see Corey Ford's *Donovan of OSS* (Boston, 1970).

Britain. Without question, the British high command was exceptionally open with him--no doubt hoping for something in return.[50] Joseph Lash describes Britain's warm embrace of Donovan: "He was shown everything and talked to everyone, from King and Churchill down."[51] The Air Ministry ensured that Donovan had conferences with a wide-range of Air Staff officers, including the Chief of the Air Staff. He was chaperoned by Slessor on visits to RAF stations and defense installations in the invasion area. Donovan was also given access to radar and Britain's newest fighter aircraft. Slessor believed Donovan's main purpose was to determine whether the United States should keep England in the war by providing critical supplies or give it up for lost.[52]

As one of the strongest pro-American officers in the Air Ministry, Slessor enthusiastically promoted Donovan's mission:

> Meanwhile, the United States authorities were beginning in other ways to evince a more active interest in our fate. In July there arrived in this country as a special emissary of the President, Colonel William J. Donovan -- 'Wild Bill' Donovan as he is widely known in his native country. A successful New York lawyer of Irish extraction, he had always been -- and still is -- drawn to unusual and dangerous adventure like steel to a magnet. He had gained the Congressional Medal of Honor in command of a New York regiment of National Guard in the Kaiser's war, and his most recent acquaintance with war had been as an observer with the Italians in Ethiopia. Short and stocky, white-haired, slow-speaking and benign of appearance, he is a delightful, kindly person with whom began a friendship that I value most highly ... A Republican by politics, he was nevertheless a close friend and confidant of Mr. Roosevelt, and his mission, in a nutshell, was to see for himself and advise the President whether we in Britain had a sporting chance of pulling through what then seemed to most Americans an utterly almost utterly hopeless situation.[53]

---

[50] Alex Danchev, ed., *Establishing the Anglo-American Alliance: The Second World War Diaries of Brigadier Vivian Dykes* (London, 1990), pp. 20-21.
[51] Joseph P. Lash, *Roosevelt and Churchill 1939-1941: The Partnership That Saved the West* (New York, 1976), p. 213.
[52] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 314-315.
[53] Ibid., pp. 314-315.

Slessor believed that sustaining close personal contacts with United States officials was essential to securing American assistance. Because of Slessor's influence, much of the customary military formality was relaxed and the rigid rules governing liaison eased. His tendency toward friendly openness was especially obvious to Donovan, who had a robust optimism that matched Slessor's mood:

> Bill Donovan paid his visit to all three Services and talked with the Prime Minister and many others in the country. To confirm his impressions he consulted with Service observers who had been here longer than he and seen more. I am told that the Army and Naval officers took a very pessimistic view of our ability to survive the invasion that they thought was inevitable. Not so Spaatz, or his Air colleagues; he took the view that the Germans would meet their match in Fighter Command and that, if they could not gain air superiority, they would not invade - in which, of course, he was right. Donovan flew back to the States and reported to the President, and we owe him a great deal - for which I do not think we have ever been sufficiently grateful to this quiet, self-effacing friend of our country - not only for his influence in clinching the destroyer deal, but for his unfailing confidence and support of our cause in a country that, almost to a man, had written us off for lost.[54]

On Donovan's return to the United States, he enthusiastically reported to the President that British morale was very high and could probably overcome an attempted German invasion; his optimistic report helped dispel the defeatist attitude in Washington. Donovan also worked unceasingly within the councils of the United States government for increased aid to Britain. Such a sanguine report contributed to the growth of the Anglo-American alliance.[55]

In a confidential letter to the Chief of the British Air Staff on 27 August, Donovan recounted his presentation to FDR on the four ways the United States could succor the British air effort:

---

[54] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 316; Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision*, vol. 1, p. 362.
[55] Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 126; Bradley F. Smith, *The Shadow Warriors: O.S.S. and the Origins of the C.I.A.* (New York, 1983), pp. 28-34.

> I have refrained from writing in the hope that I would have something definite to report ... When I saw the President I stressed from your standpoint these things particularly: First, the bombsight, Second, the flying boats, Third, the flying fortresses, Fourth, the training camps. I also took up with our Civilian Aeronautical Authority the question of the training camps and I believe that Balfour found the President's mind, prepared as it was, in a most receptive mood ... I stressed particularly with our people here what you had told me of the need of carrying the war to the enemy east of Berlin and in Italy. They were caught by that idea, and I think the magnificent way in which, under your leadership, the Air Force is resisting the attack of Germany has given substance to my reports that England could resist invasion. And that was important because I found that a great deal of hopelessness had been coming over those in high command here. I still have confidence that my judgment as to your power of resistance to invasion and of your resolution is still right.[56]

On his return to America, Donovan was certainly instrumental in infusing a new enthusiasm into the United States industrialists and was indirectly responsible for an increased production of aircraft.

Slessor's discussions with Colonel Donovan were instrumental in developing a dialogue leading to RAF aircrew training in the United States. In a 14 August 1940 message from the CAS to the British Embassy in Washington, Newall outlined the training possibilities:

> Colonel Donovan mentioned to me the possibility of U.S. Government making flying training facilities available for us in Texas. Please see Donovan and give him a private message from me on following lines. His assistance was very much appreciated and U.S. flying training facilities may be of greatest value to us. It would be helpful to know more of form in which they might be made available if idea is found acceptable to U.S.A. authorities. Immediately important shortage in our training programme is of instructors and advanced training aircraft, rather than of actual sites which can be developed in Canada and South Africa. I would therefore be glad of Donovan's advice on whether it would be possible as a beginning, to provide a few U.S. training aircraft and also instructors and maintenance personnel, and to give us the use of aerodromes in Texas, Florida or California where it is understood that climate, terrain, and general facilities are excellent.[57]

---

[56] Letter from Donovan to Air Marshal Newall (CAS), 27 August 1940, PRO AIR 8/368.
[57] Message from CAS to British Embassy in Washington on Donovan Proposal, 14 August 1940, PRO AIR 8/378.

ANGLO-AMERICAN STANDARDIZATION OF ARMS COMMITTEE

The exploratory discussions resulting from Major McDonald's June 1940 proposals grew into definite preparations for Staff Conversations. As early as 20 June, Slessor notified Air Ministry Directorates of possible conversations and called a conference to discuss the implications. Slessor prepared a JPC memorandum for the War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee. He asserted to the War Cabinet: "The American Representatives to the forthcoming Conversations are understood to have sailed from America on the 4th August. We have, as yet, no knowledge of the instructions which have been given to the American Delegation ... it is clearly essential that we should be ready with our own ideas on the subject matter for discussion and the general sequence in which the Conversations should be conducted." He further stated that the Prime Minister "has agreed that the Conversations should be conducted on a basis of complete frankness and on the reciprocal understanding that the greatest secrecy be observed ...We propose to assume that they will be prepared to discuss the problem as active Allies ... We consider that the American representatives will be at pains to ascertain the true facts of the strategic situation, particularly in respect to our ability to withstand the full weight of a German attack on this country, and to bring the war to a successful conclusion." Slessor argued that the Chiefs of Staff should "meet the American Delegation shortly after their arrival and give them a very brief survey of the existing strategical situation and of our future strategy. On the completion of these visits, we suggest that the conduct of the Conversations should be handed over to the Director of Plans, who will be assisted, on questions concerning strategy and all three

Services, by the Joint Planning Staff, and on matters concerning their own Services by Officers in their own Ministries."[58]

In the weeks that elapsed before the arrival of the delegates, however, this memorandum was amended and brought up to date. In its final version, it contained a full statement of British views both on the current situation and on proposed strategy. Copies of it were sent to the United States Embassy on 19 August to provide the delegates with the background information prior to the actual discussions. From the air standpoint, the relevant paragraph was that entitled "Lessons of the War: Air Operations" which analyzed operations to date.[59]

During the summer of 1940 uncertainty remained regarding Britain's prospect for survival. Roosevelt's remedy for this lingering doubt was to send a mission of military observers to provide an objective estimate of Britain's ability to resist invasion. On 20 July, Lord Lothian reported from Washington to the Prime Minister that American army and navy representatives were appointed to the delegation, but he was also pressing for an additional "air expert". The outcome was that Major General Delos C. Emmons, the Commanding General of the United States General Headquarters (G.H.Q.) Army Air Forces, accompanied Rear Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, and Brigadier General George V. Strong, Assistant Chief of Staff, United States Army, to Britain. The military representatives all possessed

---

[58] Note by Slessor & Joint Planning Sub-Committee on Anglo-American Standardisation of Arms Committee, 8 August 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.
[59] Ibid., 8 August 1940, PRO AIR 8/443; Air Ministry Report, "Lessons of the War: Air Operations", 29 July 1940, PRO AIR 75/22.

a detailed knowledge of American planning. From the composition of the delegation, the importance that American authorities attached to the conversations is apparent. Maj. Gen. Emmons' participation showed recognition of the large part that air power would play in the London discussions.[60]

Slessor recognized the danger that American representatives, faced with the grave and complex problems, might take an unduly pessimistic view of Britain's future and thereby prejudice U.S. support. On the other hand, a full realization of the situation might lead to increased American assistance. In late July, Slessor authored a note to the Prime Minister on the upcoming staff conversations: "In our view the only possible basis for discussion will be one of complete frankness on the reciprocal understanding that the greatest secrecy is observed."[61]

The United States military observers received oral instructions from the President, and then sailed for England on 6 August, aboard the S.S. *Britannic*. For obvious reasons, the Conversations were taking place under conditions of strictest secrecy. To provide an appropriate cover, it was decided that the discussions should be held under the guarded and fictitious title of "The Anglo-American Standardisation of Arms Committee." The *Britannic* docked in England on 15 August, and the American military representatives proceeded immediately to London.[62] At the first meeting on 20 August 1940, it was agreed that the United States officers should be given an opportunity to visit the principle operational headquarters before commencement of

---

[60] Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision*, vol. 1, p. 358.
[61] Note on possible Staff Conversations with America, 27 July 1940, PRO AIR 8/443.
[62] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 146.

discussions. Slessor noted in his memoirs the "arrival in this country on August 15 of an Inter-Service team consisting of Admiral Ghormley, U.S.N., Major-General Delos Emmons of the U.S.A.F. and Brigadier-General Strong, the late Director of Plans in the War Department. They again went around and visited our defences and Service establishments and discussed the situation with the Chiefs of Staff and with the authorities in their respective corresponding Service Ministries."[63]

The American Government, still officially neutral, carefully restricted the scope of the discussions. They were "informal," involved no detailed joint planning, and above all carefully excluded any "commitment."[64] Broadly stated, the purpose of the American delegation was to obtain information regarding British plans and strategic estimates to form an opinion as to the prospect of successful British resistance to German air bombardment and possible invasion. Historian James Leutze postulates that the conversations undertaken by these observers were to be tentative, unofficial, and always constrained by the fact that no presumption of the future belligerency of the United States could be admitted: "The purpose of these meetings, they were advised, would be to form an 'objective estimate of Great Britain's ability to resist invasion' and to gather information for future planning. From the organization of the delegation and the process in which the preparations were handled it was apparent that the Roosevelt Administration did not consider this a formal staff conference." Leutze asserts that vague instructions and lack of coordination prior to departure for Britain added to this

---

[63] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 316.
[64] Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision*, vol. 1, p. 363.

hesitancy: "This lack of a unified objective indicates that the group was not expected to enter into strategic planning negotiations. A fact-finding mission, maybe; a sop to the British in their hour of need, perhaps; but not a group designed to deal with America's most delicate military, diplomatic, political problems."[65]

The importance that the British attached to the American visit was evident from the candor with which the entire strategic policy of the United Kingdom was opened to discussion and from the participation of the British Chiefs of Staff themselves. The composition of the British group included Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord; General Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff; and Air Marshal Sir Cyril L. N. Newall, Chief of the Air Staff.[66] Leutze argues that the British Chiefs of Staff "welcomed the opportunity for frank conversations. For their part, they were willing to run the strategic gamut, but they were aware of American sensitivities about the questions that implied the use of land armies. In fact, the planners thought that all discussions of land forces should be avoided in view of American reluctance even to consider sending troops to Europe."[67]

The United States delegation met the British Chiefs of Staff on 29 August. The Chief of the Air Staff had the Chair and reviewed the current military situation. Sir J. R. M. Butler details in his official history that Newall "expounded the existing strategical situation and the British policy for the conduct of the war." He goes on to say: "The

---

[65] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 143.
[66] Mark S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Pre-War Plans and Preparations* (Washington, D.C., 1950), pp. 113-115.
[67] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy,* p. 138.

foundation of British strategy was to wear Germany down by ever-increasing economic pressure. The British believed that by the next summer Germany's morale would be lowered and her oil reserves expended, and that thereafter her military effort might be restricted by shortage of oil." Butler asserts that the essential element of British strategy was "a continuous and relentless air offensive against both Germany and Italy, directed at their oil supplies, communications and industry ... Britain was certainly relying on the continued economic and industrial assistance of the United States in ever increasing volume, no account had been taken of its active participation."[68]

In the course of his review Newall gave some details of the proposed RAF expansion while stressing that achievement would be through the utilization of Anglo-American productive capacity. Finally, the two biggest questions were raised. Ghormley wanted to know whether the British, in making their future plans, were relying only on the continued 'economic and industrial support' of the United States or whether they counted upon the 'eventual active cooperation' of U.S. armed forces. Air Chief Marshal Newall, chairman of the Chiefs of Staff, responded that American economic and industrial cooperation was 'fundamental' to all British strategy. He reassured Ghormley, however, that no account had been taken of the 'possibility of active cooperation by the United States.'[69]

Following the broad surveys of current events and strategy, the United States delegates each conferred with the Director of Plans of its own service. On 2 September,

---

[68] J. R. M. Butler, *Grand Strategy*, vol. 2: *September 1939 – June 1941* (London, 1957), pp. 341-343.
[69] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, pp. 151-152; Butler, *Grand Strategy*, vol. 2, pp. 342-343.

Major General Emmons discussed with Slessor basic questions of strategy, command arrangements, and material requirements. During his visit General Emmons was given the fullest opportunity to form impressions and obtain information: he visited operational units, heard authoritative statements on current events and future strategy, and talked with staff officers formally and informally -- all in an atmosphere of utmost frankness.[70] What Emmons heard and saw must have influenced his future thinking; it would seem inevitable that these impressions should find some reflection in plans and projects on the other side of the Atlantic.

The American officers were decidedly impressed by the unwavering resolution of the British -- no plans existed for any contingency other than successful defense of the British Isles and the continuation of the war until Hitler was overthrown. The observers were also alert to the immense value to the United States of war-proven technical data that the British offered with little reservation. General Strong returned early in September to report personally to General Marshall and the President. His account gave a far less pessimistic view of the British situation and prospects than was currently held in Washington and encouraged an American policy of "all aid to the United Kingdom short of war."[71]

General Emmons remained for several weeks in London with officials of the Air Ministry discussing aircraft production in Britain and the United States. The RAF also briefed him that Bomber Command was having remarkably good results in night

---

[70] Butler, *Grand Strategy*, vol. 2, p. 343.
[71] Kent Roberts Greenfield, ed. *Command Decisions* (Washington, 1960), p. 31; Watson, *Chief of Staff: Pre-War Plans and Preparations*, pp. 113-114.

bombing over Germany. In fact, RAF night bombing during this period was a complete failure; losses in Bomber Command aircraft were appalling, and damage to German industry was minimal. In *Command Decisions*, historian Louis Morton describes British support for strategic bombing: "The British faith in the efficacy of air bombardment, and the independent position of the Royal Air Force had an effect also on the two Army observers. Implicit in their report was a reflection of the British belief that Germany could be so weakened ultimately by bombardment as to make ground operations on the Continent feasible."[72] Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell highlight the RAF's contradictory air power philosophy: "They had their attention drawn to the strategic possibilities of air bombardment, at which the British expected to succeed even while expecting Germany to fail."[73]

During the talks, the question of the exchange of intelligence was raised. The British Chiefs of Staff agreed to unrestricted exchange of ordinary intelligence with the United States. Each day the American Military Air Attaché would be furnished with a copy of the Air Ministry "Daily Summary of Operations and Intelligence" giving full coverage of air activities, allied and enemy, during the previous twenty-four hours. In addition, American air observers were given opportunities to see all types of operations in progress, even to the extent of living for periods on RAF stations. British air strength and dispositions were revealed to them, as well as similar information concerning the German Air Force. The American Embassy were also given confidential access to many

---

[72] Greenfield, ed., *Command Decisions*, p. 32.
[73] Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942*, p. 24.

secret RAF documents on German aircraft production, order-of-battle, and casualties to name just a few. The information furnished to the Americans related to the various questions that they wished to investigate.[74]

Slessor assisted the British Chiefs of Staff in formulating a new strategic plan in August and September 1940. In this lengthy and elaborate plan, it was agreed that Germany would be subjected to an economic blockade, exploiting its weakness in raw materials, especially oil. Britain also planned an aggressive policy of subversion, which included substantial support for the underground armies across Europe. Slessor inserted strategic bombing as the centerpiece of Churchill's defense program and the singular instrument of Nazi Germany's destruction.[75] Butler asserted that Slessor and his new strategic plan offered a rationale for continuing the fight and made the bombing offensive the cornerstone of the armed effort:

> The general conclusion was that Britain's existing programs gave a reasonable target figure for industry, but that their achievement depended on adequate protection from air attack and on the amount of American productive capacity placed at British disposal ... It was not our policy, said the Chiefs of Staff, to attempt to raise, and land on the Continent, an army comparable in size with that of Germany. We should aim, nevertheless, as the blockade and air offensive had secured conditions when numerically inferior forces could be employed with good chances of success, to reestablish a striking force on the Continent with which we could enter Germany and impose our terms.[76]

The importance of a bombing offensive was famously stated by Churchill in July 1940 when he claimed that the only way for Britain to defeat Germany in the circumstances of

---

[74] Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, p. 56.
[75] Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War*, pp. 154-155; Note on the "Preparation of Strategical Bomber Plans", 14 September 1940, PRO AIR 75/52.
[76] Butler, *Grand Strategy,* vol. 2, pp. 343-344.

1940 was to crush Hitler's state with "an absolutely devastating exterminating attack by very heavy bombers."[77]

AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION IN AMERICA

Slessor demonstrated the diversity of his talents by turning his attention to Britain's aircraft procurement problems in America. The trouble can be traced to General Strong's visit to Britain in August 1940. It appears he formed the impression that RAF demands for American aircraft represented a larger number than could possibly be matched to trained crews. The General felt that Britain was massing an unnecessarily large reserve of aircraft; in other words, the United States was being asked to make unwarranted sacrifices.[78]

Slessor described the anxiety caused by General Strong's commentary:

> It was therefore with consternation not unmingled with resentment that, within a few days after the return of the delegation to the United States, we received an indignant message from Mr. Morgenthau to the effect that a meeting of his Committee on Aid to Britain, General Strong had said that it was no good the U.S. supplying us with aircraft because we could not produce the crews to fly them ... In point of fact, of course, there was not a word of truth in Strong's allegation, and I have never been able to make out what led him to say anything so inaccurate or so potentially damaging to us ... Why he should ever had imagined that we should want to hoard aircraft that we could not use remains a mystery.[79]

Secretary Morgenthau was a vigorous champion of the British cause and needed to be assuaged. Slessor believed misunderstandings surrounding aircraft and aircrew procurement could be rectified by an appropriate RAF staff representative: "There was

---

[77] Churchill quoted in Buckley's, *Air Power in the Age of Total War*, p. 155.
[78] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 317-318.
[79] Ibid., pp. 317-318.

however a good deal to be said for sending to America at that time a senior Air Staff officer who was thoroughly in the picture of the latest expansion policy, and could discuss problems of our requirements from American industry ....”[80]

By September of 1940 the facilities necessary to meet all the RAF flight-training requirements were becoming impossible to provide within the relatively small area of the British Isles. Slessor and Spaatz had already realized that the wide-open spaces and excellent climate of certain parts of America held great potential for flight training. The Roosevelt Administration was under attack in an election year by “America First” and other isolationist groups, and hesitated accepting any British or Empire students to United States training schools. The President clung to his hope that training could be carried out in Canada using U.S. instructors and rented American aircraft.[81]

British Under-Secretary of State for Air H. H. Balfour visited the United States in late August to discuss training problems with the American government. Balfour met with Secretary Morgenthau in New York on 28 August 1940 and presented an Air Ministry training proposal recommending both a refresher and completion course for American volunteers, and a course of training through all stages for British and Empire students. During the next few weeks, a draft scheme was prepared providing for an output of 3,000 pilots per annum from eight new schools. The ground was thoroughly

---

[80] Ibid., p. 318.
[81] Notes of meeting held with Secretary of State for Air concerning training of RAF pilots in America, 7 September 1940, PRO AIR 8/378.

broken and it proved to be fertile soil when Slessor entered into final negotiations a few months later.[82]

In a 2 September 1940 letter to the CAS, Secretary of State for Air Archibald Sinclair articulated his views regarding the training of RAF pilots in America: "Through various channels interesting and important discussions have been proceeding in regard to the possibility of training British pilots in the United States. It is possible that I shall be away when the Under-Secretary of State returns, but this question is of such importance that I would suggest that a conference should be held … it may affect our plans for sending schools to Canada, we ought to get these discussions started on sound lines as soon as possible."[83]

Slessor participated in Sinclair's Air Ministry conference on 7 September 1940. The participants discussed pilot training at American civilian schools. The minutes of the meeting reveal a debate of the 28 August Morgenthau-Balfour encounter: "The Under Secretary of State stated that President Roosevelt was well disposed towards the scheme and was himself taking a personal interest in it … The Under Secretary emphasised that the proposed scheme must not in any way prejudice or retard the training under the Empire Air Training Scheme … a limiting factor would be a supply of trainer aircraft … All Capital expenditures for Civil School expansion on our behalf

[82] Note of Sinclair interview with Morgenthau, 1 September 1940, PRO AIR 75/64.
[83] Letter to CAS: Training RAF Pilots in America, 2 September 1940, PRO AIR 8/378.

would have to be met by the United Kingdom … these Civil Schools might be able to give additional training to U.S.A. volunteers whom we have hitherto rejected."[84]

On 27 September, Henry Self participated in a momentous conference at the White House with President Roosevelt and Lord Lothian. The minutes of this meeting reveal Roosevelt's passionate support for the British cause and an appreciation of air power:

> The President said that he and his Ministers thought it would be useful if the British Authorities would furnish them with weekly information indicating the possible changes in our requirements from the United States that might be caused by the changing fortunes and conditions of war … he expressed some anxiety about the number of pilots available … I agreed that in principle the allotment of planes in a manufacturing capacity should be based on operational consideration which should be known to him … I then suggested that in view of Germany's preponderance we had to consider a strategic plan by which Germany could be beaten. The President interrupted with the remark 'Starve them out'. The Germans, he said, were not like 'us'; they would hold out to a certain point and then break down completely, whereas 'we' would give way only gradually. He had always urged that we should bomb the Germans everywhere, not merely at a few major points … Reverting to the question of urgency in the Spring, the Ambassador referred to the necessity in this country of 'doing a Beaverbrook' in America, i.e. making industry produce more than the schedule … The President referred to his political difficulties and to the demands of his own defence services. He was already giving us a more favourable proportion of the fighter plane output than had been previously arranged and was prepared to give similar help with bombers. He wanted us to have everything we wanted, but it would be easier to help us after the election, whichever way it went.[85]

Slessor prepared a 2 October 1940 memorandum for the Chiefs of Staff on British supply programs and Anglo-American cooperation. He was encouraged by the output of British and American factories and the consequential rise in aircraft production, yet was concerned with the Luftwaffe's capabilities and Germany's industrial potential:

---

[84] Notes of meeting held with Secretary of State for Air concerning training of RAF Pilots in America, 7 September 1940, PRO AIR 8/378.
[85] Notes on White House Conference, 27 September 1940, PRO AIR 75/64.

> Great Britain, therefore, puts in the forefront of her requirements in the United States the speeding up of the programme of aircraft and aircraft engine production ... Germany's great lead in the air means also that aircraft production in both England and the United States must be planned on an increasingly large scale if we are to establish air supremacy over Germany within measurable time ... To provide arms on a sufficient scale requires the creation in England and the United States of armament-making capacity which will turn out planes in many thousands a year ... If the foundations are laid, on a wide enough basis and every step is taken to preserve intact the war potential of Britain, the combined strength of America and the British Empire can certainly surpass and outlast that of Germany and her Allies ... It is essential that the programme of United States and British requirements be as much as possible co-ordinated so as to prevent competition arising in the industrial field. To this end we must seek a common programme agreed and adjusted to the conflicting requirements of immediate and of ultimate needs.[86]

Slessor postulated that the integration of British and American defense programs was necessary to speed the development of America's war potential. This common ground provided a more efficient production scheme, reduced financial burden for Britain, and greater capacity of production for America.

In order to remove completely the misunderstandings surrounding aircraft procurement, Secretary Morgenthau believed a visit to the United States by the newly appointed Chief of the Air Staff, Charles Portal, or a similar high-ranking RAF officer would be most opportune and timely. He stressed to Purvis on 6 October that the Roosevelt Administration would attach great importance to such a visit. Morgenthau hoped the British could familiarize American authorities with their strategic principles and provide insight into various operational particulars such as organization, training, equipment, and tactics, especially for defense against air attack. Lothian anticipated that a senior RAF officer in America could persuade the Roosevelt Administration to adopt

---

[86] Slessor memorandum on British Supply Program, 2 October 1940, PRO AIR 75/64; Letter from Mr. Morris to Lord Beaverbrook, 5 October 1940, PRO AIR 75/64.

and produce certain British aircraft. The moment for this was quite propitious; the American Army was deciding on their expansion program and debating which type of aircraft to procure.[87]

The proposal was warmly received at the Air Ministry, but regretfully the CAS found himself unable to leave Britain on account of the responsibilities of the new position. Lord Lothian was informed that an officer of the highest reputation and ability would be sent. The Air Ministry sent an urgent cable to Ambassador Lothian in Washington: "We warmly welcome proposal of United States Administration for visit by Portal. He has carefully considered whether in view of the outstanding importance of mission he should come to U.S.A. Regretfully he has had to decide that the urgency of the air battle still continuing and the responsibilities of his new post make this impossible. An officer of the highest reputation and ability will, however, be sent as soon as possible. He will let you know as soon as the final choice has been made."[88]

Ambassador Lothian sent a 10 October cipher to the Air Ministry:

> I believe that if Portal, with all the authority of his new position, could send over a high air officer chosen by himself with plenty of actual war experience, knowledge of strategy and enthusiasm which would kindle the interest of the Administration and airmen on this side, he could in a week or two exercise a great influence on the United States decisions, not only about production and types so important to ourselves, but also on the United States own programme. In other words, I think an officer of the right type would make the people here anxious to embody the very latest of our experience in their programme and he could probably do a lot to expedite production over the whole munitions field. Much the best way of bringing the integration of British and American programmes is by personal conduct essential here with the right people from England ... the kind of aeroplanes which our experience shows are most used in the field. If you agree I suggest that Portal should reply through myself and Purvis with a cable to

[87] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 320.
[88] Air Ministry to Lord Lothian concerning Air Marshal Portal visit to America, 10 October 1940, PRO AIR 8/446.

> Morgenthau stating that he cannot leave but that he is sending his most competent officer to discuss with the Air Force here.[89]

The officer chosen to undertake the mission was the Director of Plans at the Air Ministry, Air Commodore John Slessor. His pro-American slant was winning out in British policy-making circles and Slessor was being seen as a pioneer for the 'Special Relationship'. Following his selection, Slessor asked for clarification and guidance in a letter to Archibald Sinclair and Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal:

> May I ask you to confirm or modify the following, which is my impression of the purpose for which you are sending me to the United States ... I assume that I have your permission to discuss 'U.K. air strategy and other operational particulars' with complete frankness ... I think the point on which the U.S. authorities may be most anxious to assure themselves is that we are not in fact demanding a greater share of their very great effort than we really require ... I believe this is a perfectly natural anxiety on the part of the U.S. administration, who are diverting enormous proportion of their national effort on the highest priority to our needs, and who naturally want to be satisfied that we are not taking more than we really require. I realise that this is putting ourselves very fully in their hands. But I am convinced that they are out to play, and that any risks we may run by adopting this very co-operative attitude will be more than outweighed by the advantages to be obtained. After all, we are largely in their hands over this matter, and if they don't play we are sunk; and I am certain that the best way of getting them to play is to treat them as one of us and be absolutely open and free with them.[90]

Slessor was critical of Lord Beaverbrook's obstinate refusal to disseminate production figures to the U.S. Administration. He believed this would complicate his mission and adversely affect Anglo-American relations:

> I understand you are to see the P.M. on the subject of our policy in relation to coming clean with the Americans. This minute may be of some use to you as an aide memoire for that purpose. As you know, Lord Beaverbrook refused to agree to give the Americans any information about aeroplane production ... This seems to me an eminently reasonable request indeed, I do not see how the U.S. Administration can be expected to allocate to us such a high proportion of their national armament effort, in the face of their own rearmament requirements, unless we do supply them with this information ... Among all the dangers we run in this war it seems to me fantastic to

---

[89] Lord Lothian to Air Ministry: Air Marshal Portal visit and aircraft orders, 10 October 1940, PRO AIR 8/446.

[90] Slessor letter to Air Marshal Portal on American mission, 17 October 1940, PRO AIR 8/446.

> count the insignificant risk of some bit of information about our aircraft production leaking through the U.S. Administration to the Germans ... it would be quite impossible for me to enter on discussions with the U.S. authorities if I had to withhold essential information for which they had asked, and that I should not dream of giving them misleading information. ... we are in with the Americans for better or for worse and that the only possible basis for dealing with them is one of complete frankness. I know you feel the same and, unless I am completely mistaken, this is still the P.M.'s view ....[91]

Sinclair submitted a letter to Churchill endorsing Slessor's Air Ministry mission to America. "... Air Commodore Slessor, my Director of Plans, has the best possible qualifications to discuss air strategy, and to deal with questions affecting our expansion programme, (particularly in relation to the American General Strong's misleading statement reported in Pursa 128). I therefore propose to send Air Commodore Slessor to the States."[92] A diplomatic cable from Salter to Purvis on 24 October 1940 described American response and support for Slessor and his mission: "We feel sure Morgenthau and United States Administration will warmly befriend Slessor whose experience should admirably meet purpose in view."[93]

Sinclair's choice of Slessor made perfect sense. He had the experience to deal with the complicated and interrelated problems of military strategy and aircraft production. First, Slessor had built up a close relationship of mutual trust with American military and political leaders. He had a clear-cut and plausible argument for Anglo-American cooperation. Slessor appealed to America's interests rather than to sentiment.

---

[91] Slessor letter to Sinclair & Portal on release of information to America, 19 October 1940, PRO AIR 8/446.

[92] Sinclair letter to Churchill on American issues, 22 October 1940, PRO AIR 8/446; David Reynolds, "Lord Lothian and Anglo-American Relations, 1939-1940," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society,* vol. 73, p. 59.

[93] Air Ministry cable on Slessor Mission, 24 October 1940, PRO AIR 8/446; Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill,* vol. 6, *1939-1941*, pp. 870-871.

His discussions with Spaatz, Donovan and Emmons provided the foundation for the Anglo-American air partnership. Slessor appreciated the level of effort necessary to conduct a mission of this magnitude; it was critical that bombers produced in America found their way to Britain. "I eventually left England in plain clothes and with a doctored passport, with instructions which it was thought would give me the necessary basis for discussion with the American authorities. … I was however, far from happy about my instructions and was to find myself, during the earlier part of my mission in Washington, constantly embarrassed by the inadequacy of my up-to-date information on production matters."[94] A new phase of Anglo-American military interaction was about to begin.

[94] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 320-321; Sinclair to Churchill: Slessor visit to America, 24 October 1940, PRO AIR 8/446.

CHAPTER IV

SLESSOR MISSION TO AMERICA, NOVEMBER 1940 – APRIL 1941

AIRCRAFT REQUIREMENTS

Arriving in New York on 8 November 1940, Air Commodore Slessor soon found that the false impressions engendered by General Strong's allegations had been dismissed. He conjectured that avoidance of similar misunderstandings in the future would require furnishing the United States government with production and training information at regular intervals. Slessor described later the ramifications of his weather induced delay in Portugal: "One rather unfortunate result of the enforced delay in Lisbon was that when I reached New York on November 8 I found that Mr. Morgenthau had left for Puerto Rico and was not expected back for some weeks … a cable from England-perhaps had already been effective in allaying the false impression created by Strong's report."[1]

Meanwhile, the Air Commodore arranged for air policy discussions with Army Air Corps staff officers and Treasury Under-Secretary Philip Young, to whom Morgenthau had left instructions to deal with Slessor.[2] Slessor immediately conveyed his desire to discuss the future pattern of aircraft production in the United States. The Air Ministry wanted to know the breakdown of different types and classes of the 12,000 aircraft planned for in the production program. He hoped America would increase

---

[1] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 323-324.
[2] Ibid., pp. 323-324.

production of advanced training aircraft, and long-range bombers that had the range and armament to bomb Germany and decrease production of short-range bombers: "The immediate problem, as far as the U.S. aircraft programme is concerned, was to agree on our requirements as regards the proportions between classes and types on the 12,000 programme."[3]

Soon after reaching America, Slessor submitted a lengthy personal note to the Chief of the Air Staff, documenting his meeting with Purvis, McDonald and Donovan:

> Although Strong's false impression is largely dispelled, Purvis says there is no doubt that they will return to the charge on the subject of full information and periodical statements of the position ... I was met at the airport by McDonald, the late attaché in London, who said General Arnold and Spaatz wanted to see me before I saw Morgenthau, and this was followed by a telephone message from Arnold to say he would like to see me as soon as possible ... I found a message for me from Colonel Donovan, and met him yesterday. As you know he is the confidant of Knox and the President. He knew all about the visit, and has arranged for me to meet Knox on Wednesday and subsequently - I gather - the President. I got to know him well when he was in London this summer - he is a first class chap, and is putting me up in Washington.[4]

Slessor took the opportunity to interact with General Arnold and other key members of his Air Corps staff during his five months in America. In short order, he rendered an incisive analysis of Arnold: "I was to see much more of the man who subsequently became General of the Air Force ... The liking I took him at our first meeting ripened into real affection and respect. He was an intensely likable person was 'Hap' Arnold, transparently honest, terrifically energetic, given to unorthodox methods

---

[3] Note from Slessor to Portal: Arrival in America, 11 November 1940, PRO AIR 75/52.
[4] Ibid., 11 November 1940.

and, though shrewd and without many illusions, always with something of a schoolboy naïveté about him."[5]

Slessor's initial assessment of American military aircraft production was based on conversations with Baker, Self and Morgenthau's staff: "The U.S. authorities attached an importance to my visit that surprised me and, as the representative of the C.A.S. [Chief of the Air Staff], I found I had a standing which, as long as I was careful to work in the closest consultation with Self and Baker, was of definite value in getting our point across to our generous friends. I was inevitably in closer touch with our operational needs and with the requirements of our expansion programme than our representatives in America ..."[6] The American industry was in the throes of a rapid expansion that was seriously handicapped by lack of personnel with aircraft experience to fill senior executive posts and equally troubling, a shortage of skilled labor. Slessor explained that "a Joint American-British Standardisation Committee has been set up during my stay in the U.S.A. with a view to insuring the maximum standardisation as between types of aircraft being purchased by both the American and British Governments ... One of the major difficulties I foresee is the lack of properly trained labourers affecting industry flexibility with regard to production and design changes ..."[7]

To expedite the production process, Britain had to provide production information to America that demonstrated (under appropriate safeguards) the importance and urgency of the military situation. Slessor also argued that furnishing aircrew

---

[5] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 326.
[6] Ibid., p. 327.
[7] Slessor note on Production of Military Aircraft in America, November 1940, PRO AIR 75/64.

training numbers in a regular and consistent form to avoid suspicion of selecting statistics that might seem most useful for Britain's immediate purpose and forming a misleading impression. The War Cabinet thought that Britain should proceed cautiously in this matter and vary procedure according to the three main classes of secret information. The first comprised details of Britain's supply programs of which Slessor thought that a full statement should be furnished to the United States government. The second consisted of details of technical devices and the third related to operational information: "Here the main essential was to avoid giving away technical information which was intimately connected with operations likely to be undertaken in the near future."[8]

From Slessor's correspondence to the Air Ministry, it seems clear that American government officials were actively considering the dilemma of U.S. Army Air Corps' development and organization. President Roosevelt presented General Arnold the task of engineering the great expansion of forces under his command. Contemplating the AAC's eventual role, Arnold instructed his Plans Division to prepare provisional arrangements for its partial relocation to the United Kingdom. In connection with this work, Slessor provided Arnold with a copy of the *Mobilisation Instructions, Western Air Plan*, as drawn up for the original move of the RAF to France.[9] Slessor later recalled:

> The organization at Air Force H.Q. in Washington in 1940 was chaotic; staff organization was not Arnold's strongest point, but the Air Service was still a corps of the Army and its higher direction suffered accordingly. General Marshall told me for instance that in November only six new aircraft were delivered to the U.S.A.F., the remainder, amounting to some three hundred, being allocated to the British—a situation

[8] Extract from War Cabinet Meeting: Anglo-American Issues, 21 November 1940, PRO AIR 8/494.
[9] Letter from Slessor to Portal: Commentary on American Situation, 4 December 1940, PRO AIR 75/63.

> of which the consequences, if they were to become publicly known, might have been extremely awkward for him and Mr. Stimson.[10]

Slessor provided another analysis of the American air production program in a letter to the Air Ministry:

> The following conveys my impressions of the main problems in connection with the programme of production in the United States .... There appear to me to be two main directions in which the programme of aircraft production in the U.S.A. falls short of requirements for modern warfare, from the point of view both of Great Britain and the United States - namely, in the fighting efficiency of the aircraft due for production and in their numbers. It must be remembered that the contribution of U.S. industry to the air war will not make itself felt to a really important degree until the second half of 1941 and early 1942. The bombers now being produced in U.S.A. while they have good speed and range and a fair bomb load, do not incorporate the important lessons that the R.A.F. have learnt from fighting of last summer, notably in the direction of defensive armament ... by June 1942 3250 combat planes a month with a further capacity for 1250 a month, to be started early in 1941 and to be in full production by the end of 1942. Our aim therefore should be first to create immediate capacity for at least an additional 250 a month of an approved type of heavy bomber - a class which are of vital importance to the defeat of Germany and in which there is serious deficiency on present programmes. This should be followed as soon as possible after the first stage is under way ... by the creation on joint account capacity for the production of new types to bring the total of United States production up to 4500 a month.[11]

Secretary Morgenthau raised the issue of releasing classified material during his long deferred interview with Slessor on 3 December 1940. Morgenthau criticized the British position of ceding only partial aircraft production information and comparative pilot availability. He asked that the Air Ministry provide Slessor at regular intervals with information that answered his questions about these matters. In a classified memorandum to the Air Ministry, Slessor stated that Morgenthau "raised the question of our production position and pilot availability ... He said that if we were not getting all the help we needed that it was largely our own fault because we painted the picture too

---

[10] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 324-325.
[11] Slessor note to Air Ministry on U. S. Aircraft Production, 27 November 1940, PRO AIR 75/63.

black and did not keep the Administration sufficiently informed."[12] Slessor further described his meeting with Secretary Morgenthau: "When eventually I saw Mr. Morgenthau on December 3, I found him very ready to accept our assurances. He did not fail, however, to rub in the essential need to keep him and his colleagues fully informed if we were to get the help we wanted. 'The way to help us help you,' he said, 'is not to try to scare us by a string of bad news but to give us the facts'; and he asked again for a regular monthly statement of our position in respect of aircraft and crews off production."[13] Warren F. Kimball analyzes Morgenthau's diaries and assesses the Secretary's meeting with Slessor in these terms: "Interestingly, Morgenthau met with British Air Commodore J. C. Slessor of the British Purchasing Commission at which he had warned the Englishman that Britain should emphasize good news, for Americans would be more likely to help in that case. He cautioned that the United States could not be scared into aiding Britain."[14]

To satisfy Morgenthau, Slessor immediately telegraphed the Air Ministry and requested pilot losses for September. He also asked for the October and November statistics representing planned and actual aircraft output in the United Kingdom, projected deliveries of aircraft from the United States, intended and actual output of pilots, and anticipated and actual pilot losses. The Air Ministry had difficulty complying with Slessor's request because of its strained relationship with the Ministry of Aircraft

---

[12] Message, Slessor to Portal on Morgenthau Conversation, 3 December 1940, PRO AIR 75/63.
[13] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 323-324.
[14] Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939-1941* (Baltimore, 1969), p. 106.

Production (MAP).[15] Nevertheless, Slessor's response to Secretary Morgenthau's queries was indeed timely. Within a week he wrote Morgenthau: "You may be interested to hear that our pilot wastage for the months of September to November inclusive was almost exactly what we had anticipated as a result of a review which we undertook of the figures for this summer's campaign ... I understand that it has been arranged that you should receive the figures of aircraft production from Lord Beaverbrook through Mr. Morris Wilson, and Mr. Wilson tells me that the figures for recent months are on the way."[16]

During November 1940, Lord Beaverbrook and his Minister of Aircraft Production decided that the circulation of statistics giving the actual deliveries of aircraft from British and United States production should be subject to greater restriction and decreed that as far as British officials in Washington were concerned, the only recipient would be his own personal representative, Morris Wilson. He therefore showed some reluctance to provide Secretary Morgenthau with information through Slessor.[17]

In addition to providing updated information to Morgenthau, another continuing policy dilemma was that of production, both in terms of its organization within the United States and as a source of supply to both America and Britain. Part of the problem was British reluctance to give complete information on its position for fear that secrets would reach Germany. A debate continued in London regarding the best approach to

---

[15] Letter, Slessor to Morgenthau on Aircraft Production Figures, 7 December 1940, PRO AIR 75/63.
[16] Ibid., 7 December 1940.
[17] Air Ministry document on Aircraft Loss Calculations, December 1940, PRO AIR 8/446; A. J. P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (New York, 1972), pp. 439-440.

providing information: the pessimistic view which would make the peril and the need appear great, or the optimistic approach which would make Britain appear to be a worthy investment.[18]

Slessor provided commentary on production controversies in December 1940. He believed Morgenthau "wanted it clearly understood that the cooperation we expected from this country could only be given adequately if we gave the U.S. the complete facts as to our situation and that this applied particularly to the position of plane production synchronized with pilot availability." His critique also established that Lord Beaverbrook desired just "one channel of information on these matters to Mr. Morgenthau, namely Mr. Wilson." Slessor argued that MAP's telegrams to Secretary Morgenthau were incomplete and quite inadequate to give a comprehensive picture of the situation in Britain. He stated in that message to the Air Ministry that Beaverbrook was unwilling to provide information on the effects of German bombing on British aircraft production and "the probable reactions of Mr. Morgenthau and other ministers of our continued failure to supply them with the information for which they have specifically asked may some day be very unfortunate … in connection with the President's defence bill."[19]

On 15 December, Slessor prepared a memorandum that analyzed U.S. aircraft production for the Air Ministry. He based his report on visits to Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio, and feedback from other aircraft factories across America. Slessor noted the

---

[18] John Morton Blum, ed., *From the Morgenthau Diaries*, vol. 2 (Boston, 1965), p. 212; Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. 6, pp. 968-970.
[19] Slessor note to Air Ministry on U. S. Air Matters, December 1940, PRO AIR 75/63.

conflict between building large quantities of aircraft and building planes with improved performance and firepower. He suggested that America should not mortgage "all the new capacity to be created by extending the production of existing types, but should reserve some of it for production of new types which are really a substantial advance on those now in production." Slessor discerned hesitation by the United States to produce British Halifax or Stirling bombers in America.[20]

A 17 December 1940 Air Ministry letter to Slessor at the British Embassy in Washington bears witness to the calculating demeanor of the British to prosecute the war at all costs. The RAF seemed especially determined to bring America into this war against Germany and Italy. The Plans officer writing the letter to Slessor captured the sheer resoluteness of the British Vice Chief of the Air Staff (VCAS): "As regards the talks with America we are anxious to try and get them committed in West Africa and, in fact, in every area where we are fighting. Wilfrid will no doubt write you a personal letter … his great idea is to get one American at least killed on every theatre of war where we are fighting in order to focus American opinion on those areas."[21]

It was agreed at the Air Ministry that Slessor should stress to the Americans the vital importance of an almost unlimited supply of heavy bombers and point out the danger of either country concentrating too much on accumulating hoards of excessive aircraft with no strategic value. That reliance on the heavy bomber had become the keynote of British Air Policy. On 20 December, however, the CAS thought it important

---

[20] Slessor note to Air Ministry on U. S. Aircraft Production, 15 December 1940, PRO AIR 75/63.
[21] Air Ministry letter to Slessor, 17 December 1940, PRO AIR 75/5, the VCAS in December 1940 was the indomitable Air Marshal Sir Wilfrid Freeman.

to remind Slessor of the growing realization that Britain would have to turn increasingly to the United States for the aircraft necessary to implement this bombing policy: "We impressed upon him (Purvis) the vital importance of an almost unlimited supply of heavy bombers as the key to ultimate victory and the danger of ourselves or America going too much for numbers and collecting a hoard of superfluous fighters." Both Portal and Slessor believed that the more ardently they conveyed the essentials of strategic bombing to the Roosevelt Administration and the U.S. military, the more hope there was for achieving the plan.[22]

Slessor transmitted a cable on 1 January 1941 asking the CAS for aircraft production figures. He felt completely in the dark while the American government was pressing for a balance sheet of RAF aircraft production. Slessor was worried that his credibility was at stake: "I am still completely ignorant as to existing British production since Sept. ... Should be grateful for any information or fresh estimates ... I do not mind being made to look a fool though Americans cannot be expected to understand and I cannot explain to them why the Director of Plans who has been sent to America to discuss this sort of thing with them is kept in ignorance of so vital a factor as British production and the effect on it of enemy bombing."[23]

The CAS relayed Slessor's concerns to Lord Beaverbrook in a secret letter on 2 January 1941: "I have just heard from Slessor in America that he is still completely ignorant as to existing British production since September ... He was asked for

---

[22] Private letter, CAS to Slessor: Providing America with Needed Information, 20 December 1940, PRO AIR 8/446.
[23] Message, Slessor to CAS: Slessor requests Production Figures, 1 January 1941, PRO AIR 8/494.

information concerning the German strength and production, and also for our own production situation ... He admits that there is some small risk of the facts ultimately becoming known to the enemy, but the only alternative is to keep the facts to ourselves and fail to get the full co-operation of the U.S.A." Portal was desperately attempting to impress Beaverbrook that Morgenthau was anxious to obtain aircraft production figures.[24]

The Portal-Beaverbrook debate continued. The CAS proposed to Beaverbrook that the following discussion points be transmitted to Churchill:

> Slessor was sent to the United States with the task, among others, of showing that we could find crews for all the aircraft we could produce ourselves and hoped to receive from the United States ... Early in December, we sent to Slessor, in a telegram approved by the Prime Minister, information about strength in aircraft and pilots together with the forecast and actual pilot output wastage for the months of October and November, 1940. The telegram added that information about planned and actual output of aircraft must come from Morris Wilson ... Nevertheless, Morris Wilson is not in possession of the monthly figures of production. As this is the one factor required to complete the picture that Mr. Morgenthau is striving to obtain, its absence must be highly conspicuous. Slessor has been asked for the details and reports that his inability to supply them is highly embarrassing ... I believe failure to supply these figures for which Morgenthau has asked will engender an atmosphere of suspicion which will react directly on the extent of American co-operation in the aircraft programme.[25]

Sinclair proposed to Churchill that the British Government provide Secretary Morgenthau with a regular monthly statement of aircraft and pilot statistics. These figures would show: "(a) Planned and actual output of aircraft in the U.K. for the month (b) Aircraft strength of the Metropolitan Air Force (c) Pilot strength of the Metropolitan Air Force (d) Planned and actual pilot wastage for the month (e) Postulated and actual pilot wastage for the month (f) Progress in formation of squadrons for the month."

---

[24] Letter, Portal to Beaverbrook: Slessor in America, 2 January 1941, PRO AIR 8/494.
[25] Letter, Portal to Beaverbrook: Slessor in America, 6 January 1941, PRO AIR 8/494.

Sinclair explained to Churchill that Portal was pressing Lord Beaverbrook to release the monthly figures, but that the situation warranted the Prime Ministers intervention.[26]

Lord Beaverbrook, having consulted the Cabinet Committee, was of the opinion that Britain should confine submission of information to present stocks and the annual programs for 1941 and 1942 in Purvis' hands and not go beyond these declarations. In a note from Portal to Churchill, the CAS commented that:

> The Minister of Aircraft Production has invited me to submit to you for decision a question of principle on which we are unable to agree. It concerns the supply of information to Mr. Morgenthau. Slessor has reported to me that Morgenthau is very anxious to obtain the figures for the monthly production of aircraft in this country. He is at present engaged on a comparison between German and British strengths and production, and without this information this picture that he is trying to obtain will be incomplete. I consulted Lord Beaverbrook about this and he is of the opinion that we should confine ourselves to supplying information on current stocks and future programme. He supplied Purvis with these before he left and is keeping the stock figure up-to-date month by month. The Cabinet Committee is of the same opinion as the Minister."[27]

Portal reminded the Prime Minister on 10 January that Morgenthau had repeatedly stated that the cooperation Britain expected from the United States would only be forthcoming on an adequate scale provided the complete facts were furnished, with particular reference to aircraft production synchronised with pilot availability. Slessor was originally sent to America with the task, among others, of showing that Britain could find crews for all the aircraft produced by MAP and the United States.

---

[26] Message, Air Ministry to Prime Minister: Supply of Production Figures to America, 8 January 1941, PRO AIR 8/494.

[27] Prime Minister minutes, Portal to Churchill: Aircraft Production, 10 January 1941, Christ Church, Oxford, File 1, No. 12.

Portal stressed to Churchill that: "Slessor has been asked for the details and reports that his inability to supply them is highly embarrassing."[28]

Slessor's differences with Beaverbrook escalated with a controversy over Air Marshal Hugh Dowding. In a personal and highly classified letter to the CAS, Slessor painted an embarrassing picture of Dowding's official visit to America. The retired Air Marshal was representing MAP on goodwill tour of America when the disputation broke. While attending a social event with leading figures of the Roosevelt Administration, Dowding found time to issue some highly controversial opinions. Slessor stated that Henry Self asked for Dowding's opinion on the merits of a large heavy bomber force: "Dowding then proceeded to hold forth, as far as he could see, there really was not a case for having masses of bombers ... Self made every effort to counter this nonsense ... I hate writing like this about a very senior officer, but in the national interest I must express the fervent hope that you will contrive to get him out of this country before he does much more harm."[29] Historian A. J. P. Taylor describes the Dowding-Slessor discord in his biography of Beaverbrook:

> Dowding had been sent to America in order to get him out of the way. He expressed his opinions freely, and these did not accord at all with those of Sir John Slessor, the air ministry's official representative. Complaints flowed back to London. Churchill indignantly demanded that Dowding be recalled. Beaverbrook attempted to defend Dowding and pleaded that this was merely a quarrel between two air marshals [sic]. Tactfully he arranged for Dowding to move on to Canada, where there were no air marshals to quarrel with. Dowding lingered in Canada until May 1941 when he returned home, as the Air Ministry hoped, a forgotten man.[30]

---

[28] Letter, Portal to Churchill, 10 January 1941, Christ Church, Oxford, File 1, No. 12a.
[29] Letter, Slessor to Portal, 25 January 1941, Christ Church, Oxford, Box C, File 4, No. 3.
[30] Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 459, Taylor has prematurely promoted Slessor who at the time was still an Air Commodore.

AIRCRAFT FERRY OPERATIONS

The possibility of increased aircraft production in the United States produced yet one more problem; that of finding crews to ferry hundreds of planes from America to Great Britain. The RAF anticipated great difficulty in finding the crews and was naturally dismayed at the prospect of providing new ferry crews at the expense of Bomber and Coastal Command. Slessor hoped to persuade the American military to loan experienced crews for ferrying aircraft to Britain which would release several hundred crews for fighting the air battle against Germany. He emphasized to the Air Ministry the enormous commitment required to ferry aircraft across the Atlantic, Africa, and in the United Kingdom between factories and units. The numbers of trained aircrews employed in this duty ran into the hundreds, most of whom would otherwise be available for active duty in combat squadrons. Slessor emphasized that additional relief would expedite the RAF buildup for operations against Germany.[31]

Slessor dispatched a personal letter to the CAS on 4 December 1940 on the urgent need to plan for dramatic increases in ferry pilots: "The enormous production programme over this side raises a point of great importance of which I think the implications may not have been fully realized, namely the tremendous size of the ferry pilot service that will be necessary to get all these aircraft over … Ultimately we shall want something of the order of at least 1000 pilots on this job."[32] On 28 December

---

[31] Message, Portal to Slessor: Shortage of Ferry Crews, 17 March 1941, PRO AIR 8/461; Craven and Cates, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 1, p. 314, The ferrying distance was approximately 2,100 miles, and flying these bombers under their own power saved vital shipping space; factory-to-combat delivery time was cut from approximately three months to less than 10 days.
[32] Slessor letter, Slessor to Portal: Commentary on American Situation, 4 December 1940, PRO AIR 75/63; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 335-336.

1940, the British Air Commission in Washington urgently cabled the MAP to advise on the limited number of aircrews to ferry planes: "Cannot ferry 6 B.24's with personnel available. Must remind you ... we have 5 pilots with experience on 4-engined aircraft and all but 1 are away ... to cope with expected deliveries we need experienced pilots."[33] This problem required a broad solution that incorporated the creative inputs of the MAP, the Air Ministry, and the Roosevelt Administration.

Responding to the crisis, Slessor produced a comprehensive plan on the issue of transatlantic aircraft ferrying. He believed it was imperative to assess the total size of the ferry operation. Slessor calculated that appreciation of the problem was necessary, giving forecasted deliveries in types and numbers, quarter by quarter, up to and including 1942: "... we want to ship everything except flying boats and four-engined bombers..." Slessor's plan took into consideration the flying conditions in the summer and winter. He hoped that Trans-Canada Airways would provide the civil air link between Montreal and Newfoundland and that British Overseas Airways would be given the responsibility of running the air link between Newfoundland and Ireland. Trans-ocean pilots would come from three sources: experienced civil personnel, a small nucleus of experienced RAF pilots, and graduates from overseas training programs. Slessor envisioned that the RAF Atlantic Ferry Service would use pilots from training units in Canada and the United States. The plan also stipulated the need for a Collection Unit to take aircraft from factories in America and Canada to a Reception-Preparation

[33] Message from Air Commission to MAP, training B-24 crews, 28 December 1940, PRO AIR 19/249.

center/depot in Montreal, a Dispatch Unit in Newfoundland, and Reception Units in the United Kingdom.[34]

Slessor commented to the Air Ministry that by June 1941, 200 aircraft a month would need to be ferried with the rate rising to 400 aircraft by the end of the year. He was concerned that even if the entire British Overseas Airways Corporation were diverted to Atlantic ferry duty, the requirements could only be met at the cost of the operational strength of Bomber and Coastal Commands. The loss would be equivalent to at least six squadrons in June and fifteen in December. Slessor asserted in his memorandum that the Air Ministry should take over the operation of the Atlantic Ferry Service.[35]

Secretary of State for Air Sinclair wrote Beaverbrook an angry letter over the aircraft ferry issue. "The Prime Minister told us we were to come to an agreement about the ferry position across the Atlantic ... Certainly you have no right to pledge me to any arrangement made by Mr. Morris Wilson with the Canadian Government for the diversion of personnel from the Empire Training Scheme which incidentally concerns also the Governments of Australia and New Zealand." Sinclair asserted that this MAP scheme of pilot recruitment would drain some of the best and most experienced pilots from Coastal and Bomber Squadrons: "When I read your letter on my return from the Cabinet I felt at any rate that there was one important thing on which you and I could agree and that was that we could go together to the Prime Minister and settle amicably

---

[34] Note from Slessor on Possible Transatlantic Transport Organization, 22 January 1941, PRO AIR 19/249.
[35] Message, Slessor to Air Ministry, Ferry Operations, 27 January 1941, PRO AIR 75/67.

between us and subject to his guidance the main question whether the ferrying pools should be run broadly on the lines which I propose or on your lines."[36]

Winston Churchill had received a copy of Sinclair's letter to Beaverbrook through Cabinet circulation and responded to the Secretary of State for Air on the following day: "The understanding which I hoped would be reached the other night was that you would make your concession on the equipment in return for receiving back Ferry organizations ... I do not wish this matter to be discussed in Cabinet at the present time, or until I have first made a further effort to adjust the unhappy differences between you and M.A.P. by which my labours are greatly increased."[37]

The CAS cabled Slessor on 17 March 1941 urging additional American help ferrying aircraft. The shortage of ferry pilots was affecting delivery of PBY's to Coastal Command and impacting operations against U-boats because combat flyers had moved to a ferry role. Portal needed Slessor to continue to pressure Americans for more ferry pilots. "It would be a great help if U.S. authorities could be persuaded to provide crews to fly P.B.Y.'s across Atlantic ... They would release trained crews for operational service."[38] This matter was finally resolved during the summer of 1941 when America took responsibility for the bulk of ferry operations.

---

[36] Letter, Sinclair to Beaverbrook: Ferry Proposals, 27 January 1941, PRO AIR 19/249.
[37] Personal Minute, Churchill to Sinclair: Ferry Organization, 28 January 1941, PRO AIR 19/249.
[38] Message, CAS to Slessor, shortage of Ferry crews, 17 March 1941, PRO AIR 8/461; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 336.

ANGLO-AMERICAN STAFF CONVERSATIONS

Questions concerning naval, military and air strategy called for staff conversations. It is not surprising that after preliminary discussions in August 1940, the possibility of holding further inter-Allied staff conversations was considered. It was suggested in early October that representatives of Britain, the United States, the Netherlands and Australia should have contemporaneous discussions in Washington, London, and Singapore. Secretary of State Cordell Hull explained to Ambassador Lord Lothian that if any intimation of Anglo-American staff conversations reached the public, it would immediately be seized upon as proof of Administration designs for involving America in the European war. Hull informed the British Embassy that it was inadvisable to arrange a Washington military conference before the November election.[39]

On 5 November 1940 Roosevelt received a substantial majority in his bid for election to an unprecedented third term. Shortly after his return to Washington, Secretary Knox, General Marshall and Admiral Stark approached the President and urged him to agree to hold formal staff talks with the British. They stressed the need for a formal revision of United States defense planning, a move that clearly required presidential direction. They presented Roosevelt with Stark's "Plan Dog" memorandum for consideration.[40]

---

[39] Greenfield, ed., *Command Decisions*, p. 35; Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942*, p. 25.

[40] Greenfield, ed., *Command Decisions,* p. 35; Louis Morton, *The War in the Pacific, Strategy and Command: The First Two Years* (Washington, D. C., 1962), p. 81; Watson, *Chief of Staff: Pre-War Plans and Preparations*, pp. 119-120; Admiral Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations, prepared a general estimate of alternative policies open to the United States. It took the form of a 12 November 1940 memorandum from Stark to the Secretary of the Navy. Commonly called the "Plan Dog Memorandum", this paper articulated national objectives: "the prevention of the disruption of the British Empire, with all that such a

Meanwhile, in England, the British rejoiced at the news of Roosevelt's reelection. Expectations ran high that soon the United States would enter the war and thus the long-sought staff talks would surely now happen. The British felt that the earlier they could get to America and engage in talks with U.S. planners the better. On 29 November, Lord Lothian sent a jubilant report to London. The President had finally approved the holding of staff talks in Washington at the same time urging that the conference be kept completely secret.[41]

The departure for the British delegation had been set for 19 December 1940 but was delayed by the sudden death of Lothian on 12 December. His unexpected death shocked and grieved Britons and Americans alike. Therefore the delegation's departure date was set back to 14 January 1941. On that date the British representatives, accompanied by Admiral Ghormley and General Lee (he had been promoted in November) plus the newly appointed British Ambassador to Washington, Lord Halifax, and his entourage sailed for America aboard the new battleship H.M.S. *King George V*. They arrived in Annapolis on 23 January 1941.[42]

---

consummation implies." Stark's memorandum further assumed that at some future time it would become necessary for America to enter the war as an ally of Britain to defeat the Axis in Europe, even if this required assuaging the military and diplomatic pressure on an aggressive Japan. For the immediate future, Stark argued that the United States should provide extensive aid to Britain, augment the strength of the American army and navy, and develop contingency plans for the imminent possibility of American military involvement. The Plan Dog Memorandum provided a reasoned exposition of certain opinions that reached general acceptance in the upper levels of the Roosevelt Administration during the last months of 1940 that American could not escape involvement in the war.

[41] Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942*, p. 28.

[42] William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Undeclared War 1940-1941* (New York, 1953), p. 285; Reynolds, "Lord Lothian and Anglo-American Relations, 1939-1940, p. 57.

The staff conversations were held in Washington from 29 January to 27 March 1941, and included the United States Staff Committee representing the Chief of Naval Operations and the Chief of Staff of the Army, and a United Kingdom Delegation representing the Chiefs of Staff. Representatives of the chiefs of staff of the Dominions of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were associated with the United Kingdom Delegation throughout the course of these conversations, but were not present at joint meetings.[43]

The Air Ministry designated Air Commodore Slessor as its representative. Slessor later recorded the appointment to the conference: "Early in December I heard from Portal that I was to stay in the United States to represent him as the R.A.F. member of the team which was to conduct the first Anglo-American staff conversations. The scope of these conversations had been extended and they were to cover not only co-operation in the Far East, as originally envisaged, but the whole range of Anglo-American strategy in the event of the United States entering the war."[44]

The British delegation for the covert conversations in Washington was handpicked by the Chiefs of Staff. General Lee documented his impressions of all the British representatives: "Admiral Bellairs is a smallish, cherry roundheaded Englishman who laughs easily. Danckwerts is a typical German in appearance, expression and manner. What he may think is British, but verges in his case upon Teutonic overbearingness. General Morris is rather an ordinary looking Englishman but is

---

[43] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, pp. 223-224.
[44] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 330-331.

possibly a clever soldier. It is a strong team, for these two with the airman, Slessor, who is now in Washington, were all together on the Joint Planning Committee two or three years ago, and they should know what they are about." A few days later Lee lunched with General Sir Hastings L. Ismay, Churchill's Chief of Staff on the Defence Committee of the War Cabinet, and discussed the British delegation. In "Pug" Ismay's estimation, Slessor was the best of the whole delegation. For better or worse, however, these were the officers whom the British gave the responsibility for conducting these all-important staff talks with the Americans.[45]

Suspicion of British motives seems to have influenced the selection of the American delegation. Admiral Ghormley, who had been working closely with the British for some months, headed the Navy team. Ghormley, however, was overshadowed by the more forceful Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, Director of the Navy Department War Plans Division, and the second ranking naval delegate. Unfortunately, from the British standpoint, Turner seemed to think that he alone stood guard over the American national interest.[46]

Lieutenant General Stanley D. Embick headed the Army delegation. Embick was an experienced planner, having formerly been director of war plans and deputy chief of staff. He had been closely connected with the British during the First World War as a member of General Pershing's American Expeditionary Force (AEF) staff, and came away from that experience with strong feelings. One was a profound distrust of Winston

---

[45] James R. Leutze, ed., *The London Journal of General Raymond E. Lee, 1940-1941* (Boston, 1971), p. 213.
[46] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, pp. 216-217; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 355.

Churchill as a military strategist and a complete lack of respect for his character. Another was a dread of the United States being drawn by the British into peripheral operations that were based on political rather than military considerations. A very senior, highly respected officer, Embick's views were certain to carry a great deal of weight with the entire American delegation.[47]

American attitudes were based on a strongly held opinion that American destinies and military forces should not fall under British command. A heritage of suspicion remained from General Pershing's 1917-1918 experiences trying to keep an American expeditionary army intact.[48] Admiral Stark's original Plan Dog Memorandum had emphasized that upon entering an association with Great Britain, the United States must "insist upon full equality in the political and military direction of the war." Slessor recalled that "after their intervention in the 1914-1918 war they had been pressed to filter their units into existing Allied formations, and Pershing had some difficulty in getting an American Army formed at all … The Americans in 1940 were determined that the history of 1918 should not repeat itself, but that they would form their own autonomous formations under their own commanders."[49]

The U.S. delegation also included an officer from each service—Captain DeWitt C. Ramsey, USN, and Colonel Joseph T. McNarney, USA— who were appointed to discuss air operations with Slessor. Considering the size of the entire group, one might surmise that the Americans sought safety in numbers to protect themselves from British

---

[47] Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare*, pp. 52-53.
[48] Ibid., pp. 29-30.
[49] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 353.

guile: "Ramsay represented U.S. Naval Aviation and Joe McNarney the Air Force ... in addition to our ordinary roles as members of the conference, constituted a sub-committee which produced a separate Air section of the final report dealing with plans for the build-up of the British and American Air Forces and the allocation of aircraft to the R.A.F."[50]

The official records which termed the discussions as the "British – United States Staff Conversations" began on 29 January 1941. The need for secrecy covering the staff conversations had increased since the inception of the idea. Nothing was more vital to the continuation of British resistance than the speedy passage of the Lend-Lease Act, which was introduced in Congress on 10 January 1941. The Roosevelt Administration risked incurring embarrassment if the "Arsenal of Democracy" was actually convening a conference of American and British officers to plan America's eventual participation in the war. The opponents of Lend-Lease would not hesitate to charge that the Administration was scheming to involve the United States in war.[51]

In light of these possibilities, neither the President nor any of his Cabinet officially received the British officers. Instead, the British came officially as additions to the technical staff of the British Purchasing Commission. Slessor and his fellow officers wore civilian clothes and dropped all reference to rank, but military bearing is sometimes difficult to disguise.[52] Slessor described the British delegation as "composed of men with all of whom I had worked closely in earlier days ... We were all in plain

---

[50] Ibid., pp. 340-342.
[51] Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, pp. 285-287.
[52] Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York, 1948), pp. 272-273; Copp, *Forged in Fire*, p. 118.

clothes and had temporarily discarded our ranks for secrecy, but I doubt whether the fact that we called ourselves 'Mr. Morris' etc., really deceived anybody … it would have been difficult for the least suspicious enemy agent in Washington to take us for anything but British officers; Ted Morris and Dancks in particular were almost caricatures of the popular idea of what a British general and admiral ought to look like." The real activities of these officers went undetected and complete secrecy shrouded the talks from start to finish.[53]

On 29 January 1941, the British and American representatives met for the first time. The array of Americans facing the six British delegates surprised them, but with characteristic unflappability, they took in stride being considerably outnumbered. Slessor stated: "We were considerably outnumbered by the United States delegation … Their chairman, General Embick, who acted in addition as chairman of the conference, had been called from retirement … The Conference held its plenary sessions in the Old Navy building on Constitution Avenue and the British team were provided with working accommodations in the bedrooms on the top floor of the embassy … The negotiations were conducted on our side by the United Kingdom officers but the Canadians, who already had a defence relationship with the United States, were represented by an observer …"[54]

The British presented their strategic policy on the first day of the conference and argued that Europe was the decisive theater. Slessor felt strongly that Germany and Italy

---

[53] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 340-341.
[54] Ibid., pp. 340-342.

must be defeated before dealing with Japan, and that protection of the Far East and the Dominions of Australia and New Zealand depended upon the maintenance of Singapore as a secure base of operations.[55] During the next few days of the conversations the United Kingdom delegation presented to the United States Staff Committee two papers conveying the British point of view on a variety of strategic issues. On the first day they submitted "A Statement by the United Kingdom Delegation" which summarized very briefly both the general strategic policy of the British government and the views of the British Chiefs of Staff assuming the active intervention of the United States in the war. This document stated that the British Chiefs of Staff would welcome the greatest possible degree of collaboration by the United States Army Air Corps after American intervention in the European war.[56]

The American-British Conversations continued for eight weeks. With regard to areas in which their interests coincided, the British found the Americans quite cooperative. Discussions about the Atlantic proceeded smoothly, and plans were readily agreed upon for the protection of vital shipping lanes and the British home islands. Both sides recognized that the only offensive policies that could be pursued against Germany at that time were economic pressure and an increasing air offensive. Economic pressure offered little promise of immediate, visible results but the same was not true of an air offensive. Thus the British and Americans agreed that a top priority claim on Anglo-American resources should go to building up the heavy bomber force.[57]

---

[55] Greenfield, ed., *Command Decisions*, p. 42.
[56] Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision,* vol. 1, p. 451.
[57] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, pp. 248-253.

Slessor cabled an urgent message to the Air Ministry on the state of early negotiations with the American delegation: "They said their information still led them to suspect that we were accumulating unduly large reserves of aircraft which we could not match with crews at expense of their air services which were accumulating numbers of trained crews which they could not match with combat aircraft. They said bluntly that they felt they had not in past been treated by the British with frankness on this head." Slessor held the firm view that dispelling American suspicions was essential and that to withhold pertinent information would damage the relationship: "Our production position both of aircraft and crews is essentially pertinent to this question of American air assistance." He added that the RAF "should not accumulate more than we really need while the United States air corps, which at present has virtually no modern combat planes, continues to be starved for aircraft."[58]

Air Marshal Portal immediately forwarded to the Prime Minister Slessor's request for candor with the American delegation:

> I am afraid I must trouble you again with the question of the release to the United States administration of the monthly figures of aircraft production in the United Kingdom ... A telegram from Slessor, which arrived yesterday, reports that the point has come up again, in an acute form, in the course of the second meeting of the British-United States technical conversations ... I quite appreciate Lord Beaverbrook's reluctance to release this information but now that the matter has been raised directly by the U.S. Staff I feel most strongly that failure will cause a deplorable effect and will imperil the success of the technical conversations ... As to the manner in which this information is imparted by Slessor to the U.S. authorities I think there are two possible courses. We can allow Slessor to give the information to the U.S. delegation ... Alternatively, we can authorise Slessor to release the information only to the President, Morgenthau, Knox and Stimson ... My strong preference is for the first alternative and I earnestly hope that you will

[58] Message, Slessor to Portal: Need for Complete Frankness with U. S., 1 February 1941, PRO AIR 8/447.

> agree to the release to the delegation of all the information for which Slessor is asking, in particular the monthly figures of planned and actual output.[59]

Slessor and Portal wanted to demonstrate to the American delegation that the RAF could match pilots with the aircraft that it expected to receive from UK and US production.[60]

Lord Beaverbrook's 14 February letter to Portal accused Slessor of encroaching on MAP duties: "I see correspondence by cable passing between you and Air Commodore Slessor, in which there is a discussion about the release of aircraft in America. It seems to me that the Air Commodore is impinging upon the duties and responsibilities of the Aircraft Ministry. I am only too willing that discussions should be carried on according to your desires." Beaverbrook believed that "communication should pass through this Ministry and the situation should be handled entirely by us. I hope you tell Air Commodore Slessor to take this course as you will see at once we cannot both handle the American programme. The authority must be left with us."[61] Portal responded to Beaverbrook on 17 February: "The nature of Slessor's work in America is such that I am afraid it will be impossible for him to avoid points of this character being put to him by the U.S. delegation."[62] A senior MAP official responded to the Air Ministry letter with an acerbic manner: "Lord Beaverbrook has seen your note to me of 19th March on the subject of Slessor and has asked me to answer it to the effect

---

[59] Message, Portal to Churchill: Release of Production Figures to U. S., 3 February 1941, Christ Church, Oxford, Box C, File 4, No. 12c; Portal to Churchill, 3 February 1942, PRO AIR 8/494.
[60] Letter, Portal to Churchill: Commentary on Slessor message, 5 February 1941, PRO AIR 8/447.
[61] Letter, Beaverbrook to Portal: Unhappy with Slessor, 14 February 1941, PRO AIR 8/447.
[62] Letter, Portal to Beaverbrook: Support for Slessor, 17 February 1941, PRO AIR 8/447.

that he has not very much faith in this Officer and does not propose to become involved in any negotiations about him."[63]

The staff conversations had a plenary session on Monday 17 February 1941. A good part of the discussion revolved around American military support for a British strategic bombing campaign against Germany.[64] On an informal basis, the Army Air Corps Plans Division and Intelligence section cooperated very closely with Slessor and members of his staff and with Colonel McNarney. One of the most vital and fruitful developments of this informal relationship was a detailed exploration of the potential air base capacity of the United Kingdom; a prospect found to be several times greater than the Army Air Corps had anticipated.[65]

The British found the Americans questioning their Mediterranean and Far East strategy. Concerning the Mediterranean, the Americans doubted the wisdom of diverting large-scale forces away from the primary area to a secondary one. They therefore agreed only to limited naval aid in the Mediterranean and would make no commitment to assist in land or air operations in the theater. The most serious disagreements by far arose over Far Eastern strategy. Slessor asserted that "this question of Far Eastern strategy was the principal, indeed it was the only serious divergence of view between us and the Americans."[66] In order to complete war plans, the British needed to know American intentions in case Japan entered the war. America on the

---

[63] Letter, MAP to Air Ministry: Beaverbrook's Response, 21 March 1941, PRO AIR 8/447.
[64] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 240.
[65] Major General Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *The Air Plan that Defeated Hitler* (Atlanta, 1972), pp. 57-58.
[66] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 346-347.

other hand, was suspicious that Britain would try to draw them into defending purely Commonwealth interests, thereby rousing the ire of the formidable Kelly Turner.[67]

Slessor postulated that the only solution to this strategic problem was to base a portion of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Singapore. During the conference, Slessor prepared a strategic memorandum on Britain's position in the Far East. He asserted that "the maintenance of a Fleet based at Singapore has been a cardinal point in British strategy -- one of the two vital factors in our system of defence, the other being, of course, the security of the British Islands ... This has been based, not only upon purely strategic foundations, but on political, economic, and sentimental considerations which are of such fundamental importance to the British Commonwealth."[68] Slessor recognized how difficult intervening in this manner would be for the United States, but his great hope was for the pre-positioning of part of America's Pacific Fleet at Singapore to deter Japanese aggression.[69]

The unexpected difficulties encountered by the delegates concerning Far Eastern policy and the ultimate working out of a compromise strategy revealed the significance of the face-to-face meetings that had been taking place. Both sides agreed that the important personal contacts that had been established during these staff talks must be maintained. The agreed arrangement was that while America was still neutral, missions would be established in Washington and London. Once America came into the war, it

---

[67] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, pp. 247-248.
[68] Slessor commentary on the Far East, February 1941, PRO AIR 75/122.
[69] Ibid., February 1941.

was planned that these missions would be expanded into full staff committees of equal authority.[70]

During these American-British Conversations, Slessor authored a paper on British aircraft needs for 1941 and 1942 that was based on the latest Air Ministry information and took into full account all RAF operational losses. In this report, Slessor stated that:

> The latest official estimate of the total output from American factories in 1941 is 11,933 aircraft of combat type. At present 6,235 of these are assigned to the British and it is now clear that there is no prospect of meeting the full requirement as stated above ... To meet the deliveries quoted above for 1942, it is estimated that an output of about 2,600 machines per month would be necessary by the middle of 1942 for the British alone. Of these 2,300 would be combat types ... An issue of special importance arises on heavy bombers—the need for which is particularly urgent. Mr. Churchill has asked that the capacity might be created to give a joint U.S.-British output of 4,500 combat planes per month by the middle of 1942 ...a first line operating force of 1,600 heavy bombers requires to be backed by another 2,400 in reserve, working stock and operating training units—a total of 4,000. Assuming a capacity of 400 bombers a month, it would take 10 months output at peak rate to build up the initial equipment and necessary operating reserves for a force of 1,600 bombers ... [71]

Slessor realized that deliveries in 1941 could only be obtained from a capacity that already existed or was in the process of being established.

Secretaries' Knox and Stimson and Colonel Donovan attended the staff conversations on 25 March 1941. Stimson addressed the two delegations and pointed out that the Lend-Lease Act created a new condition in which America had increasingly to be interested in the strategic policy under which the resources produced by the United States were employed by Great Britain. The British delegation responded by suggesting appointment of a Joint Military Committee to advise the President on defense allocation,

---

[70] Morton, *The War in the Pacific*, p. 88.
[71] Slessor Paper, British Aircraft Requirements, 22 March 1941, PRO AIR 75/65.

strategic requirements and the availability of trained personnel. They indicated that the Committee should comprise representatives of the American Chiefs of Staff, Chief of Naval Operations and the British Chiefs of Staff. The British officers emphasized two features of the British system that they felt should be incorporated in the United States: First, the responsibility for military advice must rest with the same authority responsible for implementing the advice when approved, and second, a permanent joint secretariat, including staff officers of the three Services, would be essential for the necessary tasking to be expeditiously coordinated and put into effect.[72]

Discussions turned to the Air Force expansion program. Slessor explained that the Air Ministry was engaged in a very ambitious program of expansion aimed at doubling the first-line strength of the RAF during 1941. The Air Ministry believed that failing any major unexpected setback in the production of aircraft or trained crews, they would be able to train sufficient personnel to match the numbers of aircraft, though they continued to press the United States for additional assistance in aircrew training. Slessor urged that new capacity for aircraft production should include a high proportion of long-range four-engined bombers. The question was raised during the conversations whether the RAF could match additional heavy bombers with crews. Slessor noted that during the past winter a high proportion of trained pilots had been "plowed back" into the training program as instructors, with a view to securing a sharp rise in the curve of

---

[72] Minutes of Anglo-American Staff Conversations, 26 March 1941, PRO AIR 75/66; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 218; Craven and Cates, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War I,* vol. 1, p. 130, On 27 March, Congress authorized the appropriation of $7,000,000,000 for Lend-Lease: Roosevelt's' proclamation of supporting Britain with all "measures short of war."

production of trained crews in the early summer of 1941. Relatively few trainees from Canada had yet joined combat units, but a very large number was expected during 1941. Slessor emphatically stated that during 1941, the RAF would certainly be able to post more heavy bombers than they could obtain.[73]

After eleven full meetings had been held between 29 January and the end of February, the delegates on both sides began to prepare drafts of a report which would embody their conclusions and recommendations. The Report of the ABC Conversations was signed and published on 27 March 1941. It came to be regarded as such an important and oft-quoted document that the items from it formed the backbone of Anglo-American strategy for the duration of the war. The report reflected the efforts of the Anglo-American delegations to reconcile all divergent views in a manner calculated to best serve their joint interests. The Staff Conference recommended that immediate steps be taken to provide for the following:

> **Collaboration of Planning**. The High Command of the United States and United Kingdom will collaborate continuously in the formulation and execution of strategical policies and plans which shall govern the conduct of the war. Assumptions. The term "Associated Powers" used herein is to be taken as meaning the United States and British Commonwealth, and, when appropriate, includes the Associated and Allies of either Power. The Staff Conference assumes that when the United States becomes involved in war with Germany, it will at the same time engage in war with Italy ... the possibility of war arising between Japan and an Associate of the U.S., the British Commonwealth and its Allies, including the Netherlands East Indies, must be taken into account. The Conference assumes that the United States will continue to furnish material aid to the United Kingdom, but, for the use of itself and its other Associates, will retain material in such quantities as to provide for security and best to effectuate United States-British joint plans for defeating Germany and her Allies. It is recognized that the amount and nature of the material aid which the United States affords the British Commonwealth

[73] Strategic Discussions in Washington, 26 March 1941, PRO AIR 75/67.

will influence the size and character of the Military forces which will be available to the United States for use in the war.

General Strategic Concept. The strategic concept includes the following as the principal offensive policies against the Axis Powers: - (a) Application of economic pressure. (b) A sustained air offensive against German Military power, supplemented by air offensives against other regions under enemy control which contribute to that power. (c) The early elimination of Italy ... (f) The buildup of the necessary forces for an eventual offensive against Germany. (g) The capture of positions from which to launch the eventual offensive.

Plans of the Military Operations. The military plans of the Associated Powers will likewise be governed by the following: - (a) Since Germany is the predominate member of the Axis Powers, the Atlantic and European area is considered to be the decisive theatre. The principal United States Military effort will be exerted in that theatre, and operations of United States forces in other theatres will be conducted in such a manner as to facilitate that effort ... (h) Subject to the requirements of the security of the United States, the British Isles and their sea communications, the air policy of the Associated Powers will be directed towards achieving, as quickly as possible, superiority of air strength over that of the enemy, particularly in long-range striking forces. (i) United States Army Air Forces will support the United States land and naval forces maintain the security of the Western Hemisphere and operate in the areas bordering the Atlantic. Subject to the availability of trained and equipped organizations, they will undertake the air defense of those general areas in which naval bases used primarily by United States' forces are located, and subsequently, of such other areas as may agreed upon. United States Army Air bombardment units will operate offensively in collaboration with the Royal Air Force, primarily against German Military power at its source.

Principles of Command. (a) In accordance with plans based on joint strategic policy, each Power will be charged with the strategic direction of all forces of the Associated Powers normally operating in certain areas. (b) As a general rule, the forces of each of the Associated Powers should operate under their own commanders in the areas of responsibility of their own Power ... (e) When units of both Powers co-operate tactically, command will be exercised by that officer of either Power who is senior in rank, or if of equal rank, of time in grade.

Military Missions. To effect the collaboration ... and to ensure the co-ordination of administrative action and command between the United States and British Military Services, the United States and United Kingdom will exchange Military Missions.

Intelligence. Existing Military intelligence organizations of the two Powers will operate as independent intelligence agencies, but will maintain close liaison with each other to ensure the full and prompt exchange of pertinent information concerning war operations. Intelligence liaison will be established not only through the Military Missions, but also between the echelons of command in the field with respect to matters which affect their operations.[74]

---

[74] United States – British Staff Conversations Report, 27 March 1941, PRO AIR 9/144.

The term "United States Chiefs of Staff," freely used by the British in preliminary drafts to designate an American counterpart of the British Chiefs of Staff, was absent from the final ABC-1 report, which always referred individually to the Chief of Naval Operations and the Army Chief of Staff. The necessity for such a distinction was indeed the key to the major difference between the American and British military institutions at the time. In the United Kingdom there was a corporate high command designated by a single term, the Chiefs of Staff Committee. In the United States the powers of high command were vested in individuals, primarily the President as Commander in Chief and his major professional subordinates, the Army Chief of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations, but their relationships did not constitute a formalized institution.[75]

Further details regarding the agreements were recorded in the main report's various annexes. Annex I of the report tentatively prescribed the number and character of the personnel of the two missions and the provision for a joint planning staff. The U.S. Military Mission in London was to "collaborate with the Joint Planning Subcommittee of the War Cabinet" and the British Military Mission in Washington would "collaborate with the United States Joint Planning Committee." Annex 3 contained the "United States – British Commonwealth Joint Basic War Plan"; Section III of this Annex defined the composition and role of the Associated Air Forces. The provisions of the final Report followed the general lines of the draft by the British delegates, although in some instances they were less precise; probably in the interests of

[75] Rough Draft of Anglo-American Agreement, 26 March 1941, PRO AIR 75/66.

increased flexibility and more adaptability. For example, where Slessor and the British delegates proposed American air units operating as a formation within RAF Bomber Command, the final report suggested that the Commander of the U.S. Army Forces in Great Britain would have the authority to coordinate with the War Office and Air Ministry the operational control of all tasked forces.[76]

The general subject of air policy relating to supply and allocation of aircraft was considered of such immediate and vital importance as to deserve special attention. A subcommittee consisting of Slessor, Captain Ramsay, and Colonel McNarney was appointed to consider and report on the subject. Their recommendations, outlined in a special report entitled "United States – British Staff Conversations Air Policy, ABC-2," had a close bearing on the future development of the Anglo-American air power relationship. The Air Subcommittee submitted the following report and recommendations: "In conditions under which the British Isles no longer were available as a base for air operation against the Axis powers, an air force of 54 combat groups, plus the necessary personnel and facilities to undertake an expansion to 100 combat groups, is the minimum strength required by the United States Army for its proportionate effort in achieving the air security of United States interests."[77]

In principle, the RAF programs for the equipment and maintenance of existing and new units were based on: "the output from production in the British Commonwealth and the output of the approved British 14,375 and 12,000 airplane programs from United

---

[76] Final Report, Annex 1 and 3, 27 March 1941, PRO AIR 9/144.
[77] Air Agreement, 29 March 1941, PRO AIR 75/65.

States industry. Until such time as the United States may enter the war, the entire output from such new capacity should be made available for release to the British." Slessor endeavored for a flexible arrangement: "If the United States enters the war, thereafter the output from such new capacity should be derived among the Associated Powers as the Military situation may require and circumstances may permit." For planning purposes Slessor and the Air Committee asserted that the rate of RAF and AAC expansion largely depended upon the ability of the two nations to provide adequate numbers of aircraft. The ABC-2 Agreement presupposed that the United Kingdom should assume that aircraft production would be divided approximately on a 50/50 basis between the United States and British Commonwealth.[78]

The ABC-2 document contained an appendix entitled "The Slessor Agreement" which stated: "At the United States-British Staff Conversations the following allocation of aircraft ABC.2; was agreed in principle: 1. Prior to U.S. entry into war. Britain to receive: - (i) 100% British production. (ii) sufficient from existing U.S. production capacity to realise approved programme (the '26,000' programme). (iii) 100% new U.S. production. The U.S. to receive balance of existing production less allocations made to countries other than Britain. 2. Subsequent to U.S. entry into war. Allocation unchanged except that new production is then to be divided on a 50/50 basis between Britain and U.S." The general position of British rights under the Slessor Agreement was somewhat vague, and related explicitly to planning assumptions rather than to actual releases of aircraft from U.S. Army Air Corps contracts. It was true that the implication

[78] Ibid., 29 March 1941.

of ABC-2 was contingent on certain specific allocations being made to the RAF and that all allocations to other nations was the burden of the United States and not Britain. On the other hand, it must be remembered that a large proportion of the aircraft in the "26,000 programme" were not part of Lend-Lease but contained within U.S. Army appropriations. ABC-2 referred to allocation to Britain of a "continuing output from U.S. capacity now existing or approved" as being contingent on what "the Military situation may require and circumstances may permit". The agreement similarly refers to the allocation of 100 per cent of new capacity prior to U.S. entry into war as being available to us "in principle" and "subject to periodical review".[79]

Slessor encountered the wrath of the formidable Admiral Turner on 27 March 1941 when the Report was brought forth to the entire delegation. In *Bargaining for Supremacy*, Leutze describes Turner's reaction to the Air proposal and his unwillingness to accept a separate report as the two delegations assembled for the closing session on 27 March. "Kelly Turner, who did not reserve his acerbity for the British, went through the roof. Why, he wanted to know should the needs of the air forces be given special consideration? He did not accept the answer that Slessor and McNarney gave, so he refused to sign anything. In Bellairs's words, a 'standup fight' ensued. Slessor was fully as obdurate as Turner, and the 'closing session' turned out be the session before the closing."[80] Slessor described the confrontation with Admiral Turner in his memoirs:

> We had an extremely difficult time with Rear-Admiral R. K. Turner ... I became very fond of Kelly Turner and had a great respect for his ability .... at the very last moment

[79] The Slessor Agreement, March 1941, PRO AIR 45/12; Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 1, pp. 134-135.
[80] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy,* p. 247.

> Kelly Turner announced that the Navy Department (alias Kelly Turner) had decided that the agreement on air collaboration, A.B.C.-2, should not after all be included with the reports of the A.B.C. conversations, but should be dealt with separately. I realized that if the air agreement which had been hammered out with such blood, sweat, toil and tears, did not have the full standing and authority of an A.B.C. document, its validity would be most dangerously weakened, and felt bound to say that in that case I could not sign any of the documents and the matter must be referred to the British Chiefs of Staff. So the meeting broke up in some confusion.[81]

The next day Slessor and Turner continued to argue the need for a separate air agreement. Historians conjecture that Ghormley and Stark exerted pressure on Turner to back-down from his demands in order to salvage the agreement. The objections were withdrawn, and all documents were signed, and Admiral Bellairs offered a farewell speech.[82] Slessor stated: "I must take this opportunity of paying the most sincere tribute to the far-sighted generosity of the Americans in working out with us this plan and the subsequent more detailed allocation of aircraft to the R.A.F., which became known for the sake of brevity as the 'Slessor Agreement'."[83]

With the completion of the reports and the signatures on 28 March 1941 of the joint letter of transmittal to the United States and British Chiefs of Staff, the work of the delegates was complete. By the actual wording of the transmittal, the staff conference recommended "that action be initiated without delay by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom." Taken together, the recommendations and conclusions as recorded in the Main Report (ABC-1), in its Annexes, and in the Air Policy Report (ABC-2) were applicable to almost every aspect of air collaboration between the United

---

[81] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 356.
[82] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy,* pp. 247-248.
[83] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 358.

States and Britain. The ABC-1 and ABC-2 documents probably had a more positive effect on the shape of things to come than any other similar documents.[84]

Slessor transmitted a highly classified message to Air Marshal Portal following the conclusion of the ABC-1 Conversations. He reported that "the Main Report and Annexes were signed to-day together with a separate report on air policy. Moreover we had to overcome strenuous opposition on the part of certain Naval members of the U.S. Committee to including the subject in the purview of these conversations at all ... This explains the peculiar lay-out of report and undue prominence given to U.S. Naval aviation."[85] Slessor also provided the following strategic assumptions that could be drawn from the ABC Agreement: "1. U.S. enters war in 1941. 2. War will not end in 1942 but Associated strategy will aim at final offensive in spring and summer 1943. This rather pessimistic assumption necessary since main object of appreciation is basis for new capacity which cannot come into picture till well on in 1942. 4. British air expansion; on assumption that U.S. is in war early this year and during 1942, is building up her air forces for maximum effort in Spring of 1943."[86]

Before departing Washington D.C., in his words, he still had some "loose ends to be tidied up and a few more jobs to do." At the end of the staff conversations Slessor took part in additional discussions with President Roosevelt, Secretaries Stimson and Knox, General Marshall and Admiral Stark to discuss matters of strategic policy.[87]

---

[84] United States – British Staff Conversations Report, 27 March 1941, PRO AIR 9/144.
[85] Air Agreement: Signed by Slessor and the Americans, March 1941, PRO AIR 75/65.
[86] Message, Slessor to Portal: Policy Clarification, 1 April 1941, PRO AIR 75/64.
[87] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 359; Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision,* vol. 1, p. 461.

Slessor prepared a record of his private Oval Office meeting with President Roosevelt on Monday 7 April 1941:

> The President said he considered the staff conversations had been very valuable. He had been kept informed of their progress and had also been told of our meeting with Mr. Stimson, Colonel Knox, and the Chiefs of Staff. He was particularly concerned with how to relieve our shipping difficulties ... I emphasized that one of our main troubles was the question of ferry pilots which were already a heavy drain on our resources, and said we would welcome any assistance he could give us in this respect. I then opened up on the subject of heavy bomber requirements. The President said he entirely agreed as to their importance ... The President said I must remember the U.S. was not yet actually at war, and it was extraordinarily difficult to get the tempo of National effort necessary to full production when one is officially at peace. It was impossible to get the psychological atmosphere and momentum essential to a real war effort.[88]

Slessor later provided a more personal account of his meeting with FDR: "A few days before I left for home I was sent for by Mr. Roosevelt. I have never ceased to marvel at the way Presidents of the United States seem to be able to find time amid their crowding responsibilities to see the most unimportant people ... Mr. Roosevelt had the extraordinary knack of making one feel that he was really pleased to see one, as well as an infectious enthusiasm about anything he was at all interested in. We spoke of the staff conversations, which the President said he thought had been really valuable, and he had evidently seen the record of our meeting with Secretaries Stimson and Knox." Following his meetings, Slessor was finally able to leave the United States by Clipper for Lisbon on 10 April 1941.[89]

Shortly after his return to the Air Ministry in London, Slessor placed on record some of his personal impressions gained during five months of association with United States military and government personnel. Regarding the agreements just concluded,

---

[88] Record of Slessor's Conversation with President Roosevelt, 7 April 1941, PRO AIR 75/52.
[89] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* pp. 363-364.

Slessor was emphatic that American authorities had been very cooperative: "They had deliberately restricted the expansion of their own air forces in order that the British, who were actually fighting, should have all the aircraft the Army Air Corps could possibly afford." Slessor also addressed the subject of a separate air force. He was consulted on the subject of a separate American air force and responded to American airmen that independence would eventually come, but the first step must be the establishment of a suitable Air Staff within the War Department.[90] He candidly recorded the deficiencies in America's defense system but stated "there is no doubt that the combination of the United States and the British Empire will be absolutely unbeatable." Slessor perceived problems in the supreme direction and coordination of defense matters. "...the President who, without the slightest doubt, is a very great man and is fired with the one intense determination to see the Axis beaten ... he is a man who is very reluctant to delegate his vast authority and this inevitably leads to delay and confusion ... There is nothing in the way of a War Cabinet system as we know it in the United Kingdom."[91]

In his analysis for the British Chiefs of Staff of the ABC-1 Staff Conversations, Slessor urged the Prime Minister to persuade Roosevelt that "we had reason to believe that professional opinion in the States is by no means whole-heartedly behind the Chief of Naval Operations (or rather, Rear-Admiral Turner, an able but opinionated and pig-headed officer who, as Director of Plans, we believe wears the trousers in the Navy Department) in his determination of U.S. Naval policy in the Pacific and Far East.

---

[90] Slessor commentary on the American military, April 1941, PRO AIR 75/66.
[91] Ibid., April 1941.

Briefly, that policy is to retain an enormous Fleet in being at Hawaii on the obsolete theory that naval warfare is today still a matter of Grand Fleets fighting a Trafalgar or a Jutland."[92] Slessor affirmed that the Army Air Corps was adopting a realistic and strategically sound attitude, as reflected in the air agreement: "They are laying the foundations of a big expansion in the form of the necessary training organisation, of which they are giving us a substantial share. But they are deferring the equipment of the first-line units as long as they are not actively in the war, in order to build up British air strength; and when they come in they will make the bulk of their air force available to help win the war in Europe." Slessor admitted that his analysis was "a bit crude and over-simplified" but was essential to demonstrate that vast industrial and economic resources were necessary in the struggle against Hitler.[93]

Slessor was instrumental in the establishment of Anglo-American Military Missions. He believed the earliest possible establishment of the British Mission in Washington was of the utmost importance. Slessor explained in a memorandum for the VCAS that "the Air Agreement contains a clause to the effect that the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, in consultation with the three heads of the British Military Mission in U.S., shall jointly advise the President, on military grounds, on the subject of the allocation of defence articles under the Lend-Lease Bill."[94] He maintained that this represented the first step in the establishment not only of some system of strategic coordination in the

---

[92] Slessor report of Air Agreement to COS, 20 April 1941, PRO AIR 75/65.
[93] Ibid., 20 April 1941.
[94] Memorandum, Slessor to Freeman (VCAS): Commentary on Air Agreement, 20 April 1941, PRO AIR 75/65.

U.S.A. but also of a joint machinery for the strategic coordination of the war effort of U.S.A. and the British Commonwealth as Allies.[95]

The inclusion of the U.S. Army Air Corps in the two-service organization in Washington had become clearly apparent to Slessor and his British delegates. He recommended to the British Chiefs of Staff the addition of a senior air officer in the London Mission. Slessor also endorsed the whole issue of an associated Mediterranean strategy that could be considered in consultation with the Chiefs of Staff in Washington and London.[96] He maintained that "the British Joint Services Mission became the nucleus of the British side of the Combined Chiefs of Staff by whom, under the Prime Minister and President, the higher direction of the combined war effort was conducted in an intimate and integrated manner without precedent in the history of alliances."[97]

On 1 May 1941, the ABC-1 Agreement came before the British Chiefs of Staff for their consideration and signature. After confirming the interpretation given by the United States Chiefs of Staff, they agreed provisionally to all the conclusions and recommendations and submitted the report for the approval of the War Cabinet. They also approved the air agreement recorded in ABC-2. In accordance with report provisions, the Chiefs of Staff immediately furnished instructions that the Director of Naval Intelligence should go to Washington to coordinate all forms of intelligence work and directed the service departments to appoint the necessary staff to form the nucleus of the British Military Mission to be sent to Washington. They also expressed to the

---

[95] Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision*, vol. 2, pp. 574-575.
[96] Slessor report of Air Agreement to British COS, 20 April 1941, PRO AIR 75/65.
[97] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 352.

United States Chiefs of Staff a hope that the American Mission in London would contain a senior air officer who could collaborate with the British Air Staff at a high level.[98]

GENERAL ARNOLD'S VISIT TO BRITAIN

One of the main reasons for General Arnold's visit to Britain in April 1941 was his desire to see the European air war through the eyes of Air Marshal Portal and ascertain from a long-range point of view how best to assist the RAF. On 12 April General Arnold arrived in England accompanied by his aide, Major Peter Quesada. The RAF extended a cordial welcome, and Arnold spent the first week visiting various RAF operational headquarters and flying stations.[99]

During Arnold's stay in Britain, he attended two important formal conferences with Slessor and the Air Staff. The first of which took place on 13 April 1941 to discuss pilot training. At the second conference on 23 April, they reviewed aircraft production in America. The 13 April 1941 meeting took place at the Air Ministry, and was chaired by Air Marshal A. G. R. Garrod. The meeting dealt mainly with the difficulties of providing flying training facilities in the United States. Garrod also indicated to Arnold that the RAF needed assistance with the Atlantic ferry organization. The British required 100 pilots immediately and up to 300 later in the year; all of which supposedly would be withdrawn from operational units. Also on the meeting agenda were RAF requirements for pilots to ferry aircraft from factories to storage units and from storage

---

[98] Slessor report of Air Agreement to British COS, 20 April 1941, PRO AIR 75/65.
[99] H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (New York, 1949), pp. 215-217.

units to squadrons within the United Kingdom. In addition, the British asked for an additional 200 pilots for the Takoradi ferry route, as well as urgently needed instructor pilots, observers, and radio mechanics. General Arnold tentatively offered 300 skilled ferry pilots through subsidiary American civilian airlines and an undetermined number of pilots for internal ferrying and the Takoradi route. The Air Ministry explained to General Arnold that the Ministry of Aircraft Production was responsible for ferry arrangements and that final plans would need to be approved by Lord Beaverbrook.[100] Slessor provided a summary of the Arnold meeting: "He is expanding his pilot training organisation in the U.S.A between now and the end of the present year, with a further expansion in view during 1942 ... The U.S.A. Government will provide free of charge the aircraft, the aerodromes, the accommodation and the instructors ... One reason that has enabled General Arnold to make this very generous offer is that it will help him to build up a much expanded training organisation which he foresees that he will eventually need for the training of U.S.A. crews for his own expanding Force."[101]

General Arnold agreed to place at British disposal one-third of the capacity at primary, basic, and advanced Army Air Corps schools in the U.S. The flying training program totaled thirty weeks with a total of 240 flying hours in the three courses -- 100 hours more than the corresponding RAF courses. Entries would commence in June; Arnold also mentioned that after December 1941, a further expansion of the training organization was planned that would yield a total pilot output of 30,000 per year. The

---

[100] Notes on Air Training in U. S., 13 April 1941, PRO AIR 8/378, Takoradi route refers to the American-Middle East ferry operation.
[101] RAF Delegation: History and Organization, Annex C, p. 2, PRO AIR 45/2.

primary training would be carried out at civilian schools, and the British Government would bear responsibility for all related costs.[102]

General Arnold initiated the second conference on 23 April to discuss whether aircraft production in the United States required revision in light of changed or changing circumstances. So far as the RAF was concerned, long-range bombing was the only means of direct attack against the enemy. Arnold became so fully convinced of the soundness of the British viewpoints that he asked Slessor to collaborate with him in drafting a telegram to the War Department expressing this conviction: "In the past eighteen months the main development of the RAF had been defensive. During this period Fighter and Coastal Commands doubled their strength. Development of Bomber Command had been comparatively small and retarded by need for reinforcing the Middle East. To establish a decisive measure of air superiority the Air Ministry planned for a heavy bomber force of at least 4,000 first-line aircraft by the Spring of 1943."[103]

Slessor determined that procurement of heavy bombers transcended all other aircraft needs, and to meet this requirement the British were prepared to sacrifice a proportion of deliveries of smaller bombers and fighters. The RAF primarily needed heavy bombers possessing range, armament, and striking power necessary to engage all German war industries. Slessor asserted that production of light bombers was of secondary importance, and abundant deliveries of these would in no way make up for the failure to produce heavy bombers: "The achievement of a striking force of 4,000 heavy

---

[102] Notes on Air Training in U. S., 13 April 1941, PRO AIR 8/378; Copp, *Forged in Fire,* p. 124.
[103] Message from British Embassy in Washington to Air Ministry: Heavy Bomber Requirements, 26 April 1941, PRO AIR 9/158.

bombers by the Spring of 1943 is regarded as the supreme requirement in our defence programme. The most drastic methods are justified, and are indeed essential, to ensure that the necessary supply of heavy bombers is made available. Everything depends on the extent to which our hopes of home production are fulfilled and on the success which attends the efforts of the United States administration to stimulate production of heavy bombers in that country."[104] Slessor also assisted the Prime Minister in formulating a letter to President Roosevelt advocating an increased RAF requirement for heavy bombers:

> The changing circumstances of the war have compelled us to examine afresh our requirements for the defeat of Germany, and I must inform you, Mr. President, of the new conclusions at which we have arrived, and enlist your aid in making certain necessary adjustment in the programmes of armament production, in which the United States will play a decisive part ... We have recently had with us General Arnold, the Chief of your Army Air Corps, with whom we have discussed these needs fully and frankly, and who will be in a position to lay before you many considerations which I believe had his most complete understanding and agreement ... Victory can only be achieved by an overwhelming air predominance, supported and nourished by the staying power of the navy and her merchant fleet. Air predominance can only be won by the bomber force ... Our task during the coming two years must be to raise the intensity of our bomber offensive against Germany to an intolerable pitch ... I have instructed the Air Ministry and Ministry of Aircraft Production to aim at a first-line bomber force of not less than 4,000 long-range bombers by the Spring of 1943.[105]

The byproduct of General Arnold's visit to Britain and Churchill's letter to FDR provided new momentum for RAF pilot training in America. General Arnold's 'Six-Schools' scheme offered training for 180 pilots per month at civilian schools in the United States. Arnold offered to lease to Britain six civilian schools containing 260 elementary training aircraft and 285 advanced aircraft. British officials in London

---

[104] Ibid., 26 April 1941.
[105] Slessor draft message for Churchill to Roosevelt: Aircraft Production, 27 April 1941, PRO AIR 9/158.

naturally welcomed this offer for flying training facilities in America. Slessor stated in a letter to the Air Ministry that "after preliminary discussion within the War Department, Arnold without advance notice to me called into Washington six of the best civilian school operators in U.S. to discuss this matter confidentially ...." Slessor was most appreciative of Arnold's proposal: "... his offer of cooperation in the provision of aircraft, and the operators for their proposals to operate training schools on our behalf ... The greatest merit of proposals lie in promise of provision of proper training aircraft ... Scheme is at present entirely flexible, and next move is between us and the operators." As a further contribution to British training, the United States also agreed to accept RAF personnel at the Navigation School in Miami.[106]

The U.S. Embassy in London also furnished the Air Ministry with General Arnold's maintenance proposal. "The U.S. Army is ready to furnish competent lead men for maintenance and servicing crews in the following ratios: 1 for each single engine fighter up to 10 planes, 11/2 for each two engine fighter up to an aggregate of 10 planes and 2 for each heavy bomber up to a total of 10 planes." Arnold's invitation was made with the following provision: "[if] a definite agreement is effected with British authorities ... no duties other than supervisory will be assigned these men and that they will be actually used."[107] Sinclair immediately notified the American Ambassador and accepted Arnold's offer. Thus by the end of June 1941, agreements had been reached

---

[106] Slessor report on Flying Training Facilities in U. S., 6 March 1941, PRO AIR 75/67; Training Schemes, 7 March 1941, PRO AIR 8/378; RAF Delegation: History and Organization, Section IV, Appendix 4, PRO AIR 45/2, Training of pilots for the RAF started in 1940 with the training of Americans volunteering for service in Britain and small numbers of new trainees from Britain. They were trained at the Spartan School in Tulsa, the Dallas School, and the Los Angeles School.

[107] Letter, Ambassador Winant to Sinclair: Support from Arnold, 8 May 1941, PRO AIR 8/496.

and recorded that would enable the RAF to benefit fully from aircraft servicing and maintenance from the premier technical experts in America. If any difficulties were still encountered in bringing the American-produced aircraft into efficient service for the RAF, at least they could not be attributed to lack of full cooperation.[108]

President Roosevelt appointed W. Averell Harriman to visit London as his personal representative and expedite the flow of war materials from the United States to Britain. Harriman arrived in London on 15 March 1941. The archives reveal a letter from Harriman to Slessor regarding Churchill's telegram to Roosevelt:

> Dear Slessor. I am returning here with telegram from the Prime Minister to the President, with certain notes thereon. A cable has been received from Lovett indicating that although study had not been completed every effort is being made to find a way to increase heavy bomber production to meet your requirements. He stated that the matter would go to the President for final determination. Yours Sincerely, W. A. Harriman.[109]

On 10 May 1941 "the Former Naval Person" (Prime Minister Churchill) sent a dispatch to President Roosevelt:

> I expect you are now acquainted with the splendid offer which General Arnold made to us of one third of the rapidly expanding capacity for pilot training in the United States to be filled with pupils from here. We have made active preparations and the first 550 of our young men are now ready to leave, as training was to have begun early next month. A second batch of 550 will follow quickly on their heels. I now understand there are legal difficulties. I hope, Mr. President, that these are not serious as it would be very disappointing to us and would upset our arrangements if there were now to be delay. General Arnold's offer was an unexpected and very welcome addition to our training facilities. Such ready-made capacity of aircraft, airfields and instructors all in balance we could not obtain to the same extent and in the same time by any other means. It will greatly accelerate our effort in the air.
> W. S. C.[110]

---

[108] Letter, Sinclair to Winant, 9 May 1941, PRO AIR 8/496.
[109] Letter, W. Averell Harriman to Slessor, 30 April 1941, PRO AIR 9/158.
[110] Letter, Churchill to Roosevelt, 10 May 1941, PRO AIR 8/378.

The effect of these training programs upon the expanding Anglo-American air power alliance needs no emphasis. The interchange of ideas between British and American military personnel was an integral part of the scheme visualized by officers such as Slessor and Arnold. There can be little doubt that British experience had a considerable influence upon the eventual shape of the U.S. Army Air Corps. RAF training in the United States also brought to that country many young airmen who for the first time had an opportunity to interact with Americans. The United States' proverbial hospitality extended to British trainees with great generosity, and they in turn left many Americans with a positive impression of the RAF and their country. The effects of this important byproduct emerged later as greater understanding developed between the two nations.[111]

CONCLUSION

The record of events relating to the exchange of information between the United States and Britain during 1940 reveals a successful process. Considering the obstacles erected by Lord Beaverbrook to protect British military secrets, Anglo-American relations were characterized by a remarkable degree of candor. By April 1941 there was

---

[111] RAF Delegation: History and Organization, Section IV, p. 1, PRO AIR 45/2, By the end of November 1944, the following RAF pilots had graduated in the United States: From British Flying Training Schools (5,410), From "Arnold Scheme" Schools (4,370), From Pensacola Naval Air Station (1,842), Total (11,622), In addition, 1,182 Observers were trained by Pan American Airways School in Miami and a number of radio-gunners were trained by the Navy in Jacksonville. The British Flying Training Schools commenced American operations in June 1941. From the historian's point of view, one of the most interesting aspects of these schools was that training of RAF personnel in America was initiated six months before Pearl Harbor without arousing adverse political comment, called for much circumspection and tact by all concerned. The United States Air Corps instituted the Trans-Atlantic Air Service on 1 Jul 1941. The inaugural aircraft was a Consolidated B-24.

little regarding the British war effort that was not available to responsible officials in the Roosevelt Administration. Certainly nothing was withheld which could have furthered the joint war effort in any way.

Slessor's overriding consideration during his mission to America was to obtain the maximum American assistance, particularly in heavy bombers, as quickly as possible. The British hoped the RAF would be given priority in every form of direct and indirect assistance and that preparations for an American military buildup would not interfere with this aim. Slessor expected to build up the RAF quickly and encourage the Americans to do the same, but without conflicting with British requirements.[112] Slessor unquestionably enhanced the Anglo-American air power alliance during his five months in America. He positively effected the exchange of information on matters relating to aircraft production and supply and facilitated pilot training and aircraft ferry negotiations in Washington and Canada.

In retrospect, ABC-1 stands out as one of the most important military documents of the war. The purpose of the ABC Staff Conference was to determine the best methods by which the armed forces of the United States and the British Commonwealth could defeat the Axis Powers, should the United States be compelled to resort to war. The Anglo-American delegations coordinated on broad lines and reached agreements concerning the methods and nature of military cooperation, including the allocation of the principal areas of responsibility, the major lines of the military strategy to be pursued

[112] Instruction for British Air Representatives, 15 December 1940, PRO AIR 9/155.

by both nations, the strength of the forces which each may be able to commit, and the determination of satisfactory command arrangements.[113]

Slessor asserted that "these conversations are worth recording in some detail since they are of great historical interest, not only as the first of their kind between British and Americans but also because … the general strategic concept then agreed—while it became at times a bit frayed at the edges—did continue to govern our combined action throughout the war, in spite of such major developments as the decimation of the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour."[114] Slessor believed that the Staff Conversations were successful in making arrangement for America's eventual entry into the war. Both countries had gained an excellent understanding of each other's military positions and points of view.[115]

As reflected in the ABC-2 agreement, Slessor believed that the highest possible number of heavy long-range bombers should be provided both as formed units of the Army Air Corps and as part of the programme of supply for the RAF. The British delegation realized that their proposals might result in some retardation of Army Air Corps expansion, but believed that the course proposed would best contribute to victory. During the Conversations, Slessor wanted to ascertain the extent and limitations of the United States contribution, the nature of this contribution, and the operational roles, command, organization and training facilities of the Army Air Corps.[116]

---

[113] United States – British Staff Conversations Report, 27 March 1941, PRO AIR 9/144.
[114] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 343.
[115] Letter, Slessor to Portal: Joint Planning, 1 April 1941, PRO AIR 8/447.
[116] R. J. Overy, The Air War 1939-1945 (Chelsea, Michigan, 1991), pp. 63-64.

A concomitant feature of the conversations in London during August 1940 and the ABC-1 meetings of 1941 was a greatly increased familiarity of American staff officers with the form and procedures of British institutions. The ABC-1 Agreement was a fitting conclusion for the important formative phase of Anglo-American air power collaboration and a harbinger of things to come: "When the ABC agreement was signed, nine months remained before the United States actually entered the war and many details needed attention … the Prime Minister, for instance, was advised that the Americans regarded and quoted the ABC agreement "as the Bible of our joint collaboration."[117] Slessor affirmed in his retirement that "the Americans performed marvels, and to those of us in particular who remember those early discussions in Washington it is still almost incredible to look back upon the subsequently gigantic achievements of the United States aircraft industry, and the unprecedented generosity and far-sighted wisdom of President Roosevelt's great conception of Lend-Lease, to which the Royal Air Force owed so much as the war progressed and the great programme swung into its stride."[118]

---

[117] Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 253.
[118] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 330.

CHAPTER V

ANGLO-AMERICAN AIR POLICY, 1942 - 1943

INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 1942, Air Marshal Portal created the new position of Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (ACAS) for Policy to take advantage of Jack Slessor's talents and experience. Slessor had just finished an intense ten months commanding No.5 Group, RAF Bomber Command when in April 1942 he took the post of ACAS (Policy). Slessor stated that "the functions of the new appointment were, as far as I can remember, never clearly defined in written terms of reference ... actually I found myself doing, in a field enormously widened by the global extension of the war into a true World War, very much what I had been doing for about four years between 1937 and the spring of 1941."[1]

In order to understand the Anglo-American air power alliance during Slessor's tenure as ACAS (P) from April 1942 to January 1943, it is important to correctly appreciate the underlying strategic environment. The broad principles of Anglo-American strategy were determined with the ABC-1 Agreement and then reaffirmed at the Washington Conference in January 1942. It was decided at both meetings that because Germany was the predominant member of the Axis, the Atlantic and Europe would be the decisive theaters.[2] During the early months of 1942, Allied strategy was centered on tentative plans and preparations for a Second Front in 1943 or, given certain

---

[1] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 397.
[2] Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany*, vol. 1, p. 353.

eventualities, in 1942. It was not until late summer that this policy was temporarily shelved for an Anglo-American campaign in North West Africa in the fall of 1942. The subsequent decision to exploit the rapid successes gained in that area by striking at what Winston Churchill termed "the underbelly of the Axis" made contemplation of a large-scale invasion of the Continent for the moment impractical.[3] Accordingly, attention was again focussed on a momentous Anglo-American bomber offensive from the United Kingdom in 1943 to prepare for a Second Front in the spring of 1944. The Allied air assault on Europe would represent the de facto "second front" until the insertion of ground forces on the continent. Thus, when the Casablanca Conference was concluded in January 1943, the course of Allied strategy had been finally determined.[4]

As far as the Anglo-American air alliance was concerned, the RAF was virtually alone in conducting combat operations in the European Theater in 1942. American bomber groups began arriving in Great Britain during the spring of 1942, flying their first operational sorties over occupied territory in August. Not until 1943, however, were American air forces in a position to undertake deep daylight penetration missions into Germany itself. Meanwhile, the RAF bomber force was rapidly growing in numbers, tactical knowledge, and experience, and continued to strike with all its available strength at the major cities in Nazi Germany. It is sufficient to say that a very close liaison had been developing between the respective Anglo-American air staffs since the early days of the war. Their relationship became more pronounced with the

---

[3] R. J. Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York, 1995), p. 117.
[4] Ibid., p. 114.

initiation of the ABC conversations in January 1941. During 1942, Slessor and the other Anglo-American air force officers coordinated broad strategic plans for the employment of joint forces and reached agreements for military cooperation, areas of responsibility, principles of command, and aircraft production.[5]

THE USAAF IN BRITAIN

The implications of the 7 December 1941 attack by Japan on Pearl Harbor, and the subsequent declaration of war upon the United States by Germany and Italy obviously extended to the very core of the Anglo-American alliance. Not surprisingly within a few days Churchill, together with Lord Beaverbrook, and the three British Chiefs of Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound and Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal left for Washington. Their mission was to discuss with Roosevelt and his military staff how best to wage war since Japan had become a threat and the United States an active belligerent.[6]

Conversations between Roosevelt, Churchill, and their advisors took place between 23 December 1941 and 14 January 1942. The high-level discussions included relatively few references to air force matters; apparently a sufficient measure of agreement on policies and procedures had already been reached through the work of Anglo-American staffs during the preceding months. In effect, the agreements reached regarding the employment of United States air forces from bases in the British Isles

---

[5] R. J. Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945* (Chelsea, Michigan, 1991), p. 64.
[6] Washington War Conference, December 1941, AFHRC document 168.7026-4.

simply confirmed those reached during the ABC-1 agreement in Washington, hammered out almost ten months earlier.[7]

The War Department in Washington proposed that a United States Bomber Command should be established in England as soon as possible. On 3 January 1942, Major General James E. Chaney was designated commanding general of the United States Army Air Forces in the British Isles (USAFBI). Less than a month later, on 31 January, Brigadier General Ira C. Eaker was designated bomber commander for USAFBI, setting the stage for the first American Air Headquarters in Europe (US Army Bomber Command) to be established on 22 February with its headquarters temporarily located at RAF Bomber Command, High Wycombe. There, General Eaker and a skeleton staff of thirteen officers inaugurated his shadow command to study British methods and prepare for the arrival of American bomber forces. On 15 April, he took over Wycombe Abbey (one of the most famous girls' public schools in England), where he set up his new headquarters a few miles from, and in close collaboration with RAF Bomber Command.[8]

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, the buildup of the U.S. Eighth Air Force forged ahead under the direction of General Spaatz. On 5 May, Spaatz formally assumed command of the force, although he did not reach his new British headquarters in Bushy Park until June 1942. In the meantime, the headquarters at High Wycombe

---

[7] White House and Chief of Staff Conference, 21 December 1941-14 January 1942, AFHRC MICFILM 28243.

[8] James Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here": General Ira Eaker and the Command of the Air* (Montgomery, Alabama, 2000), p. 125.

remained the ranking USAAF Command in Britain and Eaker was charged with preparing for the reception of all air force units.[9]

One of the major results of the Washington deliberations was to drastically reorganize the War Department. Americans decided to establish the Army Air Forces, the Army Ground Forces, and the Services of Supply on a coequal footing, each with a commanding general at its head. In the Army Air Forces, the positions of Chief of the Air Corps and Commanding General Air Force Combat Command were discontinued, and their functions, duties, and powers were assigned to the Commanding General, Army Air Forces. This reorganization was put into effect on 9 March 1942. Certainly no documentary evidence has been found to indicate that the British staff in any way influenced the air forces reorganization. British officers in Washington and London, including Jack Slessor, always avoided offering any opinions or stating any views on matters affecting only the American forces.[10]

The American and RAF Bomber Commands soon established a spirit of mutual cooperation and assistance. The RAF gave considerable help to the Americans in all fields of operational and administrative activity and, probably most of all, in the field of intelligence. RAF officers and personnel were loaned to the Americans to counsel and train American intelligence staffs until they were firmly established. In *The Air War 1939-1945* Overy states that "much intelligence came from the RAF, particularly on transportation and the aircraft industry, and was handed over to American air

---

[9] Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe,* p. 71.
[10] Kent Roberts Greenfield, *American Strategy in World War II: A Reconsideration* (Baltimore, 1963), p. 89.

intelligence ..."[11] Craven and Cate noted that the "heaviest indebtedness of the Eighth to its British Allies fell, perhaps, in the field of intelligence. When war began, the AAF probably was more deficient in its provision for intelligence than in any other phase of its activities -- a deficiency brought home with increasing force to General Eaker and his staff during their study of the RAF Bomber Command in February and March."[12]

In addition, when the American air units arrived without essential equipment and supplies, the RAF furnished their requirements in ammunition, bombs, vehicles, spares, flying clothing, and other wartime necessities. Eaker paid a very warm tribute to the British in a report to Spaatz on 19 June 1942: "The British have co-operated one hundred per cent in every regard. They have lent us personnel when we had none.... they have furnished us liaison officers for Intelligence Operations and Supply; they furnished us with transportation, they have housed and fed our people and they have answered promptly and willingly all our requisitions; in addition, they have made available to us for study their most secret devices and documents." [13] Eaker was extremely proud of the relations established between the USAAF and RAF, and was hopeful that incoming commanders and staffs would maintain them.

In a further step towards coordination, Slessor established a series of weekly conferences between staffs of the Eighth Air Force and the Air Ministry. They were inaugurated at the end of August 1942 to meditate problems of operational and administrative policy and procedure. Inevitably, differences and difficulties

---

[11] Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945,* p. 111.
[12] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 1, pp. 623-624.
[13] Ibid., p. 625.

subsequently arose, but they did not shake the strong basis of mutual regard and cooperation between the two air forces.[14]

Slessor presided over a combined conference on 8 May 1942 with four Air Staff members, General Chaney, and three of his staff officers. Slessor outlined a plan for the location of the United States heavy bomber units as proposed by the Air Ministry and strongly supported by RAF Bomber Command. The units would be accommodated in the Huntingdon area and would be expanded from there into East Anglia as more Bomber Groups arrived from America, at which time the RAF units in East Anglia would take the place of the American units in the Huntingdon area. It was agreed that the AAF units could also be extended into Cambridgeshire. Slessor believed the advantages of this scheme were that RAF Bomber Command would not be divided into two distinct parts and that the American bomber units would all be located in a unified area in East Anglia, an area to which the U.S. fighter forces could move as soon as they were trained.[15]

By the end of July 1942, enough American aircraft had arrived in the United Kingdom to make the inauguration of active operations by the USAAF a possibility in the near future. The problem of determining how the combined efforts of the Anglo-American air forces should be directed and coordinated had become more than just a subject of academic interest. On 30 July, Eaker wrote to Air Marshal Sit Arthur T. Harris at Bomber Command on the subject of cooperation: "Agreement has been

---

[14] Hastings, *Bomber Command*, p. 184.
[15] Slessor Policy Message, 9 May 1942, PRO AIR 75/10.

reached between our two Governments that the two Bomber Commands should operate by close liaison and co-ordination."[16] To facilitate this end, Eaker and Slessor had already agreed that the USAAF staff should study the operational practices and doctrine of Bomber Command. Eaker proposed that he continue to attend operational conferences at Bomber Command headquarters, that a senior American staff officer coordinate directly with the Operations Section of Bomber Command, and that the closest reciprocal cooperation be maintained between staff sections of each headquarters.[17]

To turn principles into practice, positive steps towards bringing about personal collaboration envisioned by the Chiefs of Staff were taken during the second half of August 1942. Slessor realized that with the American Eighth Air Force commencing bombing operations, closer association between the staffs of the AAF and Air Ministry would be essential. He coordinated with Eaker and RAF Bomber Command to conduct a series of weekly combined meetings. Initially, the meetings were confined to operational questions. However, General Spaatz proposed to Air Marshal Harris that administrative problems might also be discussed at these meetings.[18] Craven and Cate postulate in their official history: "Much of the success of that cooperation derived from the friendly personal relations between the two forces."[19]

---

[16] Craven and Cate, eds, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 1, p. 610, Air Marshal Harris commanded RAF Bomber Command from 22 February 1942 to 15 September 1945.
[17] Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, pp. 187-189.
[18] Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, p. 88.
[19] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 2, p. 213.

AIRCRAFT ALLOCATIONS TO THE RAF

During 1942 the Air Ministry and the Army Air Corps engaged in a debate that strained Anglo-American relations. The issue in question was the continued allocation of American built aircraft to the RAF. Indeed, the most important problem facing Slessor when he assumed the post of ACAS (Policy) in April 1942 and probably the most difficult issue he had to deal with during his time on the Air Staff was the assignment of aircraft.

Assignments of aircraft on a short-term basis was not possible, and consequently the Air Ministry and USAAF entered into various agreements covering six months or a year ahead. The first of these, Slessor Agreement, was made long before the United States came into the war. The Americans, who stated that they never recognized the agreement as binding, quickly departed from the allocation schedule. This was followed by the Arnold-Portal Agreement, which was arranged during the Washington Conference in January 1942. The Americans broke this agreement almost as soon as it was made. It was followed, in turn, by the Arnold-Portal-Towers Agreement, signed during the Prime Minister's visit to Washington in June 1942. Slessor stated in a policy memorandum that the Air Ministry "understood that these failures have been mainly caused by a lag in American production which has been passed on to us *pro rata*."[20]

The provisions of ABC-1 had been accepted as fundamental to Anglo-American strategy. Differences of opinion had arisen on certain matters of detail, but these did not affect the essential unanimity of thought on basic principles. Slessor and the British

[20] War Cabinet Document: Workings of Combined Boards, September 1942, PRO AIR 75/10.

understood that the American contribution to the air war in Europe, in the event of their active intervention, would consist of the allocation of aircraft to the RAF and the dispatch of a United States air contingent to Britain. It was the detailed plans for the operation of an American air force in Britain and aircraft procurement with which Slessor was to be concerned upon assuming his new position as policy overlord.[21]

The root of the problem could be found in the arrangements for the allocation of American aircraft to Britain made during the ABC Conversations of early 1941. The section of the ABC-2 Agreement of 29 March 1941 that dealt with allocation of equipment, commonly known as the "Slessor Agreement", provided that all programs of aircraft production should be increased as much as possible, and that while the U.S. remained neutral, top priority for existing American aircraft production would be allocated to the British, who would also receive the entire output from new U.S. production. If America entered the war, then new production would be divided on a fifty-fifty basis between Britain and America.[22] By July 1941, however, the "Slessor Agreement" appeared to be in danger of breaking down for several reasons: in the first place, the need, since the German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, to send aircraft to Russia; second, the growing demands of the expanding U.S. air forces; second, the shift from the production of heavy bombers to medium bombers and fighters in the United States; and finally, the slow pace of industrial expansion.[23]

---

[21] United States-British Staff Conversations Report, 27 March 1941, PRO AIR 9/144.
[22] Air Agreement, 29 March 1941, PRO AIR 75/65.
[23] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 1, pp. 134-135.

After America's entry into the war on 7 December 1941, the assignment of aircraft was one of the most pressing problems facing the Anglo-American leaders meeting in Washington for the ARCADIA Conference. The British realized that the Americans, now active participants in the war, would no longer be willing to subordinate the needs of their air forces to those of the RAF to the extent they had before Pearl Harbor. Arnold and Portal worked out the details of a new agreement on air allocations, the so-called Arnold-Portal Agreement, which they signed on 13 January 1942. They both recognized the impossibility of Britain planning strategy and production based merely on monthly aircraft assignments. Under this agreement, each month for the next six months the British would receive from American production specific numbers of heavy, medium, and light bombers and also fighter, observation, and transport aircraft.[24]

By the end of March 1942, this new understanding began to break down. The main cause of trouble was the failure of American industry to expand as rapidly as had been expected, with resultant shortfalls in production. Thus the British received far fewer aircraft than they required for RAF expansion, training and operations. To the Americans, the percentage of aircraft that the British were receiving under the Arnold-Portal Agreement began to seem extraordinarily high.[25]

On 8 May 1942, Slessor received the disturbing news from Air Marshal Douglas Evill in Washington that General Arnold was proposing a drastic reallocation of aircraft:

---

[24] Prime Minister minutes, Opening Speech for Arnold-Towers Conference, 22 May 1942, Christ Church, Oxford, File 3; David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (New York, 1995), p. 90.

[25] Prime Minister minutes, Field Marshal Dill's observations, J.S.M. Washington to Chiefs of Staff, 3 April 1942, Christ Church, Oxford, File 3, No. 5.

> 50% of present combat airplane allocations to Great Britain from U.S. production except in light bombardment aircraft be reallocated to the U.S. during the month of June 1942. 75% of each combat type be reallocated to the U.S. during the month of July except light bombardment aircraft. After July 1942, all American production less the Light Bombardment would be available to the U.S. to meet its own requirements and Russian commitments.[26]

That same day Evill forwarded another urgent message to Slessor: "A very strong determination on the part of Arnold, Spaatz and others to concentrate the training and employment of their forces in the UK entirely upon proving that the daylight bombing offensive can be made a success ... Talking will do little to cure this, until it can be accompanied by practical demonstration of the interdependence of fighter operations offensive and defensive."[27]

This far-reaching series of proposals involved a drastic revision of the existing allocation of United States produced aircraft for the American and British air forces. Arnold's proposals implied the rejection of the Arnold-Portal agreement of January 1942. The underlying principle was that United States aircraft should be manned by American personnel; the U.S. air contribution to the Anglo-American alliance would take the form of complete air units instead of just aircraft. The result would be a considerably augmented AAF and a proportionate scaling-down of RAF expansion.[28]

The British recognized from the outset of negotiations with America that to expect full delivery of the generous allocations under the Slessor Agreement was unrealistic and they planned on receiving approximately 60 to 70 percent of what had

---

[26] Message, Air Marshal Evill to Air Ministry: Aircraft Allocation, 8 May 1942, PRO AIR 9/165, Evill was the ranking RAFDEL officer in Washington.
[27] Message, Air Marshal Evill to Air Ministry: Allocation of American Forces, 12 May 1942, PRO AIR 9/165.
[28] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* pp. 404-405.

been promised. They were therefore profoundly shocked by the figures in the new American proposal. Instead of the moderate amendment they had anticipated, they found their heavy bomber allocation reduced by about 75 percent and other combat aircraft heavily reduced as well. Slessor feared that if this proposal were accepted, such drastic reductions would result in a devastating loss of Bomber Command's striking power at a time when, with the German Luftwaffe heavily engaged on the Eastern Front, the bombing of Germany should be stepped up, not decreased. From the British point of view, the proposed cuts in aircraft assignment could not be justified on strategic grounds.[29]

Slessor conducted an analysis of the probable effect on the RAF between June and December 1942:

	Arnold-Portal Agreement	Arnold's Proposed Allocation	Loss to RAF
Heavy Bombers	447	26	421
Medium Bombers	1,160	140	1,020
Dive Bombers	2,237	621	1,616
Fighters	2,105	248	1,857
Total	5,049	1,035	4,914

Naturally the above analysis gave rise to some anxious moments at the Air Ministry. In view of Arnold's expected visit to London, discussions took place in the Air Staff to

[29] Slessor's Draft Agenda for Arnold Towers visit, 2 May 1942, PRO AIR 75/10.

evaluate the significance of the proposals -- their effect on the future expansion of the RAF and on the overall Anglo-American effort in 1942.[30]

Field Marshal Sir John Dill dispatched a message on 15 May to the Air Ministry highlighting the disturbing change of opinion in Washington: "Discussions on the revision of the Arnold/Portal agreements have reached an impasse in that Arnold having put forward sweeping proposals for immediate cuts in British allocations is now being held back from his proposed visit to London where proper examination of the issues raised alone is possible." Dill's assessment was that "U.S. Air Forces are definitely badly off for aircraft to an extent that coupled with their lack of opportunity for experience and their incomplete organisation makes them unable to meet the demands made upon them, often by the President ... Our recommendation is that a message be sent by C.O.S. saying that it is hoped that nothing will interfere with the Arnold/Towers visit intended on 21/5."[31] The Air Ministry responded the next day:

> We are deeply concerned to learn that proposals are being considered in the United States for a drastic reduction in the number of aircraft to be allotted to the London pool under the Arnold/Portal Agreement. The consequences of the proposals as we understand them would be a sudden and violent interruption in the supply of equipment which is vital to our forces in all theatres now actively engaged with all 3 Axis Powers. We had been relying on visit of General Arnold and Admiral Towers in order to give them a first hand account of our problem and to receive in return a survey of the American air expansion problem.[32]

Arnold's determination to revise aircraft allocations was based on more than just the obviously important need for equipment to train the rapidly expanding American air

---

[30] Ibid., 2 May 1942.
[31] Message, Field Marshal Dill to Air Ministry, Revision of Arnold/Portal Agreements, 15 May 1942, PRO AIR 9/165, Dill was head of the JSM and represented the collective COS.
[32] Message, Air Ministry to Field Marshal Dill: Concern over Arnold/Portal Agreement, 16 May 1942, PRO AIR 9/165.

forces. Of greater importance was his desire to build this burgeoning new air arm into combat air force units without equal in the world. Thus Arnold, with Marshall's backing, had decided that U.S. Army Air Forces should train together, serve in combat as American units commanded by Americans, and equipped with American aircraft retained in the United States until each squadron was combat ready. Moreover, Marshall and Arnold had won Roosevelt's approval of this move. They could not achieve this goal so long as allocation of aircraft to the British remained at the high levels set by the Arnold-Portal Agreement.[33]

To the British, the American attitude on this issue seemed a narrow and nationalistic one. They could understand Arnold's eagerness to build up the American air force for combat against the Axis. In light of their war experience, however, the British thought Arnold was overly optimistic about what the AAF could accomplish in the time he envisioned as necessary to reach his goal. In the meantime, Arnold's blueprint to build this new air force would severely curtail RAF expansion and operations and possibly necessitate an entire restructuring of agreed Anglo-American air offensive plans for the future.[34]

On 2 May 1942, Slessor prepared a draft agenda of the upcoming Arnold-Towers visit to Britain. The stated object of the conference was to coordinate the development and deployment of British and American air forces and the allocation of aircraft to Allied nations. Slessor's proposed agenda intended the review of Allied aircraft

---

[33] Arnold, *Global Mission*, pp. 307-309.
[34] Memorandum, General Arnold to Admiral Stark: Allocation of Aircraft to United Kingdom, 23 April 1942, AFHRC, MICFILM 28238; Slessor Policy message, 9 May 1942, PRO AIR 75/10.

distribution, including naval air forces throughout the world: "It will be essential at the beginning of the discussion to reach agreements on targets for the expansion of the United States and British Commonwealth air forces up to 31st Dec, 1942, and 31st Dec, 1943."[35]

On 9 May 1942, Slessor put forth a policy message to Portal on British strategy for the upcoming American visit: "We have got to be prepared to tackle Arnold ... We have got to show the effect on our own air force if his proposals were accepted and we must ask him whether he is prepared to substitute U.S. squadrons for British squadrons which we shall be unable to raise or maintain in theatres of war such as the MIDDLE EAST and INDIA." Slessor's strategy was to force Arnold to justify the American 16,000 aircraft expansion for 1942: "to show how it is going to be trained, both in respect of aircrews and ground and maintenance personnel, where is it going to be employed, where the shipping is going to come from to get it overseas. Arnold won't be here before the 23rd, so we have a certain amount of time, but there is a good deal to be done and we ought to get on with it."[36]

The series of conversations that constituted the United Nations Air Forces Conference began on 26 May 1942. At the opening meeting, General Arnold and Rear Admiral Towers were welcomed by the Prime Minister, who outlined in a speech prepared by Slessor, what the British view would be during the negotiations:

> The discussions that we are now embarking are of cardinal importance to the issue of the war. Their outcome will have an influence upon that great combined assault on the

---

[35] Slessor's Draft Agenda for Arnold-Towers Visit, 2 May 1942, PRO AIR 75/10.
[36] Slessor Policy message, 9 May 1942, PRO AIR 75/10.

> enemy in Europe next Spring ... Ever since the outbreak of war we have looked in an increasing degree to the great factories of the United States to supplement our own production. Over 60 squadrons of the R.A.F. are now equipped with U.S. aircraft ... Relying as we have been upon the expected flow of deliveries from America, we have many units formed and forming which can only be equipped from United States industry, because we ourselves have not gone into production on any material scale of certain types of aircraft ... We are Allies united in a common cause. We have an agreed strategy to defeat Germany while holding Japan. The issue is one of air power of the United Nations against the Axis. The problem on which we must concentrate is how best to bring to bear upon the enemy the greatest impact of our united air power in the shortest possible time – for I say again that time presses and this year is crucial.[37]

Slessor also authored Portal's opening remarks for the Arnold-Towers conference:

> These talks in London are the first stage of a series of discussions which will be completed in Washington and of which the resulting agreements will be submitted to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and subsequently to the President and Prime Minister for approval. The object is to agree on a basis on which to co-ordinate the development and deployment of the air forces of the United States and British Commonwealth, and the allocation of aircraft to our respective air forces and to other allied nations ... This agreement is in a very material degree the basis of the plans and preparations for the maintenance and development of the British air force which is now fighting against all three Axis Powers in Europe, Africa and Asia.[38]

Slessor urged that Portal stress the openness of the discussions:

> I am sure you will agree that if they are to serve this purpose, it is essential that we should both say freely and frankly what is in our minds and put all our cards on the table. We will keep nothing back from you, will show you all the calculations and statistics that you wish to see, and I hope you will cross-examine us on any point on which you are in doubt and talk to anyone you wish in the Air Ministry and out in the Commands.[39]

Portal cogently expressed the devastating effect the reallocation would have on the RAF: "We have two and a half years of war experience behind us and have built up a great organisation for further expansion in British and joint United States/British

---

[37] Draft Speech, Arnold-Towers Conference, 20 May 1942, PRO AIR 75/10; Prime Minister minutes: Opening Speech for Arnold-Towers Conference, 22 May 1942, Christ Church, Oxford, File 3; Memorandum, Slessor to CAS, topics for Arnold-Towers discussion, 23 May 1942, PRO AIR 8/651; C. G. Reynolds, *Admiral John H. Towers—the Struggle for Naval Air Supremacy* (Annapolis, 1991).
[38] Arnold-Towers Conference: CAS Opening Remarks, 17 May 1942, PRO AIR 75/10.
[39] Ibid., 17 May 1942.

spheres of strategical responsibility. For this expansion and indeed for the maintenance of our existing strength we are relying very largely on deliveries of American aircraft under the Arnold/Portal agreement in 1942, and upon its extension in some form into 1943." Portal continued: "As an indication, I may tell you that over 9,000 pilots are now under training who are destined to man American aircraft between now and September, 1943; and we have already withdrawn from industry and placed under training as ground personnel in the Air Force 63,000 men and women who have been called up on the strength of the Arnold/Portal agreement ... I am bound to say I am a little puzzled to understand why only five months ago you promised me about 1,000 aircraft a month in 1942, with which to build up R.A.F. ... and now that I have committed myself to all the work and expense and dislocation of national effort necessary to enable me to use these aircraft." He emphasized the commonality of Anglo-American strategic goals: "The important thing is, not how many squadrons there will be somewhere in the R.A.F. or the U.S.A.A.C. at certain arbitrary dates in the future, but how quickly can we get the maximum possible number of United States and/or British squadrons actually fighting, primarily offensively against Germany."[40] Slessor's own belief was that the aircraft allocated to the RAF under the Arnold-Portal agreement would enter combat much more quickly if assigned to Britain than if they were withheld and formed into American squadrons.

---

[40] Ibid., 17 May 1942; Slessor's Discussion Points for Arnold-Towers Conversation, 18 May 1942, PRO AIR 75/10.

To strengthen his hand, Portal brought Slessor into the discussions as well. Over the next week, negotiations continued, interspersed with visits to Bomber Command, Coastal Command and Fighter Command, to acquaint the Americans with the needs of the RAF. Arnold also paid a visit to the Eighth Air Force and discussed with Eaker the AAF's difficult maturation process.[41]

The question of what general principles should underlie aircraft allocation from American industry arose at the second meeting. Air Marshal Portal explained that after serious deliberation the British had agreed that distribution of air units and allocation of effort should be determined largely by considerations of timing and transportation. This revised version of the British position was included in Slessor's paper entitled "Policy Governing the Allocation of Aircraft from United States Industry to the Air Forces of the United Nations in Active Theatres of War". It was a comprehensive and important document that cogently analyzed the function and organization of air power. During the second meeting, Arnold referred to the numerous modifications carried out on American aircraft after delivery to Britain and the consequent delay in getting these aircraft into combat. He also urged that the number of "staging points" between factory and RAF units should be reduced to a minimum.[42]

There were two considerations of policy, which were fundamental to the problem of aircraft allocation. Slessor and the Air Staff asserted that the strength of the air forces in the various theaters of war should be determined in accordance with the strategic

---

[41] Arnold, *Global Mission*, pp. 307-309.
[42] RAF Policy Paper, 28 May 1942, PRO AIR 8/651.

policy of defeating Germany while containing Japan. The British asserted that every American-produced aircraft should be manned by U.S. crews, subject to the condition that this policy should not result in the weakening of any wartime theater. Slessor advocated that bringing the greatest number of fully trained crews expeditiously into combat should be the principle object governing the allocation of aircraft.[43]

After some hard bargaining sessions, a compromise was reached on 30 May 1942. Among other arrangements, the British had to forego their requirements for heavy bombers and accept instead that American crews would fly heavy bombers coming to Britain. On the other hand, the Americans agreed that the established light bomber and fighter allocations to Britain would stand. Portal stated that the decision on the whole question of aircraft allocation was a matter of urgency on which strategic planning for the future prosecution of the war depended. Portal had one more request; RAF squadrons equipped with American aircraft that were operational before 1 April 1943 should be allocated the aircraft necessary to meet combat attrition after that date. Portal and Arnold accepted the agreement in principle and Churchill gave it his approval, but Arnold was not the final authority on the American side. The President and General Marshall had the final word. Portal therefore decided that Slessor should accompany Arnold on his return to Washington and act as his representative in the final negotiations that would work out the details of allocations and get the approval of Roosevelt and Marshall for this new agreement.[44]

---

[43] Memorandum, Slessor to CAS: Topics for Arnold-Towers Discussion, 23 May 1942, PRO AIR 8/651.
[44] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 6, p. 407.

Slessor arrived in Washington with Arnold and Towers on 3 June 1942 and began at once to work out details for allocation of aircraft for the rest of 1942. For three weeks Slessor conferred with Arnold and his staff on the subject of proportional allocation of American produced aircraft. Slessor telegraphed Portal describing his 7 June visit with Arnold: "Saw Arnold this morning and asked how he is getting on. He has not seen the President who is away, but both Marshall and Hopkins have agreed to despatch of U.S Air Forces to our overseas theatres."[45] On 9 June, Slessor forwarded another telegram to the CAS explaining Arnold's approval of proposed allocations with one exception: "to despatch 1 Medium Bomber Group, probably B.25 to Middle East and to wash out our B.26's."[46] The next day Slessor again telegraphed Portal explaining his pressure that he was putting on Arnold to secure Kittyhawks for the Middle East: "Feel strongly that we should stand firm on requirements for 14 squadrons of Kittyhawks in Middle East."[47]

Slessor negotiated the transfer of RAF Hudson aircraft to support U.S. Navy anti-submarine duty in the Atlantic: "1 Squadron of 20 aircraft with British air crews should proceed to U.S.A. via Iceland and be located here on the East Coast. This unit would thus give practical demonstration of British methods as evolved on the basis of our war experience."[48] He also attempted to have the U.S. Navy relocate Catalina squadrons to Britain: "We should presumably not use the exchanged Catalina squadron for the same

---

[45] Message, Slessor to CAS visit with General Arnold, 7 June 1942, PRO AIR 9/165.
[46] Message, Slessor to CAS, Aircraft to Middle East, 9 June 1942, PRO AIR 9/165.
[47] Message, Slessor to CAS, Aircraft Allocations, 10 June 1942, PRO AIR 9/165.
[48] Message, RAFDEL to Air Ministry, RAF support for USN, 13 June 1942, PRO AIR 8/668.

job of the Hudson squadron at present. I find it very difficult to follow the strategic reason for the Admiralty's attitude."[49]

They were still involved in rigorous negotiations when Churchill arrived in Washington on 18 June 1942. Finally on 21 June, the Memorandum of Agreement was in final form—signed by Arnold as Commanding General, U.S. Army Air Forces, Rear-Admiral Towers as Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, U.S. Navy, and Air Vice-Marshal Slessor. The President and the Prime Minister initialed the report quickly, once assured by Slessor and Arnold that they were satisfied with it. The final report affirmed that:

> Powerful United States Air Forces must be created and maintained, and that every appropriate aircraft built by the United States should be manned and fought by American crews, subject to the following conditions: (a) That our combined aim shall be to create and bring into decisive action as quickly as possible fully trained United States and British Air Forces adequate for the defeat of our enemies ... (b) That the revision of previously agreed allocations of aircraft to Great Britain shall be made so as to avoid weakening the combined strength in any theatre. 2. In accordance with this policy the United States will: (a) Allocate aircraft to Great Britain to equip and maintain certain existing and projected squadrons of the Royal Air Force, and of Dominion Air Forces ... (b) Assign to and maintain in theatres of British and Combined strategic responsibility certain United States Air Forces ... 3. The United States undertake to continue in 1943 the allocation of the necessary aircraft to meet attrition in British squadrons using American aircraft operational on the 1st April 1943 ... 5. American air combat units assigned to theatres of British strategic responsibility will be organised in homogeneous American formations. They will be under the strategic control of the appropriate British Commander-in-Chief.[50]

The Arnold-Towers-Portal Agreement was a document that had far-reaching effects on the relative roles played by the AAF and RAF. In the end, the general reaction of Slessor and the British to this policy was that if the Americans could

---

[49] Message, Slessor to CAS, Request for Catalina's to United Kingdom, 18 June 1942, PRO AIR 8/668.
[50] Memorandum of Agreement: Arnold-Towers-Portal, 21 June 1942, PRO AIR 9/168; see Reynolds', *Admiral John H. Towers.*

guarantee that their units would arrive in the United Kingdom early enough to prevent any overall reduction in the combined air offensive, then the uniform of the crews taking part need not cause a disruption. His work completed, Slessor left Washington on 23 June 1942.[51]

The Anglo-American aircraft allocation debate continued into the Autumn of 1942. Slessor was again sent to Washington in October 1942 to preempt further reductions in the supply of aircraft to the RAF. On a return visit to America in November 1942, Slessor met with General Arnold to discuss air policy and informed the Air Ministry that the "meeting with Arnold went well. Good general discussion on principles. From this the shape of the present planned United Nations air forces in April 1944 will be clear and it will be possible to assess whether the planned strengths are excessive in some classes and deficient in others, also whether and if so where production does not fit in with planned order of battle."[52]

Slessor prepared an air allocation and production memorandum for the Air Ministry on 19 November: "General Arnold appears reconciled to the necessity of maintaining, by some means, British Squadrons now operational on American aircraft. But it has been suggested that R.A.F. Squadrons in British theatres of war should be further replaced by U.S. Air Force Units."[53] Slessor knew from experience that

---

[51] Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942,* p. 248; see Reynolds', *Admiral John H. Towers.*

[52] Message, Slessor to CAS, Meeting with Arnold, 11 November 1942, PRO AIR 9/420; Memorandum, Arnold to RAFDEL, Allocations under the Arnold-Towers-Slessor Agreement, 19 October 1942, AFHRC, MICFILM 28163.

[53] RAFDEL to Air Ministry, negotiations with Arnold, RAF Requirements for 1943, 19 November 1942, PRO AIR 9/420.

American units in 1942 could not replace British units in active theaters as quickly as British units could become operational flying American aircraft. It did not make sense to Slessor that America would send their ground crews and maintenance echelons to overseas theaters where British personnel and maintenance organizations already existed, causing severe shipping and logistical nightmares.[54]

In preparation for continued discussions with Arnold and McCain, Slessor prepared a memorandum of "British Air Requirements for 1943". Slessor argued:

> The President's recent directive affording over-riding priority to an air production programme of 82,000 in 1943, which figure is to be actually attained and not merely a target programme, has not been followed up by further directives covering the subject of allocations to the British. General Arnold's attitude is one of genuine anxiety to meet our legitimate needs. His instructions from the President are that every American aircraft that can be manned by an American crew in an American squadron is to be manned except for about 8,600 out of a total of 52,000 combat types for defense aid. Of this 8,600 there will be 6,100 for the U.K., including 1275 Medium and Heavy Bombers for the U.S. Navy. The balance of about 2,400 for the U.K. is, of course, totally inadequate to even meet the attrition under the A.T.P. Agreement ... Another serious obstacle to meeting British needs is the attitude of the U.S. Navy who may be expected to oppose any tendency to allocate to the R.A.F. any of certain types including Liberators and Medium Bombers, to which they are understood to have substantial and as yet unspecified claims. The Combined Chiefs of Staff should be instructed immediately to arrive at an agreed strategic policy for the conduct of the war in 1943 and 1944 as a basis both for allocations and for adjustment of the production pattern.[55]

In their official history of the United States Army Air Forces, Craven and Cate describe the reaction of Assistant Secretary of War for Air Robert A. Lovett to the paper: "Air Vice Marshal John C. Slessor brought a memo to the United States for discussion with the JCS. This document, reflecting much of Lord Trenchard's ideas on air power and urging the creation of a great Anglo-American force ... as a matter of highest

---

[54] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 415-417, the AAF training and logistical infrastructure was sill going through its growing pains in 1942.
[55] RAFDEL to Air Ministry: Negotiations with Arnold, British Requirements for 1943, 19 November 1942, PRO AIR 9/420.

priority compatible with other essential projects, made a most favorable impression on Lovett."[56]

Evill and Slessor dispatched another personal letter to Arnold on 28 November:

> Slessor and I have studied your proposal and think your suggested solution of basic allocation, supplemented by a bonus of production over 80%, a fair and reasonable basis on which to approach the question of allocations. On the other hand we find that the basic allocation that you propose for the British leaves both the Air Ministry and Admiralty in serious difficulties in respect of certain types. Knowing your difficulties in the immediate future over your bomber types we have revised and reduced our requirements in this respect in every way possible, and have set out what we regard as the minimum British needs for basic allocations of combat aircraft through 1943.[57]

Arnold responded on 30 November, informing Evill and Slessor that their proposal was under review.[58]

Slessor received a personal note from Arnold on 4 December 1942:

> Dear Jack: I want to thank you for your very kind letter received December 1st. We had a good friendly scrap and that kind are always good for both sides. As I explained to you over and over during your stay here in Washington, my one desire is to have combat airplanes in the hands of combat personnel in the active theaters with first priority the European theater. I will not permit combat airplanes to sit on the ground. They are going to go where they can be used to fight the Axis or to train my units so they can go to the active theaters for the same purpose. The United States Army Air Force and the Royal Air Force, I am sure today operate in support of each other or together as a team and it is very gratifying to receive reports from my Air Force Commanders as well as Royal Air Force Commanders that this is the case. The submarine right now is a terrible menace and it must be a target for our bomber. Their destruction is one of our primary problems. I am convinced therefore that we must hit them first where their component parts are made; second, where they are assembled; third, at their operating bases; and fourth, in the open ocean. As you know, Spaatz is already hitting them at their bases of operations on the French Coast. I wish you success in your new command duty as the Commander of the Royal Air Force Coastal Command. With the best of luck and my warm personal regards.[59]

---

[56] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 2, p. 297.
[57] Letter, Evill-Slessor to Arnold, Aircraft Allocation, 28 November 1942, PRO AIR 9/420.
[58] Letter, Arnold to Evill, Aircraft Allocations under review, 30 November 1932, PRO AIR 9/420.
[59] Personal Letter, Arnold to Slessor, Anglo-American Relations, 4 December 1942, PRO AIR 75/10.

Slessor handled the negotiations with great skill and patience, and his sound judgement and negotiating experience with Americans seem largely to have been responsible for his success in securing a substantial allocation without losing the goodwill of General Arnold. Upon his return to Britain, he prepared a summary of the Washington negotiations for Portal: "We only got a settlement a few hours before we left Washington ...

> I dare say we might have forced the issue, taken the matter to the President at an earlier stage in the proceedings, and got an apparently more favourable settlement forced upon Arnold and McCain. I am completely satisfied that we should have been wrong to do so. Arnold is out to help us, and his strategic thought follows closely that of our own in the Air Staff. I am especially impressed with what I believe to be the fact that he is head and shoulders above any other American Air General in his general conception of how this war should be won and the part air power should play in it. He is still very ignorant of administration and organisation; he is terribly over-centralized and tries to do far too much himself ... Above all, it must be remembered that Arnold is not a free agent – he is not a Chief of Staff on a level with Marshall and King. If there are any in England who still doubt the wisdom of an autonomous Air Force I recommend for them a short sojourn in Washington. And I find it hard to exaggerate the importance of getting, at the earliest possible moment, an agreed policy for the conduct of the war in 1943.[60]

Slessor's return to Britain on 8 December left Air Marshal Evill to conclude the negotiations for the RAF, and sign the final memorandum of agreement on 15 December 1942. This agreement established the supply of aircraft by the United States to Great Britain in 1943. It was decided that America would produce and furnish the RAF with 4,174 aircraft during 1943, with a total of 398 identified as B-24 Liberator heavy bombers. The B-24's were being allocated primarily to assist in meeting the antisubmarine requirements of the United Kingdom. Allocations would be made on a block system that insured regular periodic deliveries. The agreement was predicated on

---

[60] Message, Slessor to CAS: Summary of Negotiations, 5 December 1942, PRO AIR 9/420.

American aircraft production reaching in excess of 59,000. The U.S. Navy was also scheduled to allocate 437 PBY patrol planes to the RAF.[61]

AMERICAN DAYLIGHT BOMBING

By the end of July 1942, the first American Bomber Group, the 97th, with its supporting ground echelons had arrived in England and the question of the operational employment of the Eighth Air Force became a matter of immediate importance. The United States air staff was firmly wedded to the concept of daylight precision bombing. Kenneth P. Werrell asserts in *Blankets of Fire* that "American strategic bombing theory posited that unescorted, heavily armed aircraft, flying in formation at high speed and high altitude, could penetrate, defeat, or elude the enemy during daylight and successfully destroy "bottleneck" targets and thereby cause the collapse of the enemy's economy."[62] The American air staff was convinced that British night bombing was not a war-winning formula. They decided to continue with their prewar doctrine and mount a daylight offensive in the form of precision attacks upon key points in the German war economy.[63]

The Americans undoubtedly were determined that their contributions to the offensive should be a distinctively American effort. They had developed a remarkable

---

[61] Memorandum of Agreement between Arnold-McCain-Patterson: Supply of Aircraft to United Kingdom in 1943, 15 December 1942, PRO AIR 45/21; Letter, Slessor to CAS, Disagreements with Arnold, 11 December 1942, PRO AIR 9/420.
[62] Kenneth P. Werrell, *Blankets of Fire: U.S. Bombers over Japan during World War II* (Washington, 1996), p. 16; Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, pp. 168-169.
[63] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 1, pp. 596 and 610; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 431-432.

and, for its period, advanced four-engined long-range bomber, the B-17 Flying Fortress. An early version had been tried by RAF Bomber Command who viewed it as most unsuitable for night bombing owing to very prominent exhaust flames. The newer versions being sent to England carried much more formidable armament than the British heavy bombers, and were capable of flying at high altitude. For these reasons, the B-17 looked promising for daylight flying. The AAF's doctrine of precision bombing was reinforced by the development of mutual support from close formation flying and by the possession of the revolutionary Norden bombsight, which was accurate in optimum flying conditions.[64]

A strong campaign now developed in England to convince Americans that night bombing would be a more effective means of attacking Germany. At first the discussion was confined to the British Air Staff. Air Marshal Portal was greatly distressed by America's attempt to conduct daylight bombing over German-occupied Europe. Frankland and Webster argue in their official history of the RAF bombing of Germany that Portal "was pessimistic about the prospect and he saw grave dangers in the attempt."[65] Portal foresaw, as bitter events were later to show, that the American doctrine of heavy bombers operating in daylight and depending for their survival upon their own defenses would result in extremely high casualties. He did his best to persuade the Americans to convert to night bombing, but through Slessor's intervention, the CAS soon realized that the Americans had hung their hats on the daylight concept.

---

[64] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 1, p. 597.
[65] Webster and Frankland, The *Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany,* vol. 1, p. 356.

Slessor stressed to Portal that if the RAF continued to oppose the American plan, the likely result would be an AAF withdrawal from the strategic air offensive against Germany. Portal's view was that the B-17 would be comparatively defenseless over Germany when beyond the range of Allied fighter cover and would be so harried by continual fighter attack that they would resort to general area bombing. He believed that Americans should train for night bombing and their industry should convert to producing British designed Lancaster heavy bombers. This opinion was vigorously contested by Slessor, who based his support for American doctrine partly on his long liaison experience in Washington. Davis notes in his biography of Spaatz that: "The Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Policy), Air Vice-Marshal John Slessor, the RAF senior officer with perhaps the clearest understanding of U.S. determination to carry through with daylight precision bombing ... warned of the dangers of appearing to thwart U.S. designs."[66]

The Secretary of State for Air, Archibald Sinclair, posed to Slessor nineteen questions that addressed his concerns with American bombing policy. They included: "What are the Americans doing?" "What do they intend to do?" "What is their operational policy?" and "Is there any possibility that they will join us in the night bombing of Germany?" Slessor provided Sinclair with detailed answers to all of his questions. He emphasized that America was committed to a policy of daylight precision bombing:

---

[66] Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe,* pp. 157-158.

> They intend to do precision bombing in GERMANY by daylight. This is the basis of their air policy in this theatre. They believe that with their good defensive armament they can do it when they get sufficient numbers. Their early operations lend some support to this belief – the B.17 has shown that it can defend itself and take an enormous amount of punishment. It has yet to be proved whether it is possible to carry the war deep into GERMANY by day. But they believe they will and I personally am inclined to agree with them once they get really adequate numbers. On the President's instruction they have just produced a most detailed and comprehensive plan for the destruction of German war economy, based on the assumption that we shall continue area bombing by night, aimed at devastation, dislocation of normal life and undermining the morale while they single out the vital war industrial targets one by one and destroy them by high altitude precision bombing by day. I have seen this plan and – while in some respects academic and unduly optimistic – it is a very impressive bit of work and, always assuming it is possible to bomb GERMANY by day, I believe it is a war-winner.[67]

The Prime Minister sent a private letter to Harry Hopkins on 16 October 1942 articulating his concerns over America's bombing philosophy. Churchill stated:

> We are of course frightfully anxious about the future American Air Programme and what our assignments in it are to be. I must also say to you for your eyes alone and only to be used by you in your high discretion that the very accurate results so far achieved in the daylight bombing of France by your Fortresses under most numerous Fighter escort mainly British, does not give our experts the same confidence as yours in the power of day bomber to operate far into Germany. We do not think the claims of Fighters shot down by Fortresses are correct though made with complete sincerity, and the dangers of daylight bombing will increase terribly once outside Fighter protection and the range lengthens.[68]

Winston Churchill maintained his pessimistic attitude towards American daylight bombing in a note to Sinclair and Portal during October 1942:

> The Bombing Offensive over Germany or Italy must be regarded as our prime effort in the Air. It is of the utmost importance that this should not fall away during these winter months, when the strain of the Russian front will be heavy on the German people. To maintain a steady crescendo is an offensive measure of the highest consequence ... At present the United States are persevering with the idea of the daylight bombing of Germany by means of Flying Fortresses and Liberators in formation without escort. So far they have not gone beyond the limits of strong British escort. They will probably

---

[67] Message, Sinclair to Slessor: Air Issues and Questions, 26 September 1942, PRO AIR 75/56; Message, Sinclair to Slessor: Air Issues and Questions, 26 September 1942, PRO AI 8/711.

[68] Letter, Churchill to Hopkins: Future of American Air Effort, 16 October 1942, PRO AIR 8/711; Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany,* vol. 1, p. 360; Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe,* p. 158.

> experience a heavy disaster as soon as they do. We must try to persuade them to divert their energies to sea work (including bombing the Biscay ports) and to night work.[69]

Swiftly, Archibald Sinclair refreshed his memory with Slessor's pro-American arguments from the "19" question memorandum. On the day after Churchill's electrifying assessment of the controversy, Sinclair addressed a note to his Prime Minister suggesting that Slessor's view would further the war-winning potential of both Bomber Commands: "American opinion is divided; some want to concentrate on the Pacific; others against Germany; some want an Air Force which would be mainly ancillary to the Army . . . others want to build up a big bomber force to attack the centre of German power." Sinclair continued to argue that Churchill had in his power "to crystallize American opinion and to unite it behind those schools of thought that want to attack Germany and want to do it by building up an overwhelming force of bombers in this country." Then he presented a solemn warning to the Prime Minister: "You will throw these forces into confusion and impotency if you set yourself against their cherished policy of daylight penetration."[70]

Churchill responded to Sinclair's note with a message to Air Marshal Portal: "I am not at all convinced of the soundness of the Secretary of State's minute of October 23, either on the merits of the "daylight penetration" policy or on the tactics we should pursue towards the Americans."[71] Sinclair answered Churchill's 26 October note two

---

[69] Message, Churchill to Sinclair and Portal: The Bombing Offensive, 22 October 1942, PRO AIR 8/711.
[70] Letter, Sinclair to Churchill: Response to earlier message, 23 October 1942, PRO AIR 8/711.
[71] Message, Churchill to Portal: American Daylight Bombing, 26 October 1942, PRO AIR 8/711.

days later. In no uncertain terms the Secretary of State for Air continued to proclaim support for American daylight precision bombing:

> We feel bound to warn you most seriously against decrying the American plan for daylight attack of GERMANY. Their present attitude shows that on special occasions when help is required at sea they will not hesitate to give it. But we are convinced that it would be fatal to suggest to them at this of all times that the great bomber force they are planning to build up is no good except for coastal work and perhaps ultimately for night bombing. They are convinced that they will be able to bomb GERMANY by day and they are determined to do so. But if we go any further at this stage we may find ourselves confronted with an abandonment of the policy of an all-out air offensive against GERMANY, and a swing to the PACIFIC.[72]

In the face of a possible American withdrawal of its strategic bomber force, Portal reconsidered his authoritative position visa-vie daylight precision bombing. Frankland and Webster document in their official history that Portal "subjected his views upon daylight bombing to radical revision." He declared to Churchill that, "though Americans must expect great losses in unescorted daylight raids, if they were prepared to lose as many B-17s by day as the RAF were now losing night-bombers, assuming that for each B-17 shot down three German fighters were destroyed, that the German fighter force would within a few months be so weakened as to leave the whole country open to day bombing and air superiority on all land fronts in the hands of the United Nations."[73]

The daylight-bombing debate continued into December 1942. Slessor prepared a note for the Secretary of State for delivery to the Prime Minister. He stated that "any attempt to divert the American Air Force from the function for which they have been trained, and in which they have an almost passionate belief, to a subsidiary role over the

---

[72] Message, Sinclair to Churchill: Support for American Bombing Policy, 28 October 1942, PRO AIR 8/711.

[73] Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany,* vol. 1, p. 362; Portal quoted in Denis Richards, *Portal of Hungerford* (London, 1977), p. 308.

seas or in secondary theatres, or to a policy of exclusively night bombing, would occasion the keenest resentment and would be most rigorously resisted."[74] Ronald Schaffer asserts in *Wings of Judgment* that the AAF "had come to England to build up the Eighth Air Force and use it in selective attacks against German targets … AAF leaders believed they could succeed where the RAF had failed – in precision daylight bombing."[75]

Incorporating Slessor's verbiage from previous policy memoranda, the Secretary of State for Air provided an American bombing policy assessment for the War Cabinet:

> The view of the Air Staff is that there is a good chance that the U.S. Air Force will be able to bomb Germany in daylight. In my view we must still be patient with the Americans, and at this stage it would be wrong to discourage them from what may yet be a successful experiment. The Americans would resent and resist any attempt to divert them from the function for which they have been trained to a subsidiary role over the sea or in secondary theatres. In spite of some admitted defects, including lack of experience, their leadership is of a high order, and the quality of their aircrews is magnificent.[76]

Churchill responded immediately to Sinclair's War Cabinet memorandum. He vehemently protested the tone and inferences regarding the American daylight bombing effort: "Meanwhile I have never suggested that they should be "discouraged" by us, that is to say, that we should argue against their policy, but only that they should not be encouraged to persist obstinately and also that they should be actively urged to become capable of night bombing. What I am going to discourage actively is the sending over of

---

[74] Slessor Draft Paper on Air Policy, 18 December 1942, PRO AIR 75/56, 75/10; Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, p. 216.
[75] Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York, 1985), pp. 36-37.
[76] Air Ministry Note on American Bombing Policy, January 1943, PRO AIR 8/711.

large quantities of these daylight bombers and their enormous ground staffs until the matter is settled one way or the other."[77]

Sinclair replied to Churchill two days later with a letter intending to placate the Prime Minister. The Secretary of State for Air described Eaker's visit to the Air Ministry: "General Eaker came to see me yesterday. He is straining at the leash; but he has very few bombers ... So I beg you not to discourage the Americans from sending over large quantities of these bombers. The larger the quantity the greater their chance of success." Sinclair added that Britain would "have a much better chance of influencing them in the direction of night bombing if they are over here than if they are left at home. This is the place for them to learn night bombing. They will never do it if you leave them in America."[78]

The contentiousness between the RAF and the USAAF concerned the issue of day and night bombing; between what on the British side seemed to be possible and impossible, and what on the American side seemed to be worthwhile and worthless. Webster and Frankland assert: "So deeply were the Americans committed to the policy of daylight bombing that any condemnation of it by the British on operational grounds was likely to have far reaching strategic consequences. It was certain to strengthen the American naval argument."[79] Neither the British nor the American bombing doctrine could have succeeded had either surrendered to the other in 1942. Frankland and

---

[77] Message, Churchill to Sinclair: Commentary on Air Directive, 10 January 1943, PRO AIR 8/711.
[78] Message, Sinclair to Churchill: Eaker and American Bombing Policy, 12 January 1943, PRO AIR 8/711.
[79] Webster and Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany,* vol. 1, p. 354.

Webster postulate that Slessor "rendered a service to the bombing offensive, which, was of outstanding and, perhaps, even of decisive value."[80] The USAAF and RAF both believed in strategic bombing as a war-winning strategy and were united in their air power philosophy: "Though the American air force was still part of the American Army, the strategic thinking of its leaders was close to that which inspired the Royal Air Force Bomber Command."[81]

THE CASABLANCA CONFERENCE

Slessor was instructed by the Joint Planning Committee in September 1942 to prepare a worldwide review of Allied strategy and provide recommendations for winning the war. He presented his analysis at a 25 September 1942 JPC meeting:

> There appear to be three possible policies: (A) To build up sufficient land and supporting air forces, shipping landing craft, etc., to enable us to gain a decision by invasion and the defeat of the German Army on the Continent before German industry and economic power has been broken. (B) To build up a bomber forces in the UNITED KINGDOM strong enough to shatter German industry and economic power in the face of the strongest defences of which Germany is capable. When this is achieved the Army would be launched on to the Continent. (C) A compromise under which we attempt to build up simultaneously strong land and air forces on a scale unrelated to any particular tasks, without any clear intention of attaining a definite object within a definite time. "C" is the policy which the UNITED NATIONS appear to be pursuing. To me its only merit is that it is largely non-controversial.[82]

Slessor concluded that Course B would involve the concentration of all Allied resources to shatter the industrial and economic structure of Germany and thus wear down the opposition to a point where an Anglo-American force could effect entry into the

---

[80] Ibid., pp. 359-360.
[81] Ibid., p. 364.
[82] Slessor Paper on Strategy for 1942-43, 25 September 1942, PRO AIR 75/11.

Continent from the West and, in concert with the Russian Army advancing from the East, could force Germany's capitulation: "I believe a force of heavy bombers rising to a peak of between 4,000 and 6,000 could achieve this object in 1944, if we and the UNITED STATES were really determined to provide it and afford the necessary priorities."[83] Slessor was obviously hesitant to engage the main strength of the German Army. He preferred strategic bombing coupled with harassing action on the fringes of Europe and seizing opportunities for the occupation of outlying portions of the Continent.

The War Cabinet in London received a 23 December cipher telegram from the Joint Staff Mission (JSM) in Washington that reviewed the evolution of United States strategy. They reduced the American strategic concept to simplest terms: "To conduct the strategic offensive with maximum forces in the Atlantic-Western European theatre at the earliest practicable date." The JSM noted that America was moving away from a strictly defensive posture in the Pacific: "Continue offensive and defensive operations in the Pacific and Burma to break the Japanese hold on positions which threaten the security of our communications and positions."[84] The JSM followed up with a 30 December cipher warning of a possible American tilt to the Pacific: "Reference to Germany as primary enemy is satisfactory. This statement is, however, offset by a

[83] Ibid., 25 September, PRO AIR 75/11.
[84] Telegram, JSM to War Cabinet: Current Developments, 23 December 1942, PRO AIR 9/168.

reference to the Pacific Theatre in terms sufficiently broad to allow the American Navy practically a free hand."[85]

Slessor assisted in the preparation of a 31 December 1942 War Cabinet Report on strategy for 1943. He asserted that Anglo-American "resources have increased to the point where we have been able to wrest the initiative from Germany and Italy, and to pin down the Japanese in the South-West Pacific. The days of plugging holes are over. We must agree on a plan that will lead to victory, quickly and decisively." Slessor believed that Anglo-American resources were insufficient to defeat Germany and Japan simultaneously. He postulated that the Allies needed to either concentrate on defeating Germany while holding Japan or vice versa. The report contained as areas for consideration, "holding Japan, defeat of Germany, invasion of the Continent, and attrition of Germany." Slessor concluded the report with a list of proposals: "(a) the defeat of the U-boat menace to remain a first charge on our resources; (b) the expansion of the Anglo-American bomber offensive against Germany and Italy; (c) the exploitation of our position in the Mediterranean; (d) the maintenance of supplies to Russia."[86]

As 1942 drew to a close, the need for a comprehensive conference of military and political leaders became increasingly evident. Accordingly, Roosevelt and Churchill scheduled a high-level Anglo-American meeting for January 1943. Naturally, Slessor did not expect to attend this meeting because of a new assignment to take the helm of Coastal Command. As plans for the conference were being made, Portal asked Slessor

---

[85] Telegram, JSM to War Cabinet: Fear that USN will alter American Strategy, 30 December 1942, PRO AIR 9/168.
[86] War Cabinet Report on Anglo-American Strategy, 31 December 1942, PRO AIR 9/168.

to accompany him to the meeting. When Slessor reported this to his American counterparts in London, they too welcomed the idea:

> On December 14, Mr. Roosevelt suggested the meeting at Casablanca ... I had been warned in October that I was to take over Coastal Command from Air Marshal Sir Philip Joubert ... But when the Casablanca Conference loomed on the horizon Portal thought that I, having been so closely associated with the development of the policy in London, could be useful to him at Casablanca, and I was only too happy to go with him, though it meant some weeks more before taking over Coastal ... On this occasion Portal wished also to use me with my, by then, considerable experience in negotiating with U.S. officers as, so to speak, an American interpreter.[87]

From 14 to 26 January 1943, Churchill, Roosevelt, and their military staffs met at Casablanca, the storied Arab city in Morocco, to discuss Allied strategy for the coming year. Casablanca was the first of what became a series of top-level wartime conferences: "We left England on the night of January 11/12, 1943, in great secrecy as to our destination ... The conference was held in the residential suburb of Anfa, several miles out of the town of Casablanca ... dominated by a large and rather ugly modern hotel."[88] There the American chiefs experienced for the first time what they felt was the United Kingdom's superior negotiating advantage resulting from its coordination of military and political policy. Forrest C. Pogue describes in his biography of George C. Marshall the professional tone set by the British conference participants: "To the chagrin of the Americans, who had kept their party small at the President's behest, the British had brought a large delegation. And they also had provided themselves with a communications ship, anchored in the nearby harbor, that permitted a free flow of information between Casablanca and London."[89] Matloff asserts in his official history of

---

[87] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 442-443.
[88] Ibid., p. 443.
[89] Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory 1943-1945* (New York, 1973), p. 19.

the U.S. Army in World War II that "it appeared at the time to the American staff that the thoroughness of British preparations and the long experience of the British in international negotiations had a decisive influence at the conference."[90] Kent Roberts Greenfield goes a step further in *American Strategy in World War II,* postulating that: "The American Army staff went home from Casablanca convinced that they had been outwitted and outmaneuvered by the British."[91]

The American military chiefs were unprepared at Casablanca, and failed especially among the planning staffs to present a unified front. Their Joint Planning Staff at first strongly opposed the decision to invade North West Africa but then became so engrossed in carrying out the operation that they had only a few weeks in which to prepare for the conference. This state of affairs, combined with superior British preparation and organization, meant that British strategic conceptions generally carried the day.[92]

Slessor and many in the British contingent at Casablanca believed that the Americans were longing to liquidate their involvement in Europe and concentrate their war effort in the Pacific. Because Pearl Harbor brought America into the war, and the United States was traditionally a Pacific power, the war with Japan sometimes seemed more applicable to them than the conflict in Europe. By the time the American Chiefs of Staff arrived at Casablanca, they were in no mood to delay significant offensive action in Europe. The first two days of the Conference were spent debating the merits of

---

[90] Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944* (Washington, D.C., 1959), p. 38.
[91] Greenfield, *American Strategy in World War II,* p. 32.
[92] Ibid.

defeating Germany first and then concentrating on the Pacific Theater. It had been the policy of the British Government since the ABC-1 Agreement that Germany represented the greatest danger to the Allies and reaching agreement on its elimination must remain the first objective.[93]

Slessor described in his memoirs the strategic disposition at the commencement of the conference: "The day after we arrived our Chiefs of Staff had a meeting with Sir John Dill, who came to Casablanca with General Marshall, and whose wise judgement and intimate knowledge of opinion in Washington were, as ever, invaluable … Dill warned us that the Americans thought we underrated the importance of the Pacific and would press for Operation *Anakim* (the recapture of Burma) to be carried out in 1943 – Marshall was afraid of China dropping out of the war." He observed that for the next four days "the Combined Chiefs met daily to argue out the strategy for the coming year. Marshall opened up on the morning of January 14 by suggesting we should agree on some general concept of the distribution of Allied effort between the European and Pacific theatres; they did not challenge the idea of defeating Germany first, and he suggested something of the order of seventy per cent of our combined effort against Germany and thirty against Japan." Slessor explained that the indomitable Admiral King "at once weighed in and said he reckoned that the war against Japan was at present absorbing only about fifteen per cent of the Allied effort. We did not see many attractions about this mathematical basis of strategy …"[94]

---

[93] Minutes of Meetings, Casablanca Conference: Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 1943, AFHRC Document No. 119.151-1.
[94] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 444.

Slessor and the British staff developed their conference strategy along the following lines. German power was beginning to wane. Only the Russian Front stood between Germany and its two greatest needs: a period for recuperation and more oil. The British believed that the Soviet Union was the single greatest drain on the German war machine, and needed to be assisted and sustained at all costs. Moreover, a major land front was a perfect complement to a strategic air offensive - - the "air front". The Soviet Union had the additional attraction of being a potential ally against Japan, after defeating Germany. The converse was not true in the case of China, though the British certainly did not want to risk China dropping out of the war. Slessor reasoned that since the bulk of British forces were already inextricably directed against Germany, and as long as this enemy remained in the field, a considerable concentration of forces must remain in the United Kingdom and in Home Waters.[95]

The conference was on the verge of breaking up over strategic priorities when Slessor stepped to the forefront with a balanced proposal. He prepared a written summary of his valuable contributions to the momentous activities of 18 January 1943. Due to the historical value, the memorandum is reproduced in its entirety:

> The 18th of January 1943 was the 5th day of the Casablanca Conference, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff were due to meet the Prime Minister and President at 17.00 hours that evening to tell them what they had agreed upon as the "strategic concept" to underly Allied operations in 1943. By lunch that day the C.C.S. had, in fact, agreed upon nothing at all! Tempers were getting a little frayed – or anyway Alan Brooke's was – and it looked perilously as though 17.00 hours would arrive with the British and U.S. Chiefs of Staff at complete loggerheads as to Anglo-U.S. strategy to be adopted in the coming year.
>
> I was present at the Conference in the pleasant position of a somewhat detached observer; I was, of course, not one of our Chiefs of Staff, nor was I one of the Joint

[95] Report, Casablanca Conference, January 1943, AFHRC Document No. 119.151-1.

Planners. As A.C.A.S. (P), I had accompanied C.A.S. largely, I think, because he felt I might be useful as an interpreter; having considerable experience of negotiations in America during the past two years. I think I was able to be of some use to the Joint Planners who, of course, on these occasions are always being given papers to write, usually on rather inadequate riding orders; and, having sat through all the plenary sessions taking notes, I was able to brief the J.P.'s as to what was really required of them. Moreover, not being embroiled in the heat of the discussion myself, I was in a good position to watch the trend of the argument and perhaps form a better idea of what each side was getting at than the protagonists themselves.

As the morning of the 18th wore on it became increasingly obvious to me that the two sides, British and American, were not in fact half as far apart in their conceptions of our proper strategy as they thought they were, and that the cause of the threatened impasse was based partly on a misunderstanding of words – some of which have faintly different shades of meaning in English and American – and partly on suspicion of each other's motives. The real trouble was that Americans obviously felt that we were concentrating all our interest and attention on defeating Germany and didn't care a damn about Japan; while our Chiefs of Staff suspected that the Americans intended to build up a tremendous campaign in the Pacific, to the serious prejudice of our ability to defeat Germany. Neither was in fact the case, though subsequent events have shown that (largely owing to Admiral King's influence) there was more solid ground for our suspicion than there ever was for the Americans!

Anyway when we broke up for lunch we found ourselves faced with a virtual all complete impasse. Dill asked me as we went to lunch whether I thought the position was as hopeless as it looked, and I said I was convinced it was not, but that our two points of view could be reconciled.

After a hasty lunch I went up to the roof of the ANFA hotel and sat in the sun watching the long Atlantic rollers breaking on the beaches where the Americans had landed about a couple of months before. I scratched out very roughly in a little note book the sort of form which I felt an agreement could take, which looked rather good to me when I read it through. So I took it down to Portal, who altered a word or two and said let's try it on them. There were five minutes to go before the next C.C.S. meeting, in which my manuscript was hurriedly typed by Wiles, just in time for the meeting at 14.00 hours.

When we assembled, Portal said we had produced a draft which he felt might form a basis of agreement, and it was duly circulated. General Marshall and Admiral King had a short whispered conversation, Marshall made a few pencil alterations, and then said as far as he and his colleagues were concerned he was prepared to accept this as the agreed view for the strategy for 1943, subject to the addition of a paragraph about material support to Russia, which I immediately drafted. Dudley Pound said something should go in about the defeat of the U-boat remaining a first charge on our resources. And Jack Dill thereupon hurriedly suggested that Ismay, Brehon Somervell and I should go and get a final draft for presentation to the P.M. and President. So we took General

> Marshall's copy with his notes on it and withdrew to another room, where Pug dictated from the paper in its final form.[96]

Historians have mistakenly credited authorship of the 'Slessor Note' to Air Marshal Portal. John Terraine's description of the Casablanca Conference includes a misleading citation from D. Fraser's *Alanbrooke*: "The light was largely induced by a paper produced by Portal ... The Portal Paper was ingenious in its wording. By deferring to the language of compromise all that did not need immediate action it won agreement on the latter."[97] Denis Richards similarly credits Portal for the politico-military breakthrough at Casablanca: "Very early on in the Conference the two sides were at odds over a statement of policy which would govern the respective allocation of forces to Europe and to the Far East. It was Portal who produced a paper containing the compromise formula..."[98] Slessor's paragraphs survived virtually intact in the final CCS paper. They represented the bargain struck at the Casablanca Conference.

The Casablanca Conference had a significant impact on the Anglo-American air power relationship. Slessor also authored the initial draft of the Directive for the Combined Bomber Offensive on 20 January 1943 and later described its implications:

> There has been no little misunderstanding since the war about the object underlying the Casablanca Directive on the Combined Bomber Offensive from the United Kingdom, which was agreed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff on January 21. Some have tried to make out that its intention was to bring about the defeat of Germany by strategic bombing alone. Enough has been said above to dispose of that fallacy; as a matter of fact Portal at Casablanca expressly disclaimed any such idea ... I think this misunderstanding has arisen partly from the fact that the directive was issued in its

---

[96] Slessor Memorandum, Casablanca Conference: Conduct of the War in 1943, 18 January 1943, PRO AIR 75/11.
[97] Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* p. 394; Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, eds, *War Diaries 1938-1945, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke,* (London, 2001), p. 361-362.
[98] Richards, *Portal of Hungerford*, p. 257.

> original form to Bomber Command and the U.S. Eighth Air Force. It was in fact a policy, not an operational directive.[99]

The USAAF primary operational planner, Major General Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., acknowledges Slessor's design of the bombing directive: "The wording of the 'Casablanca Directive' stemmed primarily from a paper prepared by Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, who had earlier inserted the policy calling for a 'sustained air offensive against Germany' in the ABC-1 Agreement."[100]

The Casablanca Conference represented a benchmark in the acceptance of strategic bombing as a war-winning formula. The United States and Britain agreed to intensify the strategic bombing of Germany, a war plan appropriately called POINTBLANK. At last Roosevelt and Churchill conceded the impossibility of the cross-channel invasion for 1943. They accepted the essential tenants of daylight precision bombing and that at least six months of heavy bombing must precede the invasion. Their joint statement called for the "progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system" so as to "undermine the morale of the German people to a point where the capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened."[101] Slessor and those of his mind had won the argument. R. J. Overy asserts that the Casablanca Conference demonstrated that air power "was considered essential to achieve air supremacy over Germany as a prelude to successful invasion of continental Europe."[102] General Arnold called the Casablanca Directive "a major victory, for we

---

[99] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 448-449.
[100] Major General Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *The Air Plan that Defeated Hitler* (Atlanta, 1972), p. 153; Casablanca Directive, 21 January 1943, PRO AIR 75/11, Appendix D contains the complete Directive.
[101] Directive on the Bomber Offensive, 21 January 1943, PRO AIR 8/711.
[102] Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945*, p. 73.

could bomb in accordance with American principles using methods for which our planes were designed."[103] Matloff agrees in *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare* that the "Casablanca Conference marked a strategic milestone in assigning airpower a definite place in Allied planning against Germany."[104]

At Casablanca, too, FDR announced the unconditional surrender formula during a press conference, claiming that the idea had just popped into his head. However, he often cultivated the idea of fatuity, and appeared to do so in this case. Churchill reported that in fact the phrase "unconditional surrender" appeared in the notes from which the President spoke. However, Slessor claimed that he was surprised at the announcement at Casablanca and that, as far as he could learn, it had not been discussed with the Anglo-American military chiefs. As a military man, he was concerned because it would mean that America and Britain would have to destroy the enemy, not just defeat them, and Slessor, having now been a participant in two wars with Germany, knew that this would be an arduous process. In addition, any opportunities in the war for conditional terms of surrender could not be accepted. President Roosevelt had proposed unconditional surrender for political purposes to reassure Stalin that the West would fight until Berlin was reached and would make no separate peace agreements.[105]

As it turned out, Slessor's presence at the Casablanca Conference was pivotal to its success. During the formal sessions of the CCS, Slessor remained in the background providing quiet advice and counsel. At other times, however, his services were much in

---

[103] Arnold, *Global Mission*, p. 397.
[104] Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-44*, p. 29.
[105] Copp, *Forged in Fire,* p. 354.

demand as his close association with Arnold and Portal enabled him to act as an intermediary between them when they were unable to reach agreement. During the climactic session on 18 January 1943, Slessor prevented a complete stalemate and ensured a successful agreement had been reached was due in no small measure to his efforts behind the scenes providing sound strategic advice.[106]

In the end Slessor's principal contribution lay in his ability to give Churchill, Portal, Dill and others a way of thinking and talking about strategy and the use of air power. Slessor's influence owed not so much to his participation in high-level strategic planning as it did to his close personal and professional relationships to senior Anglo-American air officers. Their respect for his objectivity and analytical talent, coupled with their recognition of his ability to discern a pattern in events, gave Slessor considerable influence on the thinking of those who sat with the Prime Minister and President.[107]

---

[106] Slessor Memorandum, Casablanca Conference: Conduct of the War in 1943, 18 January 1943, PRO AIR 75/11.
[107] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 2, p. 307.

CHAPTER VI

ATLANTIC AIR POWER COOPERATION, 1943

INTRODUCTION

The defeat of the German U-boat campaign was essential to Allied offensive strategy and eventual victory. Failure to subdue the U-boat menace would mean that the Allies could not maintain the vast shipping program necessary to support their Mediterranean operations, provide military assistance to the Soviet Union and prepare for Operation OVERLORD. Naval Historian Clay Blair asserts in *Hitler's U-boat War: The Hunted, 1942-1945*: "Throughout the Casablanca Conference, the acute shortage of Allied shipping remained the "controlling factor" in most decisions. The loss of Allied merchant shipping to all causes had been a hard blow for the Anglo-American alliance: 1,664 vessels totaling 7.8 million gross tons. Of this number, it was calculated, Axis submarines sank about 1,160 ships for about 6.25 million gross tons."[1] Roosevelt and Churchill had decided at Casablanca that "the defeat of the U-boats should remain the first charge on Allied resources." The Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) detailed certain measures necessary to intensify the antisubmarine war, which were unanimously approved by the President and Prime Minister. The following CCS initiatives pertained to the Anglo-American air power alliance: (a) Intensified bombing of U-boat operating bases, (b) Concentrated bombing of U-boat construction yards, (c) Long distance shore based air cover for the North Atlantic and African convoys and West Indies oil convoys,

---

[1] Clay Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945* (New York, 1998), p. 161.

(d) Airfield construction on Greenland for Very Long Range (VLR) aircraft. In addition to the general resolutions on air suppression of U-boats there were a number of more specific policy suggestions calculated to improve the chances of Allied convoys against the coming German submarine onslaught.[2]

This Casablanca Conference formula focused Anglo-American attention on the strategic importance of the Battle of the Atlantic, and led to the Atlantic Convoy Conference in March 1943. During 1943 the U-boat was defeated, and Allied shipping losses were reduced, which in turn allowed the invasion of France to proceed the next year. Anglo-American air power was undoubtedly a major factor in that defeat, as was revealed in extracts from original German documents and Allied interrogation reports. Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz briefed Adolf Hitler on 18 March 1943 at the so-called Fuehrer Conference: "The Air Force is indispensable for the protection of supply shipping. It is impossible to ward off present and future air attacks by naval forces alone." At another Conference attended by Hitler and Doenitz on 31 March, the Grand Admiral asserted: "The substantial increase of the enemy Air Force is the cause of the present crisis in submarine warfare."[3]

On 5 February 1943, Slessor replaced Air Marshal Sir Philip B. Joubert de la Ferte as Commander-in-Chief of RAF Coastal Command. Historian John Terraine asserts in his classic study of U-boat warfare in both World Wars, *Business in Great Waters*, that Slessor "came to Coastal Command with a high reputation, much of it

---

[2] Report, Casablanca Conference, January 1943, AFHRC Document No. 119.151-1.
[3] Extracts from original German documents and Allied interrogation reports, PRO AIR 75/147.

gained at the centre of RAF affairs, the Air Ministry."[4] The force Slessor took over totaled 60 squadrons, 34 of them anti-submarine units with a strength of 430 aircraft. Like the rest of the RAF by this stage of the war, Coastal Command included many aircraft manned by airmen of other nations (including Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Norwegians, Poles, Czechs, and Dutch). Slessor also had operational control of three U.S. squadrons.[5]

As far as Slessor's Coastal Command was concerned, victory in the Battle of the Atlantic meant a rapid and marked increase in the number of U-boats destroyed at sea. The only sure method of achieving that goal was to impose such a rate of submarine losses at sea that the U-boat force could no longer operate effectively without their experienced captains and crews. Other ways of reducing the U-boat threat were suggested at Casablanca, principally the accurate and heavy bombing of shipyards and factories where the submarines and their components were made. Some in the Anglo-American camp attached great importance to the destruction of submarine ports in the Bay of Biscay, and as a result of strong pressure from both British and American naval staffs at Casablanca, the French seaport towns of Lorient and St. Nazaire were devastated.[6] Historian Philip Lundeberg states in his essay, that "as a naval airman, Admiral King emphatically preferred to see the Army Air Corps' anti-submarine effort redirected against the U-boat building yards and the Biscay bases, the latter of which

---

[4] John Terraine, *Business in Great Waters: The U-Boat Wars, 1916-1945* (London, 1989), p. 522.
[5] Ibid., p. 523; Henry Probert, *The Battle of the Atlantic 1939-1945: The 50th Anniversary International Naval Conference,* Stephen Howarth and Derek Law, eds. (London, 1994), p. 379; Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 465.
[6] Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* pp. 440-441.

continued to function despite frequent heavy air attacks."[7] The results were negligible as the Air Ministry always maintained they would be. Slessor commented in *The Central Blue* that no short cut would lead to victory over the U-boats, but only sinking them at sea in far greater numbers than had previously been accomplished.[8]

By the beginning of 1943, Slessor maintained that air power coupled with Anglo-American cooperation would secure the defeat of the U-boat. This was by no means universally recognized, especially in the United States, where no equivalent of Coastal Command existed and where the USAAF had an acrimonious relationship with their naval air counterparts. On the British side, Coastal Command was far more experienced and better organized, with an established cooperative relationship with Royal Navy in which the U-boat menace was addressed as a joint sea-air problem, with airmen and sailors working together as a single team.[9]

The Atlantic Ocean was one battlefield in which Britain in the East and America and Canada in the West were fighting a mobile enemy who constantly switched its attacks to where the best opportunities presented themselves. U-boat operations moved from the American coast to the North Atlantic convoy routes and from there to the Mediterranean Approaches. As the new Commander-in-Chief of Coastal Command, Slessor thought it obvious that to counter the U-boat threat effectively, the Allies needed to erect a highly flexible and mobile form of defense under a closely-knit system of

---

[7] Philip Lundeberg, *The Battle of the Atlantic 1939-1945,* Howarth and Law, eds., p. 361.
[8] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 464.
[9] Michael Howard, *Grand Strategy,* vol. 4: *August 1942 – September 1943* (London, 1972), pp. 306-307; Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 1, p. 519.

cooperation and control. As far as the air-sea war was concerned, this system was lacking and although some progress was made in 1943, the Battle of the Atlantic never had a system of intimate or integrated cooperation that was commonplace in other spheres of Anglo-American air warfare.[10]

In the spring of 1943 Slessor believed that the Allies had between them a sufficient number of antisubmarine aircraft to counter the U-boat, but far too many of them were in the wrong place, notably on the American seaboard, where no serious threat had arisen for nine months. It was only after prolonged discussion at the CCS level and Slessor's personal visit to Washington in June that a more efficient redeployment of U.S. squadrons was established. Slessor and Portal were bitterly disappointed that his aircraft deployment arrangement came too late to take full advantage of the golden opportunities that existed for destroying U-boats in the Bay of Biscay. The Anglo-American air alliance never achieved its aim for unified antisubmarine warfare (ASW) operations in the Atlantic in spite of prolonged negotiations. The subject bristled with difficulties. The United States had a major internal problem in the endemic discord between the Army and Navy.[11] Even with the antagonism, Slessor was committed to the Anglo-American air power alliance in the Atlantic but could not overcome America's interservice rivalry, which derailed the cooperative process.

---

[10] Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, pp. 427-428; Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945*, pp. 164-166.

[11] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 2, pp. 384-385; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 505.

THE ATLANTIC CONVOY CONFERENCE

Following up on a decision reached at Casablanca, the Atlantic Convoy Conference was assembled in Washington on 1 March 1943. Slessor nominated his chief of staff, Air Vice-Marshal A. Durston to represent Coastal Command and instructed him to make decisions without constant referral back to England and the Air Ministry, other than in exceptional cases. Before the conference met, Slessor stressed to Durston that any American squadrons allocated to the protection of shipping from East Atlantic bases must be controlled and operated through Coastal Command. The British Mission traveled by sea, arriving in Washington at the end of February.[12]

At the time of the Atlantic Convoy Conference, there were no VLR aircraft based on the western side of the Atlantic, and General Arnold's B-17s promised for Newfoundland lacked effective range.[13] Sir Michael Howard notes in *Grand Strategy* that "the only aircraft which could be adequately adapted for the very long range patrols required was the American Liberator Mark V, of which Coastal Command possessed, in November 1942, only 39, with a further 4 a month due to be delivered under the Arnold-Slessor-Towers Agreement."[14] The arrival date for a United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) B-24 squadron in this area was still unclear, furthermore, until the crews were fully trained to fly over water and in North Atlantic conditions, their value would be limited. As both U.S. Navy and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) crews with extensive experience in ocean flying were available, it was recommended that Very

---

[12] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 497.
[13] Policy for VLR Bombers, 14 February 1943, PRO AIR 75/14.
[14] Howard, *Grand Strategy,* vol. 4, p. 306.

Long Range (VLR) aircraft should be provided for them so as to form two squadrons no later than 1 April 1943.[15]

The conference opened in Washington on 1 March with Admiral Ernest J. King, American Chief of Naval Operations, presiding.[16] Subcommittees were appointed to report on the various issues on the agenda. While discussions affecting the North Atlantic were going on, the Coastal Command representative was seeking a decision on the question of operational control over aircraft in the Moroccan area. The subject proved intractable, and the Washington Conference could not arrive at a decision.[17] Slessor hoped that the conference would be the beginning of a more permanent relationship enhancing day to day liaison and control. His hopes were doomed to disappointment.[18]

At first, the conference looked promising, beginning with an agreement for a Combined Procedure Board comprising representatives of Coastal Command, the RCAF, AAF and USN air forces. The aim of the Board was to evolve a single combined system of operational, intelligence, and signals procedure for use by all Allied antisubmarine squadrons in the Atlantic. The effect of this rudimentary measure would have been that a British, American, or Canadian squadron would have moved rapidly from one area of the Atlantic to another, or eventually from the Atlantic to the Pacific or

---

[15] Brereton Greenhous, Stephen J. Harris, William C. Johnston and William G. P. Rawling, *The Crucible of War, 1939-1945: The Official History of The Royal Canadian Air Force,* vol. 3 (Toronto, 1994), p. 393; Lundeberg, *The Battle of the Atlantic 1939-1945,* Howarth and Law, eds., pp. 360-362.
[16] Report on Atlantic Convey Conference, 1-12 March 1943, PRO AIR 8/1083.
[17] Report by the sub-committee on air support for Atlantic convoys, Atlantic Convoy Conference, March 1943, PRO AIR 8/1083.
[18] Minutes of Atlantic Convoy Conference, March 1943, AFHRC Document No. 424.151A.

Indian Ocean, without having to waste time retraining its crews in strange procedures. How two great powers like the United States and the United Kingdom could have fought together during World War II for three and a half years without adopting this procedure remains a mystery. When the Combined Procedure Board was making positive progress, Admiral King brought the guillotine down and further progress toward Anglo-American cooperation was cut short.[19]

The Atlantic Convoy Conference had convinced Slessor that Allied air assets were in the wrong place where they had absolutely no influence on the Battle of the Atlantic. The Roosevelt Administration had been understandably shocked by the appalling rate of sinkings that resulted when the U-boats concentrated their attention on the rich hunting grounds of the American seaboard in the months following Pearl Harbor. As the U.S. east coast became more secure later in 1942, the U-boats fell back to other parts of the Atlantic, and by the spring of 1943 were not actively involved within the range of American air bases.[20] Discussions in Washington during the March conference clearly showed that both Allies were building up strength in their own strategic areas quite independently and without taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy.[21] The Allied representatives at the Atlantic Convoy Conference ignored statements showing their estimated operational requirements, together with their planned buildup of air forces to meet them as of 1 July 1943.[22]

---

[19] Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945*, pp. 239-242.
[20] Report by the sub-committee on air support for Atlantic convoys, Atlantic Convoy Conference, March 1943, PRO AIR 8/1083.
[21] Ibid., PRO AIR 8/1083.
[22] Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945*, p. 241.

This conference achieved substantial results in rationalizing and reorganizing the system of responsibility for convoy routing and escort in the North Atlantic. Britain and Canada assumed responsibility for the security of convoys in the North Atlantic and the United States agreed to provide additional air and sea forces for convoy protection. The Washington Conference participants agreed that the main direction and control would center at Western Approaches in Liverpool and Coastal Command headquarters at Northwood. The Eastern Air Command in Halifax assumed a position corresponding to Coastal Command with the operational control of all antisubmarine aircraft, whether RCAF, RAF or US, based in Canada.[23]

The most important agreement reached at the Atlantic Convoy Conference was that the United States would undertake the basing of VLR antisubmarine aircraft in Newfoundland and accelerate the delivery of B-24 Liberators for the RCAF, bringing the B-24 total to thirty six designated for antisubmarine duties in Canada. Britain also agreed to surrender fifteen B-24's from their inventory to allow for greater concentration of air power over the Western Atlantic. Accelerating the closure of the Atlantic Gap would be beneficial to everyone; this step, more than any other, would reduce the sinking rate of the North Atlantic convoys.[24]

---

[23] Report on Atlantic Convoy Conference, 1-12 March 1943, PRO AIR 8/1083.
[24] Message General Arnold to General Stratemeyer, VLR aircraft, 29 March 1943, AFHRC Document No. 424.3220; Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* p. 442; Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 2, p. 387.

ATTEMPTING A UNIFIED ATLANTIC COMMAND

In the Second World War, the absence of a single antisubmarine command for the Atlantic did not prevent an Allied victory against the U-boats, but it certainly made the task longer, more difficult, and costlier than it would have been in terms both of lives and ships. The lack of a single coordinating authority progressively gave rise to an inability to achieve common operational procedures in antisubmarine warfare and anomalies such as the existence of the independent American Moroccan Sea Frontier in the middle of the British Strategic Area, which hampered efficiency of operations. The disagreements and differences were unable to be resolved at the Combined Chief of Staff level. The endeavors to evolve a unified strategic control of Allied air resources in the Atlantic and the attempts to rectify the uneven distribution of long-range aircraft all foundered on the opposition of Admiral King.[25]

The first suggestion for a common Atlantic Air Command was made as early as September 1941--before America had actually entered the war, but while their sea and air forces were protecting Lend-Lease deliveries across the Atlantic and safeguarding communications with Iceland. Portal advocated creating an Anglo-American command structure in Iceland and Newfoundland to coordinate air support in the North Atlantic. The scheme was examined and approved by Vice Admiral Robert Ghormley, USN (then official observer in London), but repudiated by Admiral King as Chief of Naval Operations.[26]

---

[25] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 2, p. 377.
[26] Hilary St. George Saunders, *The Royal Air Force*, vol. 3: *The Fight is Won* (London, 1953), pp. 39-40.

With the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941, unity of effort was lacking in the Battle of the Atlantic against the U-boats. The Atlantic Ocean was divided into two strategic halves, the Western under American control and the Eastern under British. Central authority for coordinating antisubmarine operations or resources between the two strategic locations did not exist. Each half of the strategic apportionment was again subdivided into zones, and during 1942, the air war against the Germans was fought piecemeal in the various zones off North America and Africa.[27]

To strike back against catastrophic Allied shipping losses, the War Department established the USAAF Anti-Submarine Command on 15 October 1942.[28] At the express wish of General Arnold, an experienced RAF officer was attached to this new headquarters as liaison advisor. Thus, initially the new American command was analogous to Coastal Command's relationship with the Admiralty, but important differences soon appeared. No USN staff was attached to the Command, nor was any access to a U-boat tracking organization made available; and the authority for moving Army Air Force ASW squadrons within the United States was not in the hands of Arnold and his officers but in the hands of the U.S. Navy Department in Washington.[29]

From the first, this effort to set up a single Atlantic air command of AAF squadrons was viewed negatively by Admiral King. He had obtained a very large allocation of Liberators under the Arnold-Towers Agreement of May 1942 and planned to take over all such ASW tasks by the fall of 1943. The failure of the Americans to

---

[27] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 2, pp. 384-385.
[28] Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945*, p. 104.
[29] Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 1, pp. 546-553.

centralize their ASW resources allowed for the wasteful parallel development of two land-based air forces dedicated to the same task and the differences concerning the most effective way to employ aircraft in the antisubmarine campaign.[30] In his memoirs, King provided an analysis of the Army-Navy disruption: "This antisubmarine dispute was thus a collision, or rather, two collisions, between opposing concepts. One set of concepts related to air command. The Army regarded air as an entirely separate element of warfare that should be autonomous, administratively and operationally, while the Navy held that air should be integrated with other arms. The second collision occurred between opposing concepts of how to fight submarines. In this matter the Air Corps, knowing about the air only, naturally did not see eye to eye with the Navy, which was experienced with and understood not only air but also ships and submarines, and the potency of sea-air power in fighting submarines."[31]

The efforts to evolve a scheme for single-minded prosecution of the U-boat air war in the Atlantic was experiencing one set back after another. The U.S. Navy's opposition was slowly crippling the Army Air Anti-Submarine Command. General Arnold presented an innovative plan in February 1943 that would place Allied air and surface forces under a single commander.[32]

Arnold asserted that this new Allied Commander should have two deputies; one for ASW air and another for ASW surface forces operating in the Atlantic. This scheme

---

[30] Slessor Commentary on Biscay Air Offensive, 30 March 1943, PRO AIR 75/15.
[31] Admiral Ernest J. King and Walter M. Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* (London, 1953), p. 466.
[32] Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945*, pp. 309-310.

met immediate opposition from the Navy Department, which wanted to avoid any restriction of the USN's right to organize its forces according to its own principles.[33] The resultant recommendation that emerged after weeks of argument was a compromise which, in its efforts to avoid controversy, was of little practical value and presented no solution. Those in Britain realized that nothing could be gained by pressing for closer Atlantic cooperation until the American military interservice problem had been resolved.[34]

In mid-April 1943, General Marshall sought to revive the flagging effort to coordinate all antisubmarine resources. Backed by Secretary of War Stimson, Marshall presented his plan to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff in a memorandum dated 14 April 1943. The report confined itself to air operations in the U-boat war and declared that the only solution to the terrible losses in the Atlantic was a unified Allied air command spearheaded by VLR aircraft. Marshall estimated that at least 250 of these aircraft, both with Army and Navy crews, should be placed under a single Air Commander answerable directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thereby avoiding questions of rival service jurisdiction. He mentioned two names for the post of Air Commander: General Kenney of the USAAF and Air Marshal Tedder of the RAF.[35]

Air Marshal Portal, in a memorandum dated 18 April 1943 gave Marshall's fresh proposal to Churchill. The CAS emphasized to the Prime Minister that the first

---

[33] Ibid., pp. 309-310.
[34] Note by RAF delegation in Washington to Air Ministry, 9 April 1943, PRO AIR 20/848; Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 2, pp. 384-388.
[35] Terraine, *Business in Great Waters,* pp. 540-541.

requirement was for the Americans to put their house in order and then establish an Atlantic Air Command. This new command structure would be responsible for organization, procedure, tactical method, equipment, and control, but the allocation of resources would rest with the CCS. Regarding the naming of the Air Commander, Portal asserted to Churchill that Tedder could not be spared from the Mediterranean; moreover, neither he nor Kenney had any anti-U-boat experience on a large scale. Portal believed the commander should be a British officer because of Britain's absolute dependency for survival on the Atlantic trade routes and their greater experience in anti-U-boat warfare. To the CAS, the obvious candidate was the existing Commander-in-Chief of Coastal Command, Air Marshal Sir John Slessor.[36]

Independently, both Secretary Stimson and General Arnold had reached much the same conclusions concerning Slessor as Supreme Air Commander. The Assistant Secretary of War for Air, Robert Lovett, was therefore dispatched to Britain to seal the proposal.[37] Lovett also viewed Slessor as the premier candidate to become the Allied Commander-in-Chief in control of all ASW air forces in the Atlantic. Slessor was doubtful that a single Supreme Air Commander in the Atlantic would ever work in practice. The idea held obvious attractions on the condition that the proper exercise of a unified command was possible. Slessor saw that there would be inherent difficulties with an "Ocean Air Command" such as span of control and differing nationalities. He thought that even with an agreement from the USN, the result would be an officer

---

[36] Letter, Portal to Churchill, Atlantic Air Command, 18 April 1943, PRO AIR 20/848.
[37] Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 2, pp. 388-391.

acceptable to both sides but without the power to effectively exercise command. Slessor did not see the possibility of Admiral King agreeing to this kind of arrangement--much less the British military if the Supreme Air Commander was American.[38]

Slessor dined with Lovett on 17 May 1943. He provided the following observations in a personal letter to Portal: "He [Lovett] immediately opened up on this question of a single command for all A/S air operations in the Atlantic. He told me Stimson was keen on the idea ... I told Lovett that I thought there were many obvious attractions in the idea if it could be put into effect, but I thought the chances of King agreeing to anything of the sort were very remote. He agreed, but said Stimson felt deeply on this subject ... He told me various stories – such as the 70 odd V.L.R. Liberators sitting doing nothing on the Pacific coast which, of course, amply illustrated the ridiculous state of affairs now prevailing. I said one thing seemed clear to me, namely that if they did have a single Air Command, it was no good merely nominating some chap who was acceptable to both sides, calling him C-in-C Ocean Air Command and giving him the responsibility, unless they also gave him the powers effectively to exercise command, which involved moving squadrons from A to B. I didn't see King agreeing..."[39] Slessor realized that an integrated Allied ocean air command would benefit from a central focus on all planning and research on antisubmarine operations that could defeat the U-boat menace.

---

[38] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* pp. 488-491.
[39] Message, Slessor to Portal, Lovett Discussions, 18 May 1943, PRO AIR 75/12.

Slessor received a personal note from Lovett on 30 May 1943. The Assistant Secretary for Air clearly demonstrated his strong affection and admiration for the Anglo-American air alliance: "Before leaving England I want to say again how much I enjoyed seeing you, and how enormously encouraged I am after seeing the RAF and the AAF at work in this theater. It has been a very heart-warming experience for me. Meanwhile, with my best regards and a very good wish for you in the superb job you are doing ...."[40]

Meanwhile the Prime Minister asked the First Sea Lord to comment on Portal's memorandum. In his reply, Admiral Dudley Pound came out against a supreme commander, both for surface ships or aircraft, on the grounds that it would be impracticable for any one individual to acquire an intimate knowledge in all areas of such a complex multifaceted mission covering such a huge geographical area. Moreover, Pound was concerned that if a British officer held this post, friction with American counterparts would be inevitable. He was also categorically against any American officer taking the supreme commander position because they lacked qualifications. Pound pointed out that under the Washington Convoy Conference Agreement, Britain had the practical advantages of a unified command in the northern part of the North Atlantic.[41]

With his proposal, Marshall hoped to place the joint air force above questions of rival jurisdiction. Marshall's plan, of course, did not suit Admiral King, who presented an alternative plan on 1 May 1943. This scheme forecast the immediate intrusion of the

---

[40] Personal note, Lovett to Slessor, 30 May 1943, PRO AIR 75/12.
[41] Letter, Pound to Churchill, Ocean Air Command, 23 April 1943, PRO AIR 20/848.

Navy Department's new antisubmarine command, to be known as the Tenth Fleet. The Navy's ASW force would have jurisdiction over all Sea Frontiers and would use the Frontier Commanders as task force commanders. As the Navy already exercised operational control at all levels over AAF Anti-Submarine Warfare units, this proposal amounted to naval control of all shore-based ASW aircraft. While not agreeing to this, General Marshall was willing to compromise.[42] On 11 May, he requested that the command of the VLR and Long Range (LR) aircraft engaged in ASW combat be given to an Army Air Force officer and that the Army continue to supply, maintain, base, and fly the majority of these aircraft. Lively discussions followed, and it became clear by June, Admiral King was aiming not only to control all forms of American ASW aircraft but also to use his Liberator allocations to set up a naval long-range bombing force.[43]

On 10 June 1943, Admiral John S. McCain, General Joseph McNarney and Arnold framed an understanding that provided for an USN antisubmarine command. King balked at the *quid pro quo*, holding out for his long-range bomber force, but Stimson and Marshall stood their ground. In exasperation, Marshall warned King that continued foot-dragging would raise the question of full air independence. "The present state of procedure," he said, "between the Army and Navy is neither economical nor highly efficient and would inevitably meet with public condemnation were all the facts known."[44] Marshall's threat to broaden the debate by ending the informal truce over a separate air force prompted King to reconsider his position; the pressure of an

---

[42] Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in the World War II,* vol. 2, p. 390.
[43] Ibid., p. 390.
[44] Ibid., pp. 406-408.

independent air force frightened both him and the Navy. He finally acquiesced to the McCain-Arnold-McNarney pact, and the AAF finally offered to withdraw from ASW operations with the understanding that the Navy relinquish long-range bombing.[45]

The result of this affair was that a large number of experienced AAF antisubmarine warfare crews were relieved by relatively inexperienced naval crews in the middle of the Battle of the Atlantic. Slessor asserted later that it would be disastrous to reduce, even temporarily, the efficacy of the air forces engaged in the U-boat war or to delay the concentration of more air forces in the most profitable area, merely for training and time delays resulting from a transfer of responsibility from one of the American armed forces to another.[46] On the British side of the Atlantic, in Cornwall and Lyautey, four ASW squadrons of the Army Air Forces had operated with Coastal Command; all the crews were well trained and two squadrons were first-class antisubmarine units with significant combat experience.[47] Slessor believed it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the U.S. Navy to replace AAF units with anything of equal operational value without a delay of many months. In Coastal Command, a pilot with military wings was still required to undergo sixteen weeks of special courses before qualifying to be a co-pilot in long-range ASW aircraft like a Liberator or Sunderland; then required to fly operationally as a co-pilot for another three to four months to qualify as a ASW pilot – making a total of eight months, at least. The minimum period of special training was four to five months for navigators and approximately the same for

---

[45] Report, Aircraft Allocations, June 1943, AFHRC Document No. 110607.
[46] Saunders, *The Royal Air Force*, vol. 3, pp. 47-48.
[47] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

radio operators, who had to work the complicated radar equipment. The most valuable part of their training was actually done operationally, in the initial stages of their service, flying with experienced crews.[48]

Underlying the question of control was King's deep-rooted distrust of any form of Army ownership of the long-range shore-based aircraft. Slessor presumed this distrust came from the basic difference in outlook between the Army conception of using VLR aircraft offensively searching for U-boats over a wide ocean and the Navy principle of convoy support, a policy that the Army Air Forces dubbed as defensive. Admiral King put every obstacle in the way of what he decided was a misuse of Liberator strength even to the extent of opposing the allocation of Liberator reinforcements to the Eastern Atlantic in case they should be employed on offensive missions unrelated to convoy movements.[49]

Superimposed on this distrust was the fundamental discord between the USN and the Army, the active opposition of the Navy against any poaching of their preserves and their fixed determination to have nothing to do with any form of independent air forces. Hence, King initiated the wasteful policy of building up a rival organization of Naval Liberators. This hostility towards an independent air force was borne out of Admiral King's attitude towards the RAF.[50] Although cordial enough to Slessor, neither King nor

---

[48] Ibid., pp. 48-49.
[49] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* pp. 493-494.
[50] Ibid., pp. 493-494.

his Tenth Fleet organization ever acknowledged the existence of Coastal Command in the antisubmarine war.[51]

Slessor was committed to Anglo-American air organization and recognized the military advantage of air power's capacity to redeploy and concentrate squadrons at the decisive point without months of correspondence and discussion. It is significant that with the disappearance of American interservice discord, the American Anti-Submarine Command headed by King made no effort to have any contact with Slessor's Coastal Command in spite of the fact that from September 1943 three USN squadrons operated in the Bay of Biscay under RAF control.[52]

AIRCRAFT ALLOCATIONS AND THE BAY OF BISCAY OFFENSIVE

At the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, the CCS had issued a paper containing a report by the Combined Staff Planners furnishing the requirements in shore-based aircraft necessary for the defense of Allied convoys. The middle portion of the North Atlantic was designated the VLR (Very Long Range) area, and a figure of eighty VLR aircraft was given as the minimum requirement for convoy escort and support in this area. The planners suggested that the United Kingdom supply sixty aircraft and that America supply twenty.[53]

Slessor attempted to speed up the procurement of Liberators from America for the better prosecution of the war against the U-boats around the mid-Atlantic convoys

---

[51] Ibid., p. 492.
[52] Terraine, *Business in Great Waters,* pp. 630-631.
[53] Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, pp. 427-428.

and in the outer Bay of Biscay. Although the RAF Coastal Command received the first maritime Liberators as early as July 1941, the promised flow of reinforcements had dwindled in 1942 to a mere trickle, so that by the time Slessor assumed command in February 1943, still only one VLR squadron (No. 120) was working with the convoys in the mid-Atlantic. One other squadron (No. 224) had been formed of ordinary long-range Liberators that were operating in the Bay.[54]

Upon assuming leadership of Coastal Command, Slessor prepared a policy memorandum for VLR bombers. Slessor maintained that only VLR aircraft could provide effective close support to threatened convoys in the mid-Atlantic: "The solution of this problem involves a policy for air cover at very long range. It is obvious that, were adequate resources available, the present policy which aims at both affording close support to the threatened convoy and conducting a long range offensive in areas of probability far out in the Atlantic would be sound." Coastal Command needed sufficient aircraft to harass and destroy U-boats. Slessor and the RAF were committed to a long-range offensive as soon as Coastal Command resources were in place, and would in turn focus on the U-boat menace in all areas.[55]

Slessor faced the withdrawal of American B-24 heavy bombers from Coastal Command duties to the control of the United States Navy. In a message from General Marshall to the CAS, Slessor was notified that: "Transfer of from 6 to 12 of the American ASV equipped B-24 airplanes now based in the United Kingdom to

---

[54] Howard, *Grand Strategy,* vol. 4, pp. 306-315.
[55] Policy for VLR Bombers, 14 February 1943, PRO AIR 75/14.

Casablanca area to operate under the control of the U.S. naval commander at Casablanca, would be of material aid in meeting the menace of enemy submarine concentration off the Casablanca area which is seriously endangering our convoys approaching that area."[56] Slessor provided immediate comments on the transfer proposal:

> The need for providing adequate air protection for your convoys proceeding to and from North West Africa is fully appreciated ... we would welcome the transfer of one Squadron to that area as soon as it has had sufficient operational experience and the necessary facilities for maintenance and operational control can be made available in North West Africa. The period of working up these Squadrons is far from complete ... it is doubtful they could yet operate efficiently from an advanced base without the necessary technical facilities to maintain them ... In our view it would be unsound and uneconomical to move them at this stage in their training.[57]

Slessor and Portal both pressed for control of AAF and USN antisubmarine squadrons on Britain's side of the Atlantic. In a highly classified message to the RAF Delegation in Washington, Portal addressed the RAF position: "Press firmly as possible that the location and control of American Squadrons allocated for this role (anti-submarine) whether Army Air Force or Naval Air Force should be exercised through appropriate R.A.F. Command."[58] Portal was interpreting resolutions from previous Allied conferences that only one authority could be responsible for the air protection of shipping in any particular area. This particular case of American naval air assets operating in North West Africa fell under the area of command of Slessor's Gibraltar Coastal Command.

---

[56] Message, Marshall to Portal, VLR Aircraft, 12 February 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.
[57] Message, Slessor to Portal, VLR requirements, 18 February 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.
[58] Message, RAF Delegation (RAFDEL) to Portal, American antisubmarine squadrons, 24 February 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.

The urgent need for VLR aircraft was also addressed by the British Joint Staff Mission in the Washington Convoy Conference. The conference recommended an immediate VLR deployment to the Northwest Atlantic with Canada receiving a direct allocation of B-24's. The Canadians had a number of experienced crews available but no VLR aircraft, which would have allowed for convoy protection and patrols into the "Air Gap" in the mid-Atlantic. Canada therefore requested an immediate diversion of twenty Liberators from the RAF allocation to enable them to form a VLR squadron.[59]

To avoid any possibility of upsetting the flow of Liberators to the RAF, Air Marshal Portal, through the RAF Delegation in Washington, asked General Arnold if he would make a direct allocation of VLR aircraft to the RCAF. Arnold was initially predisposed to this request but finally decided it would set a dangerous precedent leading to a possible commitment of all Army Air Force VLR aircraft to the antisubmarine campaign and allowing the USN to divert their entire allocation of Liberators to the Pacific.[60] Arnold also felt strongly that since the USN had secured a huge allocation of Liberators for the express purpose of meeting the submarine menace, they should make this allocation to Canada. He therefore suggested to Portal that the Air Ministry should ask Admiral King for VLR aircraft, although he regarded a negative reply as a forgone conclusion.[61] In a subsequent message to Portal, the RAF Delegation in Washington explained that while Arnold was obviously sincere in his desire to help, he was not averse to using the British request as a lever against the USN in their internal quarrel

---

[59] Message, RAFDEL to Portal, VLR requirements, 24 March 1943, PRO AIR 8/1399.
[60] Ibid., PRO AIR 8/1399.
[61] Ibid., PRO AIR 8/1399.

over ownership of long-range land-based aircraft. The RAF Delegation suggested that the Prime Minister broach the subject directly to Roosevelt, using the President's sympathetic telegram about the current North Atlantic losses and necessity for more VLR aircraft as a means of approach.[62]

The Prime Minister was, however, reluctant to making any kind of official complaint at the Presidential level. The Cabinet ASW Warfare Committee decided to make the allocation directly to Canada from the RAF allowance at a rate of five aircraft per month in March, April, and May 1943.[63]

What was needed was drastic and immediate deployment of VLR aircraft into the North Atlantic. The Anglo-American position in the Atlantic was perilous during March 1943. The total loss of Allied shipping during the month was 620,000 tons, and twenty ships were lost in three days of U-boat pack attacks on a pair of eastbound convoys, H.X.229 and S.C.122. The Alliance could not sustain these crippling losses.[64] Slessor's policy at the time was to concentrate every available aircraft with the necessary range to escort threatened convoys, but these opportunities came in peaks, between long periods when air patrols showed no dividend at all. In the Bay of Biscay the opportunities remained more or less constant. No one contested that Coastal Command needed more aircraft in the spring of 1943, particularly in the Bay. The question for Slessor was how they were to be found, bearing in mind that the question was not merely a one of

---

[62] Message, RAFDEL to Portal, internal American dispute, 26 March 1943, PRO AIR 8/1399.
[63] Memorandum, Slessor to Pound, Bay Offensive, 4 April 1943, PRO AIR 75/15.
[64] Slessor, *The Central Blue,* p. 510.

numbers of aircraft or even crews, but of the right type of aircraft with the requisite range and the right type of radar equipment.[65]

The Washington Conference recommended U.S. squadron deployments but opposed any extensive diversion of aircraft earmarked for other wartime theaters. This stance showed a lack of appreciation for the seriousness of the mounting losses in the North Atlantic by both the USN and AAF. In a signal to the Air Ministry, the RAF Delegation stressed this fact and informed the AAF of efforts made on the British side to accelerate the numbers of operational Very Long-Range aircraft into Atlantic combat.[66]

In March 1943, when the U-boat wolf pack attacks were dangerously successful, only thirty-four VLR Liberators were based in the United Kingdom and Iceland. In spite of repeated requests by Canada, Washington would not agree to a direct allocation of Liberators to the RCAF. The AAF was incapable of providing support because the USN was now receiving large allocations of Liberators for the express purpose of meeting the U-boat threat and asserted that this purely naval requirement would be met by Navy air forces.[67] However, the Naval Department was unwilling to do this, and finally, neither service would volunteer to fill this need. Finally, the RAF made available fifteen Liberators from their slender allotment to reequip one Canadian ASW squadron. The U.S. Navy Liberators were being sent to the Pacific or the East Coast of America, neither of which contained a U-boat threat, and not until the end of May 1943 were a

---

[65] Memorandum, Slessor to Pound, Bay Offensive, 4 April 1943, PRO AIR 75/15.
[66] Message, RAFDEL to Portal, 24 March 1943, PRO AIR 8/1399.
[67] Greenhous, Harris, Johnston and Rawling, *The Crucible of War*, vol. 3, p. 393.

squadron of naval B-24's deployed to Newfoundland.[68] Admiral King refused to consider the North Atlantic as a priority area for B-24's and stated in March that if the British were so short of Liberators for the Atlantic battle, they should obtain them from RAF Bomber Command.[69]

The RAF Delegation suggested to Portal and Slessor on 9 April 1943 that the Prime Minister might forward his delayed letter to Roosevelt and ascertain America's plan to help meet the emergency, observing that only fifteen VLR aircraft were operating over the Atlantic at a time of critical shipping losses, and of that number, only eight were available per day.[70] Slessor asserted that without direct pressure from the President, Admiral King would not support air antisubmarine operations or give priority to the North Atlantic over the Pacific. The Prime Minister took note of Slessor's suggestion and drafted a telegram on these lines.[71]

King's complacency regarding the increasing Atlantic shipping losses disappeared with Roosevelt's urgent letter stating a requirement for an adequate number of VLR aircraft for the North Atlantic was of highest priority. In response to the President's prodding, the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that 255 VLR aircraft would be provided by July 1943. Of these, 75 would come from the AAF, 60 from the USN, and 120 from RAF Bomber Command, including fifteen being diverted from the RAF to Canada. Arnold assumed responsibility for compensation of Canadian losses and

---

[68] Message, RAFDEL to Portal, 24 March 1943, PRO AIR 8/1399; Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War*, p. 136.
[69] King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King*, pp. 462-467.
[70] Message, RAFDEL to Air Ministry, Anglo-American Co-operation, 9 April 1943, PRO AIR 20/848.
[71] Ibid., PRO AIR 20/848.

undertook to replace the allocation to the RAF at a later date. This change of heart was welcome news to Slessor and Coastal Command. The President's letter to the Navy and War Department highlighted the actual number of VLR aircraft that were operating in the North Atlantic during the latest U-boat battles.[72]

In March 1943, Slessor was instrumental in developing the Allied Anti-Submarine Survey Board, which was designed to improve coordination and liaison between Anglo-American forces in the war against the U-boats. The board represented the British Admiralty and United States Surface Navy, Slessor's Coastal Command, and U.S. Naval Aviation. Their task was to tour the various British and U.S. antisubmarine commands throughout the world and make recommendations for improving coordination and combat operations. The board's first report at the end of March described the air coverage in the North Atlantic as totally inadequate and pointed out that there was not a single VLR west of Iceland. Many sound measures were put forward during the Board's subsequent tours, but no case is on record in which recommendations were ever carried out by the USN. Stifled by Admiral King's uncompromising attitude, the Board was dissolved on 28 September 1943.[73]

After the defeat of the U-boat packs in the North Atlantic, the emphasis changed to the Bay of Biscay, which then became the fruitful area for engaging the German submarine. Here again the absence of an Anglo-American Atlantic air alliance hampered the deployment of ASW air forces. By spring 1943, more than enough

---

[72] Saunders, *The Royal Air Force*, vol. 3, p. 55.
[73] Report on Atlantic Convoy Conference, 1-12 March 1943, PRO AIR 8/1083; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 496.

Liberators existed to prosecute a full offensive in the Bay, but many of them were located in places where they could have no influence on the U-boat war.[74]

Slessor's Coastal Command authored a detailed plan for the defeat of the U-boat during 1943. It was entitled "Anti-Submarine Offensive by Aircraft in the Bay of Biscay". Slessor prepared the note personally and submitted it to the Air Ministry and the CAS on 30 March 1943. It was also intended to counter the Admiralty's position *vis-a-vie* the defeat of the U-boats: "The scale of the air offensive should be regarded as one that may be adequate to prevent U-boats from operating in the Atlantic altogether ... to put a stop to sinkings altogether by air action ... the reduction of sinkings to a level where they do not constitute a serious limitation on our offensive capacity." Slessor postulated that aircraft needed to be concentrated in the most profitable areas. He pointed out in his paper to the Air Ministry that the Bay of Biscay was the source of the Atlantic U-boat menace, and operations in the Bay constituted offensive and defensive measures for the whole Atlantic: "The Naval Staff underestimate the tactical flexibility of air forces in anti-submarine warfare. If the U-Boats in fact withdraw from any given area we have surely gone a long way to achieving our object of preventing ships from being sunk."[75]

Slessor's plan explained that "at any one time during the Spring of 1943, there were from 90 to 140 U-boats at sea in the Atlantic ocean. Of these, about five out of every six were based in the Biscay ports; the sixth was a new submarine, just having

---

[74] Saunders, *The Royal Air Force*, vol. 3, pp. 47-48; Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945*, p. 315.
[75] Slessor Commentary on Biscay Air Offensive, 30 March 1943, PRO AIR 75/15.

passed its trials in the Baltic, which entered the Atlantic through the passage between the Faeroes and Iceland." Slessor noted that five out of six U-boats that operated in that vast area had to pass through a little patch of 300 by 120 miles in the Bay of Biscay where they could be located and attacked by aircraft based in southwest England. The principle of the Bay Offensive was to patrol that small area with sufficient aircraft to give the Anglo-American air forces a reasonable certainty of sighting and attacking every U-boat that passed through it in either direction – whether into or out of a Bay of Biscay port.[76]

The Admiralty also provided a plan to the Prime Minister for the defeat of the U-boat. They incorporated the advice and input of three distinguished scientists who provided mathematical calculations quantifying the desired number of Allied aircraft to achieve the requisite number of U-boat sinkings. Their assessment determined that to achieve decisive intervention in the Bay required 260 long-range aircraft. Slessor prepared a six-page letter to Admiral of the Fleet Sir A. Dudley Pound on 4 April 1943 to counter the scientific calculations on the number of aircraft needed to sink the requisite number of U-boats to win the war in the Atlantic. Slessor stated that he had the "deepest respect for them [scientists] – think their work is of vital importance to us. But these last few days especially have impressed on me the feeling that strategy by slide-rule is not a working proposition." He favored concentration of air activity in the Bay of Biscay and the Northern Approaches and believed in tackling the problem from a less scientific but perhaps a more realistic angle: "There can be no argument that we are not killing enough U-Boats. Equally it is clear that the Bay has two outstanding features: (a)

---

[76] Ibid., PRO AIR 75/15.

It is the main source of the U-Boat menace in the Atlantic – the base of at least 3 out of 4 U-Boats that operate anywhere in the Atlantic, (b) It is the U-Boats' soft spot – the one and only area in which we can be perfectly certain there will be 100 to 150 U-Boats to be found in the course of every month."[77]

Slessor was adamantly opposed to Anglo-American Combined-Bomber Offensive assets being transferred to the U-boat campaign. He stated that: "I do not believe the loan of 2 or 3 squadrons from Bomber Command would contribute very materially to the Bay Offensive."[78] Slessor certainly has received intense criticism for this strategic approach. British military historian John Terraine attributes Slessor's unwillingness to secure Bomber Command or Eighth Air Force heavy bombers as further evidence of his overwhelming support for strategic bombing at the expense of combating the obvious threat to the Alliance: "His heart was in the bombing campaign, and it is this author's belief that he never really understood the significance of Coastal Command's role. He saw it as a defensive weapon, an essential part of what could later be called Britain's 'survival kit'. He did not perceive the offensive character, in so greatly helping to make OVERLORD possible, which gave the Command a true centrality."[79] Historians have incorrectly assessed the Air Marshal's rationale for not procuring VLR assets from Bomber Command. Slessor affirmed that "Coastal

---

[77] Memorandum, Slessor to Pound, 4 April 1943, PRO AIR 75/15, the three scientists were Professor's Williams, Brind and Edelsten, all experts in Operational Research.
[78] Ibid., PRO AIR 75/15.
[79] Terraine, *Business in Great Waters*, pp. 522-523.

Command's work is a very specialized form of Air Force work, requiring special equipment and special training."[80]

These aircraft could only be supplied at the expense of Bomber Command, and the Admiralty's demand was summarily rejected by the Prime Minister, on the grounds that Bomber Command was at the time the only Allied force that was exerting any pressure upon the enemy. Slessor also strongly opposed the idea. He postulated that the British, Canadians, and Americans already had between them in the Atlantic as many, if not more, long range ASW aircraft than were required. The trouble for Slessor was that many of them were in the wrong place, notably on the American seaboard. Slessor believed the correct approach was to redeploy existing Anglo-American resources, concentrating them in the area where the threat was greatest and the opportunities for kills most fruitful. That area at the time was unquestionably the Bay of Biscay.[81]

Eventually after some three weeks' delay, due mainly to continued discussions on the matter of aircraft for the Bay Offensive, the Anti-U-boat Committee agreed with Slessor that his was the proper policy. A paper was drawn-up with the signatures of Admirals Pound and Stark and Air Marshal Slessor recommending the transfer of seventy-two long-range aircraft from the Western Atlantic to the Bay. This Joint Paper was sent to the CCS in the third week of April 1943. Slessor emphasized to Portal that time was an urgent factor; the squadrons needed to be available at the earliest possible

---

[80] Memorandum, Slessor to Pound, Bay Offensive, 4 April 1943, PRO AIR 75/15.
[81] Saunders, *The Royal Air Force,* vol. 3, pp. 41-42.

moment to capitalize on the technological advantage in radar held over the German Navy.[82]

After some weeks of discussion an Air Ministry signal was sent to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 21 April 1943 suggesting the transfer of seventy-two long-range aircraft from the Western Atlantic to the Biscay operational theater. After a further two-month delay, the CCS agreed that two of the Army's ASW Liberator squadrons (twenty-four aircraft) would be transferred from Newfoundland to the United Kingdom. This was far short of the seventy-two the RAF had requested and resulted in Slessor's June visit to Washington to see Admiral King. Sir Michael Howard notes in his official history that "a personal visit by Air Marshal Slessor to Admiral King eased the situation."[83] Slessor requested an arrangement from King, whereby on the abolition of the Anti-Submarine Command, four more AAF anti-submarine squadrons would be sent to the United Kingdom. They would be constituted as a Special Bomber Wing of the Eighth Air Force, detached under the operational control of Coastal Command for operation in the Bay Offensive. He also suggested an alternative plan to King, which would allow four AAF squadrons to come to Britain for the Bay Offensive with the understanding they would eventually be relieved by naval squadrons.[84]

Even after Slessor received personal assurances from Admiral King, any indication of further American air reinforcement was absent until a RAF Delegation signal of 7 August 1943 notifying the British that additional squadrons to make up

---

[82] Howard, *Grand Strategy,* vol. 4, p. 309.
[83] Ibid., p. 309.
[84] Memorandum, Slessor to Sinclair, Bay Offensive, 16 July 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.

seventy-two would arrive in the United Kingdom at the end of August, four months after the proposal had first been submitted. Actually the first squadron of Admiral King's reinforcements arrived in September 1943. Britain never received the full complement of seventy-two VLR aircraft. Fortunately for the Allies, they were able to defeat the U-boat menace without the American aircraft; though all the cumbrous and lengthy procedure doubtlessly resulted in the loss of many opportunities for killing U-boats at the height of the Bay Offensive.[85]

American Secretary of War Stimson visited Slessor at his Coastal Command headquarters on 16 July 1943. Slessor's discussions with Stimson centered on the antisubmarine activities and the prospect of dissolving of the USAAF U-boat responsibility. The Air Marshal noted the jealously and ill feeling existing between the U.S. Navy and the AAF and that Admiral King had been increasingly restive and critical of the ASW system. Slessor remarked: "Perhaps the Army A/S Command has not been as efficient as it might have been, it has never really had a chance under the existing set-up in the United States." A tentative agreement had been reached that the AAF was to move out of the ASW field and be replaced by the Navy. To satisfy Marshall and Arnold, the Navy dropped from the transport and heavy bomber arena. At the occasion of the final agreement, King balked at moving out of the transport and heavy bomber fields until a later date. Stimson had found this unacceptable and threatened to pull out of the entire arrangement. Slessor asserted to Portal that Stimson's support provided the

---

[85] Message, RAFDEL to Air Ministry, additional American squadrons, 7 August 1943, PRO AIR 8/780; Slessor Commentary on Bay Offensive, 15 September 1943, PRO AIR 75/15.

RAF with an opportunity of making a protest against something considered to be unsound: "Mr. Stimson assured me that he would deal with the matter in a way that would not prejudice our relations with Admiral King, although I find it a little difficult to see how he would do it."[86]

The CAS provided the Prime Minister an update on the American reorganization of their antisubmarine forces. Portal incorporated many of Slessor's observations from the Stimson visit in his commentary to Churchill. The CAS was concerned that the Army and Navy agreement to relieve the AAF of all responsibility for the U-boat operations would hamper Anglo-American air operations in the Atlantic. "As you know, there are four American Army Liberator Squadrons engaged in anti-U/Boat war on this side of the Atlantic, 2 in Morocco and 2 in the U.K. They are all well-trained units and will be of utmost value in the Bay Offensive." Portal hoped that Churchill would promote an arrangement under which the American Navy would allow for Army squadrons operating with Coastal Command to continue, and agree that projected AAF squadrons would be allowed to come over and operate until U.S. Navy units were fully trained to take their places. He was suspicious of the USN's intentions in the Atlantic: "I believe that Admiral King is no great believer in the Bay Offensive and a strong opponent, on principle, of the mixture of British and American forces. I therefore think that we are much less likely to get help in the Bay Offensive from the U.S. Navy than we were from the U.S. Army and accordingly I think we should make the utmost effort to

[86] Letter, Slessor to Portal, Stimson visit and Bay Offensive, 17 July 1943, Christ Church, Oxford, File 14; Letter, Slessor to CAS, Stimson visit, 17 July 1943, PRO AIR 75/15, AIR 8/730.

retain the two Army squadrons as long as possible and get four additional squadrons over as soon as possible before the new agreement 'freezes' or disbands them."[87] Slessor and Portal's view coincided exactly with that of Stimson.

The timing of Portal's letter to Churchill was indeed propitious because later on 21 July, the Air Ministry received a disturbing message from the RAFDEL in Washington. The British were notified that the American Chiefs of Staff had officially abolished the AAF Anti-Submarine Command and the USN would undertake all antisubmarine duties. The message explained: "orders have already been given that ground echelon of 4 and 19 Squadrons will not be sent to U.K. and air echelon of 4 and 19 Squadron will be withdrawn without relief by August 30th. Nos. 1 and 2 Squadron in North Africa will be replaced by U.S. Navy. U.S.A.A.F. will send no further squadrons for Bay Offensive and so far we can get no information from Navy Department as to whether they intend to make up the 6 squadrons."[88] Slessor was doubtful at this time whether the American Navy could undertake all AAF commitments considering the shortage of trained crews. At this point the matter of air power in the Atlantic was still being debated at the highest level of the War and Navy Departments.

Following Portal's earnest letter and the RAF Delegation's revelation from Washington, Churchill penned a personal letter to Stimson urging the continuation of the Anglo-American air power alliance in the Atlantic. In keeping with Slessor and Portal's recommendations, Churchill hoped to convince Stimson to maintain the two AAF

---

[87] Message, Portal to Churchill, Stimson visit and U-boat war, 21 July 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.
[88] Ibid., PRO AIR 8/780.

squadrons operating with Coastal Command and delay U.S. Navy air intervention in the Atlantic. Churchill stated to Stimson, "a new development seems to arise from an agreement (which has not yet been communicated officially to the British Chiefs of Staff) between the United States Army and Navy, whereunder the Navy will assume sole responsibility for the anti-U-boat war. The effect of this first operation of the agreement will be serious indeed on our prospects of beating the U-boat decisively during the next few months."[89]

On 23 July 1943, Portal received notice from the RAF Delegation in Washington that General Arnold was willing to keep AAF assets in the U-boat war. Arnold emphasized that it was essential there should be no suggestion that he had promised this solution.[90] The next day, Portal cabled the RAF Delegation in Washington to pass on appreciation for Arnold's change in position concerning the U-boat campaign.[91] The CAS informed Churchill that Arnold and Stimson were being exceedingly helpful and that the recall of AAF anti-submarine squadrons had been rescinded.[92] The RAF Delegation stated in their 31 July message: "King is extremely jealous of the Army's success and contends that the change over can be effected without any loss of efficiency. Arnold does not share this view."[93]

Slessor traveled again to America and met with Admiral King in Washington on 6 August 1943 to discuss US Naval air support for the Bay Offensive. He asserted in a

---

[89] Letter, Churchill to Stimson, withdrawal of B-24s from United Kingdom, 22 July 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.
[90] Message, RAFDEL to Portal, 23 July 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.
[91] Message, Portal to RAFDEL, 24 July 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.
[92] Letter, Portal to Churchill, 24 July 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.
[93] Message, RAFDEL to Portal, 31 July 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.

message to the Air Ministry that King was deliberately obstructive in order to show the War Department who was in charge: "He is very jealous of any interference and said that Stimson appeared to have forgotten that it was the Navy Department and not the War Department who was responsible for anti-submarine aircraft."[94] Later in the month Slessor addressed a personal note to Portal venting his frustrations with Admiral King: "Whole thing smells to me like an ugly rush to get the Army out of the A/S field regardless of the effect on U-boat war."[95]

Slessor and the RAF viewed with great trepidation Admiral King's 8 October dispatch announcing USN air withdrawal from the Bay of Biscay Offensive. They marshaled the support of the British Chiefs of Staff and dispatched a memorandum of protest to their U.S. counterparts. The Combined Chiefs of Staff regarded the Bay Offensive as a cardinal feature of the Anglo-American Atlantic strategy, and the fact that thirty-two U-boats had been sunk and a large number damaged in the Bay and its approaches from March through September 1943 refuted King's suggestion that air attack on U-boats was a failure. With Slessor's assistance, the CCS documented the 1943 antisubmarine relationship with Admiral King. Their main point of contention was King's unilateral withdrawal of air assets from the Bay Offensive: "We are not aware of any situation in any U.S. strategic area calling for the withdrawal of these squadrons from the Bay before they are all in action; nor does Admiral King's decision to withdraw them appear to be based on the suggestion that any such situation had arisen. And we

---

[94] Message, Slessor to Air Ministry, problems with Admiral King, 6 August 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.
[95] Message, Slessor to Portal, problems with USN, 18 August 1943, PRO AIR 8/780.

feel bound to protest against a unilateral decision without previous consultation with us, that will so gravely prejudice the success of vitally important A/S operations in British strategic area."[96] Slessor postulated to Portal that King was politically motivated to assume the ASW mission before in an operational position to adequately relieve AAF squadrons with fully trained naval units.[97]

The net result was that no USN squadrons participated in the Bay Offensive until September 1943, by which time the U-boats were changing tactics and fitting their submarines with a warning receiver against Allied radar. Once again this lack of Anglo-American coordination of resources did not prevent the RAF from inflicting heavy casualties on the U-boats between June and August 1943, but such German casualties might have been dramatically increased by an immediate deployment of seventy-two long-range Army Air Forces aircraft when requested by Slessor.[98]

CONCLUSION

The Battle of the Atlantic was decided in 1943 in favor of the Allies. It was a phenomenal year from the standpoint of comparison to the first three and a half years of the war up to the end of 1942, when a total of 210 U-boats were sunk, of which only 54 were credited to Allied air forces. In 1943, 200 hundred U-boats were sunk, of which 117 were destroyed by air units. The success of Slessor's Coastal Command was largely due to a direct control over all Coastal squadrons and close collaboration with Allied

---

[96] Memorandum to U.S. Chiefs of Staff, lack of USN support, 12 October 1943, PRO AIR 75/15.
[97] Message, Slessor to Portal, problems with Admiral King, 1 November 1943, PRO AIR 75/15.
[98] Howard, *Grand Strategy,* vol. 4, p. 309.

forces in the United Kingdom, Iceland, Azores, Canada and Gibraltar. Slessor's prosecution of the Atlantic campaign demonstrated the necessity for maritime air power but also highlighted the need for close cooperation with Allied navies.[99] Slessor commented on his difficulties organizing the Anglo-American Atlantic alliance in a letter to Lord Trenchard: "The whole history of U.S. Anti-Submarine operation is a classic example of the evils of divided air forces and control of air by sailors."[100]

The expanding scope of naval air activity collided with Slessor's theory of air power by diminishing the number of VLR aircraft available to Coastal Command. The jurisdictional dispute over the conduct of antisubmarine warfare revealed the growing conflict between the American Army and Navy, a conflict which led many to advocate a unified Atlantic air command. Slessor asserts in his memoirs that "King's obsession with the Pacific and the Battle of Washington cost us dear in the Battle of the Atlantic."[101] As a consequence of those challenges to Coastal Command, Slessor intensified his efforts to instruct representatives of the Roosevelt Administration about the importance of air power in the Atlantic.

Slessor believed that the requirement was not merely for numbers of aircraft, but for the right category with the right type of radar equipment, manned by crews with the right kind of training. Properly trained and equipped antisubmarine squadrons would have taken literally months to provide and needlessly interrupted other aspects of the air war.

---

[99] Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* pp. 451-452.
[100] Letter, Slessor to Lord Trenchard, Air Power in the Atlantic, 19 December 1943, PRO AIR 75/14.
[101] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 499.

Fortunately for the Allies, the existing Anglo-American aircraft inflicted heavy casualties on the U-boats in the Bay Offensive. Had their been some form of unified air command in the Atlantic the U-boat menace could have been decisively dealt with much earlier. One cannot help thinking that had there been no clash of opinion between the USN and AAF, the questions of Very Long-Range aircraft, their supply, allocation, control, and coordination would have been settled in mid-1942. Slessor postulated that an integral Anglo-American air alliance would have been strong enough to deploy the air resources in the North Atlantic where the U-boat would have been defeated earlier at less cost in ships, cargo, and lives.[102]

Air Marshal Slessor advocated the central direction of air forces but the determined and single-minded approach of Admiral King had derailed the overall strategic direction of Anglo-American forces. Slessor must still be credited for his tireless effort to confer a common strategy and an integrated team effort. John Terraine, who always had ambivalent feelings towards Slessor, does admit in *A Time for Courage* that when "his [Slessor] own tour of duty at Northwood ended on January 20, 1944; he was a popular commander, a hard-hitting professional with a clear mind (except when clouded by dogma); above all he was a leader."[103] The Air Marshal's perseverance, energy and fierce aggressiveness in the U-boat war brought about the destruction of the German submarine force and allowed for the Normandy invasion.

---

[102] Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945*, pp. 710-711.
[103] Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* p. 456.

CHAPTER VII

THE MEDITERRANEAN ALLIANCE, 1944 - 1945

INTRODUCTION

Air Marshal Sir John C. Slessor moved to the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF) after leading RAF Coastal Command at the most critical phase of the Battle of the Atlantic. The Secretary of State for Air asked Slessor to build a coalition command in the Mediterranean. Slessor commented: "I could at least not complain of lack of variety in my war experience."[1] He was appointed on 12 January 1944 as Deputy Air Commander-in-Chief MAAF with the following instructions from the Air Ministry: "You will exercise such responsibility as may be delegated to you by the Air Commander-in-Chief MAAF." The cable also stated, "you are appointed Commander of the Royal Air Force in the Mediterranean Theater and of the Middle East Command of the RAF as at present constituted. For all RAF operations in the area of responsibility of the Allied Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Theater ... [which included the Balkans, Hungary, and Turkey] you will be responsible to the Air Commander-in-Chief MAAF."[2] When Slessor assumed his command position in January 1944, powerful factors influenced air operations in Italy. In spite of exterior and interior stresses and the various Allied air forces and national forces, each with its own tradition and system,

---

[1] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 556.
[2] History of the Allied Forces Headquarters in the Mediterranean (AFHQ), December 1943 – July 1944, p. 652, AFHRC document 621.01

Slessor was instrumental in holding the alliance together by providing the strong flexible framework of command for the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces.

When General Dwight D. Eisenhower left the Mediterranean for his own new assignment in England, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder likewise transferred to the new headquarters assembling in the United Kingdom. Since the Allies were reversing nationalities in the position of Allied C-in-C Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTO), Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker succeeded Tedder as Air C-in-C MAAF. The first announcement of General Eaker's appointment occurred on 28 December 1943 when General Marshall cabled Allied Forces Headquarters in the Mediterranean (AFHQ): "The Allied Air Commander in the MEDITERRANEAN is to be Lieutenant General Eaker ... General Eaker to move to North Africa about 12 January for the purpose of relieving Air Marshal Tedder."[3] However, Eaker was unable to arrive until 15 January 1944. Military historian James Parton explains that the new MAAF commander was an enthusiastic advocate of Slessor joining the Mediterranean team: "Before appointing him to his new post Portal meticulously asked Eaker's approval, which was hearty."[4]

To appreciate fully Slessor's contribution to the Anglo-American air alliance in the Mediterranean, it is crucial to examine the unusual organizational and command labyrinth that he faced with the MAAF. Slessor and Eaker's command was the world's biggest air command, as measured both by personnel and airplanes. The Americans

---

[3] Ibid., p. 652; Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, p. 599.
[4] Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, p. 352.

mustered more officers and men than the British--217,118 versus 104,311—a total of 321,429. But the RAF had more than twice as many aircraft as the USAAF—8,852 versus 3,746—a total of 12,598, of which 4,323 (60 percent of them U.S.) were in combat units.[5] The MAAF included squadrons drawn from the United States, Britain, France, South Africa, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Greece, Italy, Brazil, and Yugoslavia--almost as many Allies as constituted NATO fifty years later.[6] Craven and Cate note in their official history of the Army Air Forces (AAF) in World War II that the organizational structure of the MAAF "provided a true unit of command for operations but preserved national distinctions for purposes of administration, and key commanders, be they British or American, usually wore two hats."[7]

The MAAF was a participant in the exceedingly desperate Italian campaign as depicted by John Terraine: "As 1944 came in, the Armies found themselves trapped on battlefields either deep in snow or deep in mud, or both, inescapably and ominously recalling the doomed landscapes of the Western Front in 1916 and 1917." Terraine asserts that Slessor entered a military environment in which "soldiers and airmen suffered the depression of feeling that they were now caught in a secondary theatre where they would have to go on fighting and suffering casualties, but no longer for prime purposes."[8]

---

[5] Ibid., p. 351.
[6] Commentary on MAAF Command Structure, 1944, PRO AIR 75/155.
[7] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 3, p. 327; Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 660-661.
[8] Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, p. 585.

The simultaneous crisis at Anzio and Cassino was one of the most fascinating episodes of the Second World War. Through the winter of 1943-1944 the German forces in Italy were entrenched between the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Seas (through Cassino), along the strongest natural defensive position on the Italian Peninsula—the Gustav Line overlooking the Liri valley. Although the Allied armies were numerically superior by several divisions, they were unable to break the four-month stalemate either with the beachhead established at Anzio or by the intensive attacks at Cassino. All attempts to pry the German forces from their positions had failed. Both Germany and the Allies appreciated the criticality of the strategic environment, and both sought a window to the future through the Italian campaign, hoping to find clues to the outcome of battles soon to take place in France. Criticism from America and Britain goaded the Allied forces in Italy into ill-considered expedients to break the German line. Hitler was reported to have ordered his troops to hold at all costs in the hope that a complete failure by the Allies would so discourage them that they would abandon all plans to invade "Festung Europa". The Anglo-American campaign in Italy and particularly its focal point, Cassino, thus achieved an importance out of all proportion to the immediate tactical or strategic objectives to be won.[9]

Operation STRANGLE, conducted from 15 March to 11 May 1944, was Slessor's response to the bloody quagmire existing in Italy. Previously, the dominating Anglo-American method for hampering the enemy's logistics had called for destruction of concentrated traffic centers, chiefly rail yards, by heavy bombers, whereas the

---

[9] Andrew Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945* (Surrey, 2000), pp. 70-80.

medium and fighter-bombers were used in immediate front-line support of ground troops.[10] In January 1944, however, Slessor and MAAF's Anglo-American Target Section began promoting a new philosophy of tactical air power that stressed the cutting of supply lines by breaking bridges rather than pulverizing marshalling yards. After the failure to break through at Cassino, Slessor was focused on using Anglo-American air power to reduce the enemy's flow of supplies to a level that would "make it impracticable for him to maintain and operate his forces in central Italy."[11]

MAAF ORGANIZATION AND COMMAND STRUCTURE

The Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) produced a 5 December 1943 directive at the Cairo Conference creating the MAAF and providing for its general organizational framework. In accordance with the desire for a centralized control expressed by Air Marshal Tedder and General Carl Spaatz, the directive provided for a single Anglo-American operational staff under the Air Commander-in-Chief and three separate administrative staffs headed by a U.S. Deputy C-in-C, and a British Deputy C-in-C and the Air Officer Commander-in-Chief (AOC) Middle East. The Air Commander was established on a level with the Navy's Admiral Sir John Cunningham and the Fifteenth Army Group Commander, General Sir Harold Alexander, with all three reporting to the

[10] Ibid., p. 98.
[11] Ibid., p. 81.

Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theater, General Sir Henry "Jumbo" Maitland Wilson.[12]

The evolution of MAAF involved two simultaneous tasks: the reshuffling of the various air forces involved and the creation of a MAAF Headquarters adequate to supervise them. At the birth of the MAAF, the headquarters was physically split three ways between Algiers, La Mersa Tunisia, and the fifth floor of the former Bourbon palace at Caserta, Italy. Parton describes the reaction of Eaker to the Royal Palace: "Once again we found ourselves occupying a building with unique historic and architectural characteristics as well as peculiar living conditions. The most noticeable ... was the uncomfortable discovery that the palace's 1,200 rooms were already inhabited by a 180-year accumulation of fleas."[13] The molding of MAAF Headquarters into its final form took somewhat longer than the reshuffling of the various air forces themselves. Both tasks were blueprinted within a few weeks after Air Marshal Slessor's arrival at Caserta. The CCS directive of 5 December had indicated the general form that the reorganization was to take. After Slessor and Eaker had worked out with Spaatz and Wilson the broad relationships necessary for successful implementation of Allied strategy, they delegated to their respective deputy officers, Major General Idwal H. Edwards of the AAF and Air Marshal Sir John Linnell of the RAF, the duty of working out the detailed organization.[14]

---

[12] AFHQ History, December 1943 – July 1944, pp. 651-652, AFHRC document 621.01; RAF Narrative: The Italian Campaign 1943-1945, vol. I, p. 225, PRO AIR 41/34.
[13] Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, p. 355.
[14] Commentary on MAAF Command Structure, 1944, PRO AIR 75/155.

Their proposed organizational chart, submitted to Eaker and Slessor on 3 February 1944, was approved after a few minor changes and established the MAAF structure which proved to be very successful for the remainder of the war. The structure's guiding principles were the use of joint operational staffs and separate administrative staffs for the Anglo-American air forces. In previous joint headquarters, such as the AFHQ and Northwest African Air Forces, the policy had been to alternate British and American staff officers and commanders in a vertical organization that merged not only operations but also administrations.[15] Since Anglo-American organizational and administrative practices differed in many respects, this had caused considerable inefficiency and difficulty earlier in the war, usually when one of the Allies attempted to impose their standards on the other. The virtue of the new MAAF organization was that it enabled both the British and Americans to administer their forces and headquarters according to their own national systems. Only in the operational sections was compromise and interaction necessary. A secondary but far from inconsequential virtue of the MAAF system was the flexibility it provided Allied airmen in the allocation of resources.[16]

Slessor provided the Chief of the Air Staff with an initial assessment of the interworkings of the MAAF: "I rather think, the way things are going, that Eaker will be spending more of his time in Italy at the MAAF Command Post, running the day to day operation, while I divert my time between this place (TUSIS, Advanced HQ, MAAF) –

---

[15] Report, Composition of MAAF, 1944, PRO AIR 75/86.
[16] Report, Staff Organization at AFHQ and MAAF, 26 January 1944, PRO AIR 75/41.

H.Q. R.A.F. MED and ME – and Algiers, Deputy for Eaker in the planning and policy field, dealing with AFHQ and the Chiefs of Staff business, with occasional visits to Italy and Cairo." Even at this early stage of Anglo-American air force cooperation in the Mediterranean, Slessor was mapping out the most efficient manner to utilize the individual strengths of Anglo-American officers: "I think that would be the best diversion of duties, anyway until AFHQ and the planners can move up to Caserta, which can not be for several months. Nearly all the USAAF are in Italy, and day to day operations are well up Eaker's street, whereas I probably have more experience than he has, in the planning and policy line."[17]

Grouped directly under Eaker and Slessor in the MAAF headquarters were all the staff sections whose functions were chiefly operational rather than administrative. They included Public Relations (PRO), Statistics, Liaison, Signals, and Combat Operations & Intelligence. The first three existed in dual form (for example, an American PRO Section handled all news of U.S. operations, while an entirely separate British PRO serviced British news), but the Signals Section and the Directorate of Operations & Intelligence were joint, having both AAF and RAF personnel together to support MAAF objectives. These key sections took orders directly from Slessor and Eaker through their respective Chiefs of Staff and were linked to the Strategic, Tactical, and Coastal Air Forces, each of which also had a small joint Anglo-American operational staff.[18]

---

[17] Letter, Slessor to Portal, 20 January 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, File 12, No. 1.
[18] Slessor Memorandum, Interservice work at Caserta, 1944, PRO AIR 75/41.

Most important of all MAAF's headquarters sections and the hub of all air operations in the Mediterranean was the Joint Staff headed at first by General Lauris Norstad and, after 17 July 1944, by Brigadier General Charles P. Cabell. Norstad had been Spaatz's chief operations officer at La Marsa, and when Eaker took command in January 1944, Norstad's small joint staff was one of the few at HQ MAAF that was really discharging its functions to the fullest. Brought to Caserta, the staff expanded considerably, and its functions fell into three broad categories: intelligence, plans, and combat operations. Since the Director of Operations was American, the deputy, Air Commodore (then Group Captain) MacGregor, was British. Similar alternation ran throughout the section. The Chief Intelligence officer was British, Air Commodore F. Woolley, and his American deputy was Colonel H. S. Hull, who arrived from England with Eaker. Director of Plans was also British, Air Commodore L. T. Pankhurst, and two of his three sub-section heads were American. Teamwork between the Anglo-American groups was excellent and resulted in a nice balance between British and U.S. staff methods.[19]

Under Woolley and Hull, the primary functions of the British and American officers were to collect and evaluate all intelligence concerning enemy air capabilities and defenses and to develop targets for each of the subordinate air forces. MAAF intelligence was directly linked with the Joint Intelligence Committee, the Joint Intelligence Board, and the Joint Scientific Intelligence Committee in London through

---

[19] Robert S. Jordan, *Norstad: Cold War NATO Supreme Commander* (New York, 2000), p. 36; Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, pp. 352-353.

the Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Intelligence) as well as parallel organizations in Washington. Intelligence material flowed in from photography, visual air reconnaissance, signals, agents, diplomatic sources, enemy and neutral press and broadcasting, Allied air crews, prisoners of war, and captured enemy equipment and documents, along with other sources. The MAAF's Target Section kept a close record of the status of all targets in the theater of operations.[20]

After the intelligence had been compiled and the plans prepared, the Operations Section, with twenty-seven American and fifty-eight British personnel, executed MAAF policies. Chief of the section was the senior American; the senior RAF officer was the Deputy. The Operations Section performed the following functions: (a) determined bombing policy, (b) determined airfield policy, construction and future requirements, (c) coordinated joint operations, (d) determined policy and issued orders on the operational control of units and airfields, (e) coordinated all routine operational matters, including air movements, aircraft safety, flying control, airfield defense, air-sea rescue and routing and recognition, and (f) performed operational analysis. Supervision of all these matters insofar as the subordinate commands were concerned was generally handled through Operating Instructions.[21]

At the time of Slessor's entry into the MAAF, a peculiar command arrangement existed for directing certain elements of the United States Army Air Forces in the Mediterranean Theater. The Fifteenth USAAF, whose mission was primarily strategic

---

[20] Report, Composition of MAAF, 1944, PRO AIR 75/86.
[21] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, pp. 327-332.

bombing, was incorporated on 1 January 1944 into a new command called the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe (USSAFE). The primary task of the strategic bombing forces was implementing Operation POINTBLANK. This required the full utilization of American air forces in both the European and Mediterranean theaters. Consequently the USSAFE was established as a coordinating command over both the Eighth USAAF in England, and the Fifteenth USAAF in the Mediterranean. The definitions of channels and responsibilities of this new inter-theater command were given in the CCS Directive of 4 December 1943.[22]

Thus Major General Nathan F. Twining, Commander of the Fifteenth USAAF, became responsible to three different authorities for different functions of his command. For operations in the Mediterranean Theater he was responsible to General Eaker, the Air C-in-C MAAF; for Administration, supply, and training he was responsible to Eaker as the Commander of the Army Air Forces/Mediterranean Theater of Operations (AAF/MTO); and for Operation POINTBLANK he was responsible to General Spaatz, the Commander of United States Strategic Air Forces (USSTAF).[23]

The opportunity for conflict of assignments and authority implicit in these various arrangements was obvious. Fortunately for the Allied war effort, Spaatz, Eaker, and Slessor were old friends who saw eye to eye on virtually all matters concerning strategic bombing. Spaatz readily agreed, therefore, to communicate with the Fifteenth Air Force only through the medium of MAAF and to delegate Eaker operational control

---

[22] Ibid., pp. 327-332, *Pointblank* was the code name for the Combined Bomber Offensive.
[23] Ibid., p. 327; Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* p. 585; RAF Narrative: Italian Campaign, pp. 206-207, PRO AIR 41/34.

of the Fifteenth Air Force unless precedent-setting Combined Bomber Offensive directives were received. The immediacy with which this policy was put into effect was apparent from the first operational directive issued by Spaatz to the Fifteenth Air Force on 11 January 1944.[24]

As matters worked out, these arrangements were rarely employed for the specific purpose of coordinated attacks, for the opportunity for such operations came up much more rarely than had originally been anticipated. In short, the possibilities of conflict in command never developed. The use of MAAF as the link between Spaatz and the Fifteenth Air Force enabled Eaker and Slessor to negotiate effectively with the Mediterranean Supreme Commander during emergencies when General Wilson felt obliged to call upon the Fifteenth Air Force for tactical operations.[25]

The headquarters for the Tactical Air Force had an integrated RAF-AAF staff, but its various component commands, the American Medium Bomber Wings, RAF Desert Air Force and the American Tactical Air Command were either entirely American or entirely RAF, except when RAF units were placed under the operational control of the U.S. Tactical Air Command. American units of the Tactical Air Force, however, formed part of the U.S. Twelfth Air Force. The commanding officer of the Tactical Air Force was also the commander of the Twelfth Air Force, which maintained a completely separate headquarters in southern Italy. The Desert Air Force was completely integrated into RAF Middle East-Mediterranean (MEDME) command on all

---

[24] RAF Narrative: Italian Campaign, p. 208, PRO AIR 41/34.
[25] Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945,* pp. 46-47; Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 6, pp. 59-61.

administrative matters. Slessor's MAAF, therefore, coordinated operational policy, but exercised very little direction over organizational and administrative matters within the American and British forces comprising the Tactical Air Force. These actions were handled through Desert Air Force and Twelfth Air Force headquarters respectively with guidance from RAF MEDME and HQ Army Air Forces-Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTO) and tended to conform to national policy, particularly on the American side.[26]

In addition to British and American air forces, the MAAF had airmen from other Allied countries under its command. The MAAF inherited the triple duty of equipping, training and introducing into combat the reborn French Air Force. The French units served in the MAAF Coastal and Tactical Air Forces and were assimilated into the chain of command of those combined operational units.[27] The success of French cooperation in this command arrangement was attested to in one of Eaker's letters to General Arnold: "All they want is an airplane and a bomb, and they will work in complete loyalty to anybody who will furnish them this."[28] By September 1944, the French squadrons had matured and acquitted themselves so well during the invasion of southern France that they were organized as a Tactical Air Command supporting the French Army. Like the French, the Greeks had a special arrangement for the Allied command of their air force units dating back to March 1942. Greek Air Force personnel and units became part of

---

[26] Commentary on MAAF Command Structure, 1944, PRO AIR 75/155.
[27] AFHQ History, December 1943 – July 1944, pp. 673-677, AFHRC document 621.01; Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, pp. 419-420.
[28] AFHQ History, December 1943 – July 1944, p. 677, AFHRC document 621.01.

the RAF and entered into the same RAF chain of command in the Mediterranean. Italian, Brazilian, and Russian air units, as well as individuals from the Royal Yugoslav Air Force were also under the command of the MAAF at certain times during this period.[29]

Further changes took place in the AFHQ command channels for Balkan operations when the Balkan Air Force and Land Forces Adriatic were formed on 15 June 1944. The commander of the Balkan Air Force was made responsible to AFHQ for ensuring the coordination of the planning and conduct of combined amphibious operations by Allied air, sea, and land forces on these lands and eastern shores of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. Special operations in Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Albania were also placed under its control.[30]

No organizational problem facing Eaker and Slessor in their first hectic months of command was greater than absorbing the flow of new flying units and getting them ready for combat. Building airfields for the heavy-bomber groups arriving at a rate of three per month was only one of a dozen vexatious problems. Other issues included the creation of squadrons to support Partisans fighting the Germans in Yugoslavia, conversions of fighter groups from P-40's to P-51's for long-range escort, crew replacements, incorporation of USAAF's only African-American fighter unit which was growing from squadron to group strength, and finally management of the morale

---

[29] Commentary on MAAF Command Structure, 1944, PRO AIR 75/155.
[30] Slessor Memorandum, "The Application of the Balkan Air Force System of Command after the War", 24 September 1944, PRO AIR 75/93; Message, Slessor to Portal, Yugoslavia Commentary, 9 December 1944, PRO AIR 75/93.

difficulties created by General Arnold's sudden decision to abandon the long-established policy of the fixed combat tour.[31] These matters were so interconnected that they became one enormous jigsaw puzzle for Slessor and Eaker. The prodigious efforts of all concerned, plus extremely sage policy decisions by the two Mediterranean air commanders, allowed for all the pieces to fall together. Their internal accomplishments were so successful that by April 1944, the MAAF was able to launch campaigns of tremendous scope and classic significance: Operation STRANGLE and the air attacks on the Ploesti oilfields in Romania.[32]

As the Italian campaign progressed to a bloody but successful conclusion for the Allied forces, Slessor penned some personal observations to Portal on the difficulties of maintaining productive Anglo-American relations, with Field Marshal Alexander replacing Wilson as Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean Theater: "I have got a lot of experience in this line; not only at Caserta and Algiers but in London and Washington over a period of years." Slessor believed that a Supreme Commander like Alexander should not be a commander in the same sense as a Corps or Army Commander but instead master the difficult art of inducing all three Services to adapt their habits and procedures for the military benefit of the Alliance: "He's dealing with people who are themselves Commanders-in-Chief in their own right, with directives from the Prime Minister and President ... The trouble in this theatre is that the issue is

---

[31] Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, p. 367; Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, pp. 302-308, At a conference on 6 March 1944, Spaatz and Eaker agreed to replace the standard combat tour in the ETO and MTO with an indefinite tour (each airmen's case to be settled by the commander) and to counter this blow to combat morale by allowing the flyers 30-day leave in America. Approved by General Arnold on 7 April, this sweeping change went into effect immediately.
[32] Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, p. 586; Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945*, p. 98.

somewhat confused by the fact that F.M. Alexander has two hats – one an Inter-service hat as S.A.C. and the other a khaki hat as the Ground Forces Commander-in-Chief."[33]

In a letter to Portal on 3 December 1944, Slessor demonstrated his genuine concern for the continued necessity of maintaining a strong Anglo-American military alliance in Italy. He was fearful that Alexander would negatively affect the "special relationship": "The point, which Alexander does not seem to realize, that SACMED is not a British General responsible to the War Office, but an international inter-service commander responsible to the Combined Chiefs of Staff." Slessor informed Portal that Alexander had presented a change to the Mediterranean command structure that mirrored the British Army: "That is one of the factors which, to my mind, makes his proposal absolutely impracticable, and I think it is unfortunate that it should even have been put forward, A.F.H.Q. may have its faults but in one way I think it has been outstandingly successful, mainly the way in which an integrated British-American H.Q. has worked without friction." Slessor noted that British and Americans had differences of opinion, but these had "been argued out frankly in the spirit of give and take which is essential if any Allied show is to work. I do not like to think of their reaction if they find a British General coming in and reorganizing the whole show on a purely British Army model." Slessor ended the letter with a very personal characterization of Alexander: "He will realize that when one reaches the level of Supreme Commander, one cannot

[33] Letter, Slessor to Portal, December 1944, PRO AIR 75/41.

behave like a bull in a china shop -- least of all an Irish bull in an Anglo-American china shop!"[34]

Less than two weeks later, Slessor was again articulating to Portal his concern for the ongoing Anglo-American relationship in Italy. Slessor derided the conduct of Alexander in a multinational military environment:

> One of the things that worries me most about this new regime (ALEXANDER) is the questions of our relations with the Americans, and I think if we are not very careful we are in for really serious trouble there. The Americans here, are extremely suspicious of Alexander; and I'm afraid it is already apparent that he does not realize that he is primarily an international – inter-service commander responsible to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and only secondarily a British General responsible to the War Office, I do feel that it is of absolutely capital importance that everyone at home from the P.M. downwards should understand the implications of this being an integrated Anglo-American H.Q. The Americans know we have our secret communications, just as they have theirs, and recognize the importance for them.[35]

Slessor went on to write, "But if to believe (what they already suspect) that the Supreme Allied Commander is receiving introductions on policy or strategy from the P.M., and the British Chiefs of Staff behind their backs, there will be hell to pay, and this system of command will break down, to the permanent prejudice of Anglo-American relations."[36]

Slessor was continually preoccupied during the course of the Italian Campaign with providing continual improvements to the Anglo-American relationship. He presented a memorandum to Portal on 12 December 1944 outlining his views of the post-war Anglo-American relationship. This portentous perspective hoped for Britain and America would create in the aftermath of the Second World War an Atlantic

---

[34] Letter, Slessor to Portal, 3 December 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 10.
[35] Letter, Slessor to Portal, Relations with America, 15 December 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 12.
[36] Ibid., 15 December 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 12.

Community facilitating world peace. Slessor asserted, "if we are going to make the Atlantic Community work, we must establish the machinery for a common foreign and defence policy." Slessor said of this new and wider community: "America and Britain are inescapably committed, must consult with each other in foreign policy to insure the success of the Alliance: and he who throws a spanner in the works of the machinery by unilateral action sets in train a whole sequence of misunderstandings and dislocations which are a menace to the Community as a whole."[37]

OPERATIONAL PLANNING

Slessor maintained in *The Central Blue* that the MAAF had four primary tasks: (1) Bring maximum pressure on German industry, (2) Support the land armies in battle, (3) Protect Allied shipping, and (4) Provide maximum support for the Partisans in the Balkans. The organization of the MAAF was designed to facilitate these objectives. The Mediterranean Strategic Air Force was designed primarily for the accomplishment of the first task. The Mediterranean Tactical Air Force, composed of the American Twelfth Air Force and the British Desert Air Force, supported the Allied armies in their drive up the boot of Italy. The Mediterranean Coastal Air Force was organized to protect shipping lanes from enemy air attacks and to locate and destroy enemy submarines and shipping. The Balkan Air Force was developed to support the Marshal Tito and his Yugoslav Partisans.[38]

---

[37] Memorandum, Slessor to Portal, 12 December 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 7.
[38] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 558-562; Jordan, *Norstad*, p. 36; Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945*, p. 44.

The Tehran Conference in December 1943 had decided that Operation ANVIL, the amphibious invasion of southern France, was to have priority over all other operations in the Mediterranean.[39] The essential prerequisite for ANVIL was the capture of Rome and the stabilization of the Italian campaign. The CCS decided therefore to attempt a dislodgment of the enemy by an amphibious landing between the frontline and Rome combined with an offensive by the Allied Fifth and Eighth Armies. The area chosen was Anzio, and the immediate objective was to sever the supply and communication line behind the German forces opposing the Fifth and Eighth Armies. The Anzio endeavor, codename SHINGLE, failed to achieve its objectives and in the process dramatically altered Allied strategy. It now became top priority to salvage SHINGLE, and planning for ANVIL was postponed until after OVERLORD.[40]

Early in his tenure at MAAF, on 27 January 1944, Slessor provided a letter to the CAS. With only two weeks of command under his belt, Slessor authored a strikingly clear assessment of the Mediterranean scene. He was obviously dismayed with the Allied performance at Anzio, but impressed with the performance of Anglo-American air and naval forces. Slessor was disheartened with many of the ground force commanders and painted an alarming picture to Portal: "I think … the Army Group and Army Commanders are too cautious and are not instilling the right tempo and the proper aggressive spirit into the units." He was flabbergasted that with countless military advantages, Operation SHINGLE was a dismal failure: "Here we are, with air

---

[39] Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, p. 414, Operation *Anvil* later changed to Operation *Dragoon.*
[40] Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945*, pp. 46-47; See also Martin Blumenson, *Anzio: The Gamble That Failed* (London, 1963). *Overlord* was the code name for the invasion of France.

superiority so complete as to be amazing – we've got more air superiority in ITALY than we have in KENT; we have great superiority on land, especially in artillery … the landing was virtually unopposed … I have not the slightest doubt that if we had been Germans or Russians landing at Anzio we would have been in Rome by now." Slessor went on to write "… this is a rather gloomy picture, but I honestly do not think an unduly unkind criticism of the Army." For the Air Marshal, success in the Italian campaign rested with Anglo-American leadership: "Frankly I do not believe the troops are so inferior; I believe 4/5ths of the trouble is leadership and refusal to face the thousands of casualties today that may well save ten thousand next week. Eaker fully shares my views …."[41]

Slessor composed a private letter for Portal on 18 February 1944 with another commentary on the Italian campaign. He asserted to the CAS that Generals Wilson and Alexander were pessimistic about ANVIL and unsure of pursuing the Germans up the boot of Italy.[42] The next month, Slessor sent a message to Portal informing him that Wilson was deviating from planned Allied strategy. It appeared from Slessor's dealings with the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean (SACMED) that Wilson was attempting to avoid his Operation ANVIL obligations: "I know he himself feels that the continuation of the Battle in Italy and inflammation of the Balkans is the best way he could contain forces away from Overlord. But ANVIL is the strategy agreed on at TEHRAN." Slessor warned Portal that Churchill's disciple, Field Marshal Brooke, was

---

[41] Letter, Slessor to Portal, 27 January 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 2.
[42] Letter, Slessor to Portal, 18 February 1944, PRO AIR 75/69.

an instigator behind the scenes: "I am not sure if you realize the extent to which he [Wilson] is subjected to pressure from Brooke ... unofficially he is constantly being pressured by Brooke to kill it [Operation ANVIL]."[43] It is interesting to note that Craven and Cate correctly assert in their official history that Slessor was also opposed to ANVIL but did not allow his feeling to trample already agreed upon Anglo-American plans.[44]

MONTE CASSINO

In an attempt to preserve the cultural heritage of Europe, the Roosevelt Administration established in August 1943 the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe. The commission was directed by United States Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts and had the strong support of American political and religious leaders. In response to this high profile initiative, the MAAF divided Italian cities and towns into three categories for protection purposes. The first arrangement consisted of Florence, Rome, Venice, and Torcello, which required MAAF headquarters approval before any type of bombing could take place. The second category consisted of cultural venues with no military value, for instance, Assisi, San Gimignano, and Montepulciano, which were to be avoided at all costs. Historical centers such as Sienna and Verona which were located near significant German installations could be bombed but with great care by taking into account cloud cover and using identifiable markers at night. Historian Ronald Schaffer notes that "if

---

[43] Message, Slessor to Portal, Wilson and Mediterranean Strategy, 20 March 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 4.
[44] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 3, p. 385.

the German army was using places in categories two and three for ground operations, all restrictions were lifted."[45]

Entrenched across the narrowest and most mountainous part of the Italian peninsula, the German Army established an extremely strong defensive position, the "Gustav Line", whose linchpin was the little town of Cassino, famed for its sixth century Benedictine Monastery which commanded the ideal route to Rome. On 5 November 1943, General Eisenhower had notified Fifteenth Army Group that the Monte Cassino Abbey was added to the list of Italian monuments to be protected. Eisenhower clarified the Allied position on 29 December: "If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more and the building must go ... Nothing can stand against military necessity."[46] During their failed attempts to breach the Gustav Line in January 1944, Allied ground commanders became convinced that the German Army was using the Abbey for military purposes. A British soldier wrote: "Hostile eyes can be sensed without being seen ... Monte Cassino projected this feeling over an entire valley, the Monastery had itself become the enemy."[47] In an attempt to minimize Allied casualties, General Bernard C. Freyberg, Commander of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, petitioned General Wilson and the MAAF to destroy the Abbey. John Terraine believes that Freyberg was a victim of the "prevailing absurdities about that war, as were so many of his contemporaries. The soldiers for their part, had been schooled to believe that battlefield

---

[45] Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment,* p. 49; RAF Narrative: Italian Campaign, p. 270, PRO AIR 41/34.
[46] Ibid., p. 276; Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, p. 588.
[47] Fred Majdalany, *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle* (London, 1957), p. 121.

casualties were lives 'wasted'. In the German Army, neither generals nor soldiers were afflicted by such demoralizing beliefs."[48]

Denis Richards and Hilary St. George Saunders maintained in their official history of the RAF in World War II, that General's Clark and Eaker, along with Slessor, expressed strong doubts about bombing Monte Cassino. According to General Frido von Senger, commanding the German XIV Panzer Corps in the Cassino Theater, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the senior German commander in the Italian Theater, had forbidden German troops from entering the Monastery.[49] The final decision to destroy the Abbey rested with General Wilson who finally succumbed to Freyberg's pressure. He authorized Eaker and the MAAF to conduct an air attack, and on 15 February 1944, 500 tons of bombs completely destroyed the Monte Cassino Abbey. This did not enable the Allied troops to take the town despite repeated courageous attacks by Allied soldiers. The American Fifth Army managed to establish one small bridgehead across the Rapido River and occupy one-tenth of Cassino before being stopped.[50] Richards and Saunders comment that "it is too early to pass final judgment on this melancholy event; but, while making allowance for the feelings of commanders faced with a task of peculiar difficulty, it might not be out of place to observe that to destroy so famous a shrine on so slender evidence that it was occupied by the enemy … was to put a wide interpretation on Eisenhower's directive."[51]

---

[48] Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* p. 593; Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment*, p. 53.
[49] Richards and Saunders, *The Royal Air Force*, vol. 2, p. 359.
[50] Ibid., pp. 358-360; Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, p. 363.
[51] Richards and Saunders, *The Royal Air Force*, vol. 2, p. 360.

Slessor was so disturbed by the senseless bombing of the Cassino Abbey that he authored a highly classified letter to Air Marshal Linnell detailing his views on protecting Florence, Italy, from future attacks. This action reveals a degree of personal humanity in the midst of a boiling cauldron. Slessor asserted:

> In case the issue of bombing FLORENCE comes to a head, it may help you to have the following notes on my own feelings in the matter. On the question of principle. We say we are fighting to preserve civilization. FLORENCE is one of the shrines of European civilization and in my view is of more permanent value to the cause for which we are fighting, than a few British or American lives. If we are prepared to be killed in defending these things, we should, if necessary, be prepared to accept a small added risk of being killed in preserving them from destruction by our own action. I do not challenge the obvious truth that in the last resort military expediency must be the deciding factor. But we must be profoundly certain that the bombing of FLORENCE is militarily essential ...[52]

Slessor asserted that "FLORENCE can be classified only with ROME and VENICE in historic, cultural and religious importance, and again the point is that we must be completely convinced that the bombing is inevitable." Slessor concluded that the destruction of Florence would be "one of the greatest tragedies in history."[53]

In the early Spring, with the mountains still snow covered and the valleys a morass, the Cassino position represented the quintessential bottleneck. The German defensive line prevented an advance on Rome, for it lay at the entrance to the only real break in the mountain wall extending from the Adriatic to the Mediterranean. The slender Rapido River running in front of it made a natural barrier, which was considerably enhanced by the abnormally bad weather of early 1944. In the words of

---

[52] Letter, Slessor to Air Marshal Linnell, 22 February 1944, PRO AIR 75/69; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, 1941-1945 Road to Victory*, vol. 7 (London, 1986), p. 698, Slessor's efforts in protecting Florence were successful.
[53] Letter, Slessor to Air Marshal Linnell, 22 February 1944, PRO AIR 75/69.

historian John Ellis, General Mark Clark "activated a gruesome sausage machine that was, over the next four months, to suck and spit out the very innards of four Allied Divisions."[54] The town itself was made entirely of stone, some of it dating back to ancient Rome and all ideally arranged for fortification purposes. Behind the town was the steep slope of the 1,300-foot Monte Cassino. The only useful road, Highway 6, passed through Cassino and along the flank of Monte Cassino, directly under the German artillery. The troops holding this key position were Germany's best, some 5,000 members of the 1st Parachute Division. Their high morale and fighting caliber are indicated in Slessor's assessment: "Yet he fights, and fights like hell, not only in defence but in counter-attack. He is undoubtedly the world's finest ground soldier ..."[55]

A few days after the all-out air attack and artillery bombardment of Cassino on 15 March 1944 it became apparent to Slessor that this action could not be exploited sufficiently to be decisive and the deadlock in ground operations ensued. The situation called for a different employment of Anglo-American air power, and Slessor and Eaker responded quickly.[56]

OPERATION STRANGLE

The MAAF had been the primary laboratory for the use of air power to assist ground attack ever since the Battle of El Alamein in 1942.[57] After the air campaigns in

---

[54] John Ellis, *Cassino, The Hollow Victory* (London, 1984), p. 3.
[55] Letter, Slessor to Portal, 16 April 1944, PRO AIR 75/69; Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945*, p. 84; Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, p. 581.
[56] MATAF Report, "Attack on Cassino, Italy, 15 March 1944", 11 July 1944, AFHRC MICFILM 282417.
[57] Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, pp. 592 and 597, the October 1942 Battle of El Alamein was the turning point in the North African Campaign.

Sicily and Southern Italy, a panel of British scientists headed by Professor Solly Zuckerman and known as the Bombing Survey Unit was directed by the Air Ministry to study the results. Zuckerman's report, "Air Attacks on Rail and Road Communications" covering Allied operations up to October 1943 and issued on 28 December 1943, contained an exhaustive collection of data from which the Professor drew several conclusions about the proper use of air power. The Zuckerman thesis presupposed that Allied bombing should concentrate on "destroying the enemy's means of rail communication ... best achieved by attacks on large railway centres which contain important repair facilities and large concentrations of locomotives and rolling-stock."[58] Many, however, differed from this belief, and a rival group of theorists led by Slessor slowly developed an alternative plan for tactical air power. Slessor and many in the MAAF Target Section favored a detailed interdictory program calling for "complete, simultaneous and continuous" cutting of all German supply lines across the German area of operations. Zuckerman explains in his memoir that there were "authorities who sniped from the sidelines. Even Air Chief Marshal Sir John Slessor, who had succeeded Tedder in the Mediterranean after leaving R.A.F. Coastal Command, of which he had been so inspired a leader, weighed in against the plan."[59]

In an 11 February 1944 memorandum to the Director of Operations, Slessor called for a review of bombing policy and an investigation of the possibilities of interdiction. Brigadier General Norstad, Director of Operations, quoted the Zuckerman

---

[58] Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945*, pp. 142-143; Geoffrey Perret, *Winged Victory: The Army Air Forces in World War II* (New York, 1993), pp. 233-236.
[59] Solly Zuckerman, *From Apes to Warlords* (London, 1978), p. 227.

hypothesis in reply but agreed to initiate a study of alternative targets.[60] At a MAAF policy meeting on 14 February it was decided to draw up a new bombing directive, incorporating both types of targets and stating the objective was to force the enemy to "withdraw at least to the Pisa-Rimini line by making impossible the supply of his Armies in the South."[61] A division of assignment between the various Anglo-American air forces was also agreed upon: (1) strategic air forces to handle "Zuckerman's" marshalling yards, (2) tactical forces for the interdiction of rail and supply lines, and (3) coastal air resources for the interdiction sea supply routes. After being reviewed by Eaker and Slessor the new policy was put into effect in a 16 February directive.[62]

Though this directive established the concept of interdiction, the MAAF still had not agreed as to the specific rail targets to attack. Then, in a memorandum dated 29 February 1944, the MAAF Target Section focused attention on Italy's hundreds of vulnerable bridges arguing that "by far the most effective means of interdiction is that achieved by destruction of bridges and viaducts."[63] Zuckerman had earlier labeled bridge bombing as uneconomical. After some dissenting grumbles, the views of Slessor and the Target Section were accepted. Richards and Saunders credit Slessor with designing an effective solution allowing for STRANGLE to progress saying that "he succeeded in blending the two opposing designs into a single plan."[64]

---

[60] Operational Directive, 11 February 1944, Included in 15th Air Force History, vol. II, Append, November 1943 – May 1945, AFHRC Document 670.01-3A.
[61] Memorandum, 14 February 1944, Included in 15th Air Force History, vol. II, Append, November 1943 – May 1945, AFHRC Document 670.01-3A.
[62] Operational Directive, 16 February 1944, Included in 15th Air Force History, vol. II, Append, November 1943 – May 1945, AFHRC Document 670.01-3A.
[63] Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* pp. 586-587.
[64] Richards and Saunders, *The Royal Air Force*, vol. 2, p. 363.

This evolution reached its peak in the spring of 1944, producing what many military analysts and historians have accepted as a masterpiece of tactical air procedure—Operation STRANGLE. Slessor and Eaker were in full agreement on the absolute necessity of concentrating Allied efforts in the Mediterranean on the battle in Italy until the Anzio beachhead and the main front were joined, as any other course of action would be impracticable. Although faced with a formidable task, Slessor felt confident that the new air offensive against the German lines of communication would pay dividends. This factor combined with the weight of Allied attacks on the main front and from Anzio would force the enemy to withdraw. Slessor did not anticipate a rapid advance because of the skilled and determined German soldiers who used every opportunity to prepare their defenses and make the rugged terrain even more difficult.[65]

Accordingly on 19 March 1944, "Bombing Directive No.2" was issued by the MAAF to 42nd and 57th Wings, Air Support Command Desert Air Force. The stated objective was "to reduce the enemy's flow of supplies to a level which will make it impossible for him to maintain and operate his forces in Central Italy." Specific missions were assigned to groups composing Tactical Air Force; effective coordination and understanding was established with Strategic and Coastal Air Force and the Army commands so that they would expect little direct support from the MAAF. The revised air offensive started two months ahead of the target date for the "big push".[66] From 24 March onwards, German rail lines to Rome and the front line were continuously cut.

---

[65] Ibid., pp. 361-362.
[66] Bombing Directive No. 2, 19 March 1944, Included in 15th Air Force History, vol. II, Append, November 1943 – May 1945, AFHRC Document 670.01-3A.

Simultaneously, a complex program of air attacks against ports, shipping, and motor transport, were subjected to intense bombing.[67] Slessor hoped that through this offensive, "German resources would wither below the tourniquet applied by the MAAF."[68]

Slessor prepared a 30 March 1944 staff memorandum on "Future Operations" for internal MAAF review. He provided insightful commentary on the nature of air power: "I suggest CASSINO has proved—if proof were needed, which I do not think it was—that a concentration of medium and heavy bombers on the battlefield is not the magic key to open this very formidable door." Slessor was an ardent proponent of air interdiction and its overall effect on a ground campaign: "The air offensive against enemy communications and supply must continue on present lines and be supplemented by every available aeroplane at the temporary expense of close battlefield support."[69]

Slessor continued to keep Portal appraised of events in Italy. In a 16 April 1944 letter, he provided the CAS a clear and prescient assessment of the fighting caliber of the German Army. Many in Anglo-American political and military circles were confounded by the lack of progress in the Italian campaign. In his letter to Portal, Slessor admitted to personally underrating the "unsurpassed capacity of the Hun's Q Staff to keep him supplied in apparently impossible conditions." He contended that the German success was attributable to the significant reserve stock during the harsh winter months when air

---

[67] Ian Gooderson, *Air Power at the Battlefield: Allied Close Air Support in Europe 1943-1945* (London, 1998), pp. 210-211.
[68] Letter, Slessor to Portal, Mediterranean Campaign, 16 April 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 3.
[69] Slessor Memorandum, "Future Operations", 30 March 1944, PRO AIR 75/155.

superiority was not a factor. Secondly, he asserted that the German soldier "lives far harder than we and the American do, and gets along with far less. He doesn't worry about V cigarettes, coca-cola or chewing gum, the masses of motor vehicles, or all the luxuries without which it is assumed that the modern British and American soldier cannot wage war." Slessor reported the growing effects of Operation STRANGLE: "One of the remarkable developments in the past three months to my mind has been the emergence of the bridge as a worth-while bombing objective. At the present time, of the 25 clean cuts in the Italian railways, 16 are bridges." He believed the explanation was twofold; "First, the astonishing accuracy of the experienced medium bomber groups ... secondly, the accuracy of the fighter-bomber in the low attack." Slessor urged Portal to pass on his targeting recommendations to the Anglo-American forces preparing for OVERLORD.[70]

Air Marshal Portal responded to Slessor's critique of the Italian campaign on 16 April 1944: "Your letter of the 16 April is a brilliant commentary on the War in your theatre and I am in general agreement with all you say ..... The only point in your letter which seems to me to be open to disagreement is in paragraph 10, where you deal with the bombing of railway centres in preparation for D-Day of OVERLORD." Slessor's tactical approach to air power success ran counter to Zuckerman and Air Marshal Tedder: "I [Portal] was myself doubtful about it at first but I have been convinced that there is nothing else we could do with the enormous force available that would give a

[70] Letter, Slessor to Portal, Mediterranean Campaign, 16 April 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 3; letter referred to in Terraine's, *A Time for Courage*, p. 594, Q staff refers to Quartermaster activities.

better chance of causing that delay to German movement which maybe absolutely priceless --- Tedder is satisfied with the results which are being achieved and I must say that the night bombing (mainly with OBOE) has been magnificently accurate."[71]

The air interdiction campaign, Operation STRANGLE, was a success inasmuch as the Germans could not maintain and operate their forces in central Italy when the Allied offensive came. Prior to STRANGLE, the Allied armies had been unable to break a four-month stalemate on the ground, but when the Allied offensive came after STRANGLE, German resistance collapsed, and Rome fell within thirty days.

By the end of STRANGLE on 11 May 1944, the stage was set for DIADEM, the combined ground-air attack by which the Allies sought to break the stalemate and capture Rome. Slessor agreed with other Allied strategists that the capture of Rome for both broad and strategical and political reasons was an essential part of the campaign in Italy. The capture of Rome would improve the Anglo-American military situation by giving greater depth to cover the main bases in Southern Italy. Moreover, the political effects of the capture of Rome would, in Slessor's opinion, be as important as the military consequences. The prestige of possession of the Italian capital was important to both Germany and the Anglo-American coalition.[72]

On 27 April 1944, Major General John K. Cannon addressed a memorandum to Eaker and Slessor that set forth the basis for the "Outline Plan for Air Participation" for Operation DIADEM. The Outline Plan envisioned three principal phases for the air

---

[71] Letter, Portal to Slessor, 3 May 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 12, No. 3A, OBOE was a British bombing device controlled by RAF ground stations.
[72] Christopher Hibbert, *Anzio: the bid for Rome* (New York, 1970), pp. 6-7.

attack. The first or preparatory phase called for the intensification of the harassing attacks prior to initiating DIADEM, plus attacks on airfields and concentrations of aircraft. The MAAF's Tactical Air Force was to operate generally south of the Pisa-Rimini line against rail and motor transport routes and equipment, and in the last few days before the ground offensive, to strike at enemy stores with a priority on fuel and ammunition dumps. The Strategic Air Force was to strike the Pisa-Rimini line at marshalling yards and similar installations, and Coastal Air Force was to continue its pounding of ports and shipping. The second phase, the assault, called for Tactical Air Force to give close-in support of ground operations and, if necessary, provide lift for a battalion of paratroops, whereas the Strategic Air Force was to deliver a double attack on German corps and army headquarters. A sustained offensive was the third phase which called for both the Tactical and Coastal Air Forces to continue their operations in support of ground forces and against enemy communications, while Strategic Air Force would revert to its normal theater-wide role.[73]

Slessor was still disenchanted with the Anglo-American army leadership and the progress of Operation DIADEM when he sent a letter to Portal on 31 May 1944. He commented that the Allied advance on Rome was disappointingly slow: "It was the same old story, the utmost caution, waiting till we could get more guns or troops forward, regrouping and reorganizing--and thus giving the desperately hard-pressed Hun just the chance he needed ...." Slessor was especially critical of General Alexander: "I

[73] Operational Memo, 6 May 1944, AFHRC document 168.7044-18; Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, pp. 395, 412-413.

can see no grip or drive on the part of the commanders, and am afraid this battle has confirmed my opinion of Alex as a very nice pernickety little man with a job several sizes too big for him." He compares Anglo-American commanders with their German counterparts: "I'm disappointed in Clark and Leese, I believe both of them have had moments in this battle when a German commander in their place would have pulled off a smashing success." Slessor believed that their temperament was not equipped to lead modern armies: "They cannot think in terms of real movement as it exists today … nowadays they will not face casualties. They are mentally paralyzed by pill-boxes and landmines … it is not the junior leaders and troops that jib at casualties. It starts from the top and the attitude of caution seeps down through all echelons of command."[74]

During Generals Marshall and Arnold visit to the Mediterranean Theater in June 1944, Slessor provided them with a classic military assessment of the Italian air campaign. He purported in his "The Effect of Air Power in a Land Offensive" that air power could not "by itself defeat a highly organised and disciplined Army, even when that Army is virtually without air support of its own … It cannot by itself enforce a withdrawal by drying up the flow of essential supplies … In short, it can not absolutely isolate the battlefield from enemy supply or reinforcement." He asserted that Operation STRANGLE demonstrated that a coordinated tactical air offensive can "make it impossible for the most highly organised and disciplined army to offer prolonged resistance to a determined offensive on the ground—even in a country ideally suited for

[74] Letter, Slessor to Portal, Commentary on Mediterranean Campaign, 31 May 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 5A.

defence; it can turn an orderly retreat into a rout; and virtually eliminate an entire army as an effective fighting force."[75] Terraine notes that "these were wise words, but by the time they were uttered the final act of the war's great drama was proceeding, with all its own preoccupations, and little time remained to study fruitfully what hard experience had ascertained."[76]

The summer campaign in Italy, initiated by the DIADEM offensive, was quite successful. The mission of driving the enemy out of Rome and north to the Pisa-Rimini line, given the Allied Armies in Italy by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, was largely accomplished by mid-August 1944. The Germans suffered heavy losses in manpower and materials in their stubbornly conducted defensive campaign.[77]

STRATEGIC AIR OPERATIONS

The Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force (MASAF), though nominally a joint AAF-RAF entity, was essentially an American effort. The British component was No. 205 Group, composed of nine squadrons of night bombers, whereas the American contingent, the Fifteenth Air Force, contained eighty-five squadrons of heavy bombers and twenty-two squadrons of long-range fighters. The RAF night bombers were valuable, but few in number alongside the massive onslaught of the Fifteenth after it

---

[75] Slessor Essay: "The Effect of Air Power in a Land Offensive", 18 June 1944, Christ Church, Oxford, Box D File 6, No. 4A; Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, pp. 598-599.
[76] Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, p. 599.
[77] Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945,* p. 98; For an outstanding assessment of the ground war in Italy, see Martin Blumenson's official U. S. Army History, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington D.C., 1969).

reached its full strength in the spring of 1944.[78] By then the problems of daylight precision bombing had been largely solved and the tactics had been crystallized by the Eighth Air Force in England. The counter offensive by the Eighth Air Force against the Luftwaffe had reached its climax. The growing Fifteenth Air Force contributed to that victory with its attacks of Regensburg during the "big week" in February 1944.[79]

Though the Eighth Air Force and Bomber Command bore the brunt of the counter air phase of the Combined Bomber Offensive, the Fifteenth deserves credit for its campaign against Axis oil facilities that began on 5 April 1944. The elimination of Ploesti, source of fifty per cent of the entire Axis oil supply, was the focal point of the whole counter-oil offensive. The MASAF accomplished its goal of eliminating Ploesti as the primary oil producer with twenty daylight and four night missions. This constituted the largest single sustained air battle of the war. Between 5 April and 19 August 1944, the MASAF flew more than 5,000 sorties over what was the third most heavily defended target on the continent and dropped more than 10,000 tons of bombs. With the beginning of the offensive on 5 April, oil production started to decline. The total five-month offensive estimated reduction was 1,129,000 tons, a sixty per cent loss to Germany. At a time when all other German oil production centers were being systematically attacked by day and night, this loss was a major triumph for the Anglo-American air alliance.[80]

---

[78] History of the 15th Air Force, November 1943 – May 1945, vol. 1, pp. 64-68, AFHRC Document 670.01-1.
[79] USAF History Office interview with General Twining, 17 December 1953, AFHRC Document K110.7009-1; Terraine, *A Time for Courage,* p. 586.
[80] MASAF Report, 26 September 1944, AFHRC MICFILM 25217; Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, p. 385.

Aside from its Target Section, MAAF had little to do with the conduct of the Battle of Ploesti – it was an American campaign. Slessor's influence in the strategic effort was represented in his stalwart and adroit insistence that other commitments, such as the Italian campaign, should interfere as little as possible with the concentration on POINTBLANK. In May 1944, for example, when four of the most effective attacks on Ploesti were executed, the Fifteenth was also called upon to make extensive attacks on rail yards in southern France and to help launch the DIADEM offensive in Italy. Deft management was required of Slessor to juggle these diverse assignments so that each was accomplished without detriment to the others and without rupturing the always-fragile relationships between Army and Air commanders.[81]

CONCLUSION

As the Italian campaign was grinding to a conclusion in March of 1945, two significant personnel changes affected the MAAF. Air Marshal Slessor was succeeded by Air Marshal Sir Guy Garrod as Deputy Air C-in-C and senior British airman in the theater on 15 March. One week later, Major General Cannon was promoted to Lieutenant General and assumed command from Ira Eaker of the MAAF. Eaker became the USAAF Chief of Staff in Washington. The day Slessor relinquished command of the

[81] History of the 15th Air Force, November 1943 – May 1945, vol. 1, pp. 75-76, AFHRC Document 670.01-1; MAAF Oil Targets, 1944, AFHRC MICFILM 25216.

RAF in the Mediterranean and Middle East, Eaker directed U.S. Fighters to escort the Air Marshal to a new assignment in Britain.[82]

Slessor secured his position in the annals of Anglo-American military history with the design and orchestration of Operation STRANGLE. Towards the end of March 1944, when the fronts at Cassino and Anzio had become relatively static, Slessor undertook with Eaker a thorough review of the situation, preliminary to planning the next Allied air and ground offensive for early spring. STRANGLE, the interdiction of German supply lines in Italy was a classic demonstration of Anglo-American air power. The German Army became so weak under the pressure of Allied bombing that it was unable to withstand another ground offensive. It was not until the failure to break the line at Cassino that the ground commanders accepted the validity of the Slessor's air interdiction campaign. The true significance of Cassino, therefore, is not that it was a spectacular failure of the old concept of using aircraft as artillery. The more important fact according to Slessor was that air power alone cannot win wars, but when properly employed, can be truly decisive. The two events of Cassino and STRANGLE establish the basic principles of employment of tactical air forces.[83]

By any measurement this was a resounding military accomplishment. The Germans suffered at least 80,000 casualties during Operations STRANGLE and DIADEM.[84] These operations included the first Allied offensive to capture an Axis

---

[82] Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945,* p. 147; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 635.
[83] Richards and Saunders, *The Royal Air Force*, vol. 2, p. 361; Gooderson, *Air Power at the Battlefront*, pp. 3-4.
[84] Brookes, *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945*, p. 143.

capital—Rome. From the point of view of military history, however, all these achievements fade in significance when compared to the functioning of the Anglo-American air power alliance. Operation DIADEM and its preceding air campaign, Operation STRANGLE, formed without question the most significant demonstration of Anglo-American tactical air cooperation in the Second World War up to that date.[85]

The cooperative MAAF air power alliance constituted a "command post" sequestered from the administrative headaches and business of AAF/MTO on one side and RAF Mediterranean-Middle East command on the other. It enabled Eaker and Slessor to deal with their constant joint operational problems without worrying about any conflict in administrative procedure. This minimum amount of staff overlap between Anglo-American forces provided the maximum amount of flexibility of command. The MAAF headquarters resembled a finely tuned, integrated operation where either Slessor or Eaker could shift from operational to administrative or from joint to separate issues without wasted motion or clashing of gears. Each had a Chief of Staff who served as the pivot between the administrative and operational segments of the headquarters.[86]

The cooperative employment of Anglo-American air forces opened a new chapter in the history of the effectiveness of this military arm of the "special relationship". Much of the Allied success during the Italian campaign can be attributed to the punishment administered to the Germans by aircraft of the MAAF and to the

---

[85] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, pp. 388-389.
[86] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 558-559; Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here"*, p. 355, General Charles C. Chauncey was Eaker's Chief of Staff, while Air Marshal Linnell served in the same capacity for Slessor.

protection given to Allied armies from the waning Luftwaffe. Allied naval forces contributed richly to the successful campaign by harassing the enemy's sea-lanes while protecting their own and by destroying coastal strong points in support of army advances. In the final analysis of the fighting, however, the ground forces carried the heaviest burden and suffered the greatest losses. The splendid Anglo-American cooperative effort sponsored by Slessor and Eaker contributed significantly to the victory in Italy.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION: AN AIR FORCE PARTNERSHIP

MILITARY COOPERATION: 1945-2001

British air policy since 1945 has been strongly influenced by the close and continuous relationship between Britain and the United States. In many respects, the intimate association between the two countries has assumed its most visible and tangible form through the cooperative alliance of the U.S. Air Force and the Royal Air Force. This study has argued that Slessor was vital to the development of this partnership in air force-related matters. Anglo-American cooperation during the period of 1945-2001 could be regarded as the central core of what is usually described as the 'special relationship'.

Shortly before the end of World War II, Air Marshal Slessor returned to Britain to take a high appointment at the Air Ministry, Member of the Air Council for Personnel, and was promoted to the rank of Air Chief Marshal at the beginning of 1946. He held this post until the end of 1947, when he succeeded Field Marshal Sir William Slim as Commandant of the Imperial Defence College.[1]

Slessor was determined to work quietly but consistently for closer relations with the American military. In 1948, he conducted a lengthy lecture tour of United States military staff colleges and participated in talks with senior Pentagon officials. Slessor told an audience at the U.S. National War College in April 1948 that he and his RAF

---

[1] Probert, *High Commanders of the Royal Air Force*, pp. 33-34.

colleagues believed it did not "make sense to discuss British strategy except as a part of a combined Anglo-American strategy."[2] It was clear that by 1948 Slessor had grave concerns about Soviet intentions and was becoming convinced of the need for combined policies. He apprised a group at the United States Air War College, "We in Britain are quite prepared to accept U.S. leadership in this modern world; but the U.S. must treat us as a real partner."[3]

Slessor was instrumental in concluding a series of crucial agreements from 1949 to 1953 governing the use of British bases by the United States. These years witnessed the rapid growth of an American military presence, from a few bombers in East Anglia to a vast network of bases and facilities covering the United Kingdom. Britain's location was critical for the deployment of bombers and nuclear submarines and crucial for providing an infrastructure for American overseas forces. This included communication and intelligence centers, command headquarters, storage for nuclear and conventional weapons, and logistical support. From Slessor's early negotiations with his close friend, USAF Chief of Staff General Hoyt Vandenberg, a substantial American force of 30,000 service members arrived and stayed in the United Kingdom for the next fifty years.[4]

Sir John Slessor's career reached its pinnacle with promotion to Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) in 1950. Visiting America as CAS in January 1951, he discussed the military situation in Korea, and exchanged views on achieving a joint policy for future

---

[2] Marshal of the RAF Sir John Slessor, *The Great Deterrent* (London, 1957), p. 78.
[3] Ibid., p. 93.
[4] Simon Duke, *US Defence Bases in the United Kingdom: A Matter for Joint Decisions?* (New York, 1987), p. 1.

endeavors. Slessor informed the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) that many in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth were concerned with the possibility that the Korean War would escalate into a general conflict involving the Soviet Union and Communist China. Slessor disapproved of United Nations forces advancing north of the 38th parallel and later regretted not pressing his views.[5] He also insisted that China should not be bombed. The minutes of the meeting reveal Chairman of the JCS General Omar Bradley's attitude towards war with China: "Bradley said that the United States Chiefs of Staff were firmly opposed to a war with China."[6]

Returning to America three months later, Slessor proposed an integrated NATO air force to counter the conventional military power of the Soviet Union. The conference convened in Washington on 16 April 1951 with participants from the United Kingdom, Canada, United States and France. They examined the personnel required for such an endeavor: training of aircrews, resources, and ground personnel. The attendees agreed to undertake a practical, preliminary examination of national air force needs and those of the anticipated integrated air forces for Western Europe. Slessor hoped this integrated air force would expand upon the example of the MAAF. In the end, the conference participants made advances in shared doctrine and combined operations, but failed to reach any consensus on total force integration.[7]

While returning to Britain in May 1952 from another military conference in Washington, Slessor jotted down some impressions of Anglo-American relations for Sir

---

[5] Slessor memorandum on Pentagon Conference, 13 January 1951, PRO AIR 75/108.
[6] Minutes from Pentagon Conference, 15 January 1951, PRO AIR 75/108.
[7] Agenda for Air Programs Conference in Washington, 6 March 1951, PRO AIR 75/71.

Roger M. Makins of the Foreign Office. During his visit to America, Slessor was concerned with what he deemed the misunderstanding, suspicion and dislike for the British in some quarters. He asserted, "Anglo-American understanding is so vital to the free world, and at the same time is so delicate a plant that it cannot be left to flower by itself but must be constantly watered and fertilized." Slessor was a firm believer that "a very great deal is done in America at parties and over drinks—in fact by social contacts."[8]

As CAS, Slessor authored an essay in the September 1952 RAF Review commemorating the twelfth anniversary of the Battle of Britain. He furnished an historical perspective of the Anglo-American air force relationship. Slessor explained, "For a hundred years before 1914 the Pax Britannica rested on the British Fleet. Then there was thirty years of grey twilight when there was nothing to take the place of our Sea Power. Today the Pax Atlantica depends as surely and, I believe, more permanently, on Anglo-American air power." He added in his message to all RAF personnel that "we British today can not hope to compete in numbers or material strengths with our great American partner. But we can make a contribution in quality—in fighting value, in battle experience, in training, design and invention—that is second to none."[9]

Slessor met with General Vandenberg on 24 November 1952 to confer on matters of common interest. Both agreed that the Chiefs of Air Staff should meet and

---

[8] Letter, Slessor to Makins, 15 May 1951, PRO AIR 75/107.
[9] Slessor's essay in "RAF Review", September 1952, PRO AIR 75/57.

consult with each other more frequently. Slessor commented that "owing to the somewhat different relations between the Services in U.K. and U.S., it would be sometimes easier for action on an air policy matter to be initiated by C.A.S./R.A.F. through the British Chiefs of Staff." At the meeting, Vandenberg agreed to send USAF officers, including a representative of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) to the British Air Staff for coordination of joint maneuvers, basing issues, planning, and movement of air assets in Europe and the Middle East.[10] Historian Andrew J. Pierre maintains in *Nuclear Politics* that Anglo-American interdependence was a key component of RAF policy: "Relations between the two air forces were excellent and far more intimate than they were between the other respective services of the two countries. This was explainable in part by their common experience in seeking to establish themselves with the more established services ... recognition of the new importance of air power."[11]

In a 19 December 1952 Air Ministry memorandum, Slessor relayed the substance of his meeting with U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett in Paris. Slessor's old friend from World War II was a keen observer of the Anglo-American scene and confided that he was "astonished and delighted at the relations between the U.S.A.F. and the R.A.F." after touring American bases in the United Kingdom. Slessor noted in his memorandum that Lovett "found the relations between the U.S.A.F. and the R.A.F. much better than those between the U.S.A.F. and U.S.N. and went out of his way to express his warm appreciation."[12]

---

[10] Notes on Slessor's meeting with General Vandenberg, 24 November 1952, PRO AIR 75/72.
[11] Pierre, *Nuclear Politics,* p. 148.
[12] Memorandum, Slessor to Secretary State for Air, 19 December 1952, PRO AIR 75/107.

As Chief of the Air Staff, Slessor favored a fresh examination of Britain's defense policy. He argued for the development of a robust bomber force that could menace the Soviet military without the need for targeting population centers. From January 1950 onwards, Slessor's approach to strategic planning became much more sharply focused on a strategy of nuclear deterrence. As a result of a reappraisal of RAF policy in early 1950, Slessor initiated planning for the V-bomber force, which could threaten Soviet airfields, submarine pens, guided weapon sites, rail centers, and the lines of communication of Soviet armies invading western Europe.[13]

In March 1952, Defence Minister Lord Alexander directed a major reassessment of government policy. He instructed the three Chiefs of Staff; Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Slim, First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Rhoderick McGrigor, and Sir John Slessor to devise a new strategic planning document that accounted for the serious economic conditions facing the United Kingdom.[14] John Baylis has written that the Chief of the Air Staff had unquestionably the intellectual acumen to create such a transitional document: "Slessor was the dominant figure and intellect within the COSC." The result was the "Report on Defence Policy and Global Strategy", which went before the Cabinet Defence Committee in June 1952 and formed the focal point for all strategic deliberations for the next five years.[15]

---

[13] Slessor essay, "The Role of the RAF", 25 July 1949, PRO AIR 75/119; Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy 1945-1964,* p. 119, V-bombers consisted of the Vulcan, Valiant and Victor.

[14] Baylis, Ambiguity and Deterrence, p. 132, Lord Alexander, Earl of Tunis, was Minister of Defence from 1952-1954.

[15] Ibid., pp. 132-133, COSC was the British Chiefs of Staff Committee.

Slessor's strategic analysis provided the intellectual foundation for those contemplating nuclear deterrence as a viable defense strategy. Pierre asserts that the Global Strategy Paper "strongly influenced the evolution of strategic doctrine in the West." Slessor's ideas were based on an attempt to deal with the problem of vulnerability and improve deterrence. Pierre illustrates that this new strategic construct "eventually led Britain to become the first nation to base its national security planning almost entirely upon a declaratory policy of nuclear deterrence. In the United States it helped originate the "New Look" military policy of the Eisenhower Administration."[16]

Slessor was one of the main architects in this Anglo-American shift in emphasis to nuclear deterrence. In many ways, the new Chief of the Air Staff was a product of his generation. Baylis contends that Slessor "had a strong realist perception that violent conflict was an ever-present part of human existence. Experience told him that the best way to deter war was to confront the potential aggressors, like the Soviet Union, with superior power."[17] Slessor believed fervently that the Soviet Union had shown through its action and its ideology that it was bent on world domination. Only through a strong and resolute Anglo-American alliance could the West meet this threat.[18]

---

[16] Pierre, *Nuclear Politics,* p. 87, the new Administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower came to office in January 1953 faced with its own economic difficulties that necessitated a review of defense policy. Eisenhower needed to reduce defense expenditures, which had risen dramatically because of the Korean War, and develop a defense policy that would not bankrupt the nation. In December 1952, the NATO Council reversed itself and approved a major reduction in the conventional military force goals, which had been formally agreed upon at Lisbon only ten months earlier. The following year much of Slessor's thinking was incorporated into the "New Look" of the Eisenhower Administration.
[17] Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence*, p. 111.
[18] Marshal of the RAF, Sir John Slessor, *Strategy for the West* (New York, 1954), pp. 26-28.

Slessor retired from the service in January 1953 as Marshal of the Royal Air Force. During his retirement years, he enriched the study and dialogue of Anglo-American relations with the presentation of informed lectures on both continents. Slessor's postwar publications laid the intellectual foundation for further study by providing ideas for debate on deterrence, arms control, limited war, and crisis management, which are now the main organizing concepts of contemporary strategic thought.[19] He was adept at presenting the case for RAF enhancement as a means for promoting the Anglo-American alliance: "The RAF today, without long-range bomber force, would be like the Royal Navy of Nelson's day without its line-of-battle. If we were to provide as our contribution to the Pax Atlantica only ground-support and maritime aircraft and fighters to defend ourselves ... then we should sink to the level of a third-class Power."[20] Underlying Slessor's philosophy was the belief that Britain could not retain its position of influence as a world power if it did not have a strategic bomber force of its own.

Slessor vigorously opposed Britain's adoption of an independent nuclear strike force, and instead favored a unified Atlantic nuclear structure. Slessor affirmed in a 1960 paper that "independent control of national nuclear deterrents is in fact meaningless as long as the Alliance endures. It implies that a less powerful ally, Britain or France for instance, would be politically able to engage in a bilateral nuclear exchange with Russia independently." Slessor believed that the loyalty of America to

---

[19] John Baylis, ed., *British Defence Policy in a Changing World* (London, 1977), p. 170.
[20] Slessor's essay, "The Place of the Bomber in British Policy", 1953, AFHRC Document 168.7100-128.

their obligations under NATO was not just a matter of a signature on a Treaty, but of enlightened self-interest and recognition that the first vital line of defense of the United States ran through Europe. He asserted in his paper: "I believe it almost if not quite equally absurd to imagine that any U.S. Administration could involve their Allies in a nuclear war in Europe against their wishes."[21] In 1962, Slessor published a widely circulated paper entitled "The Case against an Independent British Nuclear Deterrent", in which he argued against the "utterly fallacious and propagated idea that Bomber Command represents an insignificant or marginal fraction of the Allied long-range striking power." He was opposed to the retention of Bomber Command as an independent British deterrent outside of NATO, and under the exclusive control of Her Majesty's Government. He noted in his paper: "I have always disliked the term Independent Air Force as applied to the OCHEY Wing in 1918. I dislike the term Independent British Deterrent still more because it is not and never can be independent – and in my view it makes political and military nonsense to pretend that it can be."[22] Slessor was convinced that RAF Bomber Command should become part of NATO to supplement the strength and power of America's Strategic Air Command.

Slessor was also a major advocate for the creation of an integrated Anglo-American Atlantic Community. He authored a paper analyzing the January 1962 Atlantic Convention held in Paris. Slessor's purpose was to describe and comment on

---

[21] Slessor essay on Atlantic Policy, 1960, PRO AIR 75/83.
[22] Slessor essay, "The Case against an Independent British Nuclear Deterrent", 1962, PRO AIR 75/52, Ochey was an aerodrome near Nancy France, and the headquarters for Britain's First World War Independent Bombing Force that reported directly to the Air Ministry.

the convention's main political, economic, and military recommendations and provide his audience with the overall climate of the meeting. The convention resulted in an agreement for the creation of a true Atlantic Community by the end of the 1960s, and outlined the policies and institutions required for facilitating this new conception. Slessor advocated a governmental commission to draw up plans within ten years for the inception of a true Atlantic Community, suitably organized to meet the political, military, and economic challenges of the Cold War environment. He recognized the interdependence of national interests in many fields of policy and postulated that this new community would harmonize the policies of its members and develop common planning in economic and military spheres. Slessor asserted that the "development of a comprehensive Atlantic Community, providing a stimulus to competition, investment and more rapid growth in the mass markets appropriate to the modern technological age, with progressive reduction in tariffs and other obstacles to trade."[23]

Slessor confronted critics who believed that the Atlantic Community would adversely affect the British Commonwealth. He reminded his audience that the Commonwealth was never intended to become a political or military community but instead a social, economic and cultural association of hundreds of millions of people in five continents. Slessor firmly believed that the Commonwealth and the Atlantic Community were not alternatives that Britain had to make an irrevocable choice between, but rather that Britain must "assume a leading position in the European, and ultimately in the Atlantic Community – still as the centre and prime mover of the

[23] Slessor report on the Atlantic Convention on NATO Nations, 26 January 1962, PRO AIR 75/146.

Commonwealth mission." Slessor noted that politically Britain could best serve the Commonwealth by assuming a position of influence in Europe and the Anglo-American alliance: "I believe the Commonwealth has everything to gain from our membership of an Atlantic Community – and what we may lose is relatively negligible."[24]

In his retirement, Slessor was at the international forefront in discussing and analyzing nuclear strategy. He authored an article for the Times Aviation Supplement, "Nuclear Strategy and the Future of Manned Aircraft" on 10 April 1964, again preaching the necessity of an Anglo-American defense relationship. Slessor maintained that "our strategic policy, world-wide, must remain one of coalition with the one giant of the Free World."[25] In short, Slessor was convinced that if the Anglo-American alliance did not take the lead in setting up a world-order on constitutional lines, the Communist Bloc would certainly fill the vacuum.

* * *

Anglo-American military cooperation is today so vast, so worldwide, and so complete that it is difficult to visualize the furtive prenatal conditions under which the alliance was born. Assistant Air Attaché to the British Embassy in Washington, Group Captain Barry T. Dingle asserts that Slessor was of "central importance in the history of Anglo-American military relations" and that he "played a key role in fostering a very special relationship with the United States forces, in particular their flying related elements." The Assistant Air Attaché affirmed that in the tradition of Air Marshal

---

[24] Address by Slessor of Delegates to the World Branches Conference, San Francisco, 15 November 1962, PRO AIR 75/146.
[25] Article, "Nuclear Strategy and the Future of Manned Aircraft", 10 April 1964, PRO AIR 75/89.

Slessor, the RAF staff in Washington is "dedicated to playing a key role in sustaining and enhancing the defence and security relationship between the UK and the US."[26]

The largess of the RAF staff in Washington is a far cry from the environment that Slessor faced during his mission to America in 1940. The current British Defence Staff (BDS) in the United States numbers some 600 personnel. The BDS has emulated its World War II predecessor by focusing on a broad range of defense and security activities, but especially in the core areas where Britain and America are particularly close: military operations, scientific and technological cooperation, and intelligence. Dingle stated that the RAF "maintains a fruitful and highly successful personnel exchange program of sixty officers stationed with the United States Air Force." He explained that the RAF attempts to ensure the maximum interoperability between Britain and America "so that we can undertake any military operation and work together seamlessly … such transparency between key allies is essential if we are to enhance the undoubted military effectiveness of our respective military organizations."[27]

Conflicts in the late twentieth century have shown that the Anglo-American air power alliance continued to play a leading role. The 1991 Gulf War and the air action of Operation DELIBERATE FORCE that helped promote Bosnian peace in 1995 are but two examples of the strength and persuasiveness of the air alliance at work. Dingle commented that "air power with its mobility, speed, precision, and ability to gather information is ideally suited to our new strategic environment." Air power undoubtedly

---

[26] Phone Interview with Group Captain Barry T. Dingle, 6 June 2001.
[27] Ibid., 6 June 2001.

provides the Anglo-American political alliance with a vital capability to respond quickly to the unexpected, such as Somalia in 1992, Bosnia in 1995, Zaire in 1996, and in both Iraq and Kosovo in 1999.[28]

SUMMARY

This study, intended as an inquiry into the career of an important but little appreciated wartime figure, has argued that Sir John Slessor served as a significant participant in the formation of the Anglo-American air alliance. In fostering the great Anglo-American partnership, the contributions of Henry "Hap" Arnold, Carl "Tooey" Spaatz, or Lord Tedder, and Lord Portal have been well recognized. Those of Slessor, however, have virtually escaped notice except by those who witnessed his talents firsthand.

The overriding theme of this study has been the relationship forged between Air Marshal Sir John Slessor and the American air forces during the Second World War. During the preparation of this study, the author has become increasingly aware of the immense variety, far-reaching importance, and great complexity of the problems that Slessor handled during the Second World War. He spearheaded Anglo-American cooperation in air warfare; few aspects of this vast worldwide partnership escaped some manner of his influence. As a pioneer for the RAF in the United States during the autumn of 1940, Slessor was the transatlantic eyes and ears of the Air Staff. The training of pilots, the procurement of aircraft, spares, equipment, and fuel and the

[28] Ibid., 6 June 2001.

interchange of operational intelligence and information on countless subjects—all of these depended in varying degrees on Jack Slessor.

The defeat of France in June 1940 marked the transition to a closer Anglo-American relationship. Overnight the magnitude of the war and the problems for the United States and Britain changed. America's fundamental policy question during this period centered on influencing the outcome of the war in favor of Britain without actually entering the conflict. Kent Roberts Greenfield concludes that "one of the foundations on which American strategy was built was that the national interest of the United States required the survival of Great Britain and its postwar freedom of action as a great power."[29]

Long before America entered the war in 1941, strategic air power had become a central part to Anglo-American strategy. Churchill formulated his thoughts for the British War Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff: "The Navy can lose us the war, but only the Air Force can win it. Therefore our supreme effort must be to gain overwhelming mastery in the air. The Fighters are our salvation, but the Bombers alone provide the means of victory."[30] Slessor helped formulate a new strategic plan in September 1940, which offered a rationale for continuing the war and made strategic bombing a cornerstone of Britain's effort against the Axis.[31] David Reynolds asserts that "the Army Air Corps naturally shared FDR's faith in heavy bombing, but the Navy took the Army's view that another AEF [American Expeditionary Force] was inevitable. In fact,

---

[29] Greenfield, *American Strategy in World War II: A Reconsideration*, p. 3.
[30] Prime Minister Winston Churchill quoted in Terraine, *A Time for Courage*, p. 260.
[31] Slessor memorandum, "The Preparation Strategic Bomber Plans", 14 September 1940, PRO AIR 75/52.

Roosevelt's strategic thinking was closer to HMG's than to that of his own military."[32] Dr. Noble Frankland insists: "The great immorality open to us in 1940 and 1941 was to lose the war against Hitler's Germany. To have abandoned the only means of direct attack which we had at our disposal would have been a long step in that direction."[33] Famed philosopher Michael Walzer postulates that a Nazi defeat of Britain would have ushered in a long night of inhumanity and constituted a "supreme emergency" which warranted the use of air power: "Nazism challenged the highest values of international society .... Bomber Command was the only offensive weapon available to the British in those frightening years, and I expect there is some truth to the notion that it was used simply because it was there."[34] R. J. Overy maintains that "the bombing of Germany not only promised the one slim prospect of eventual victory in the absence of powerful allies, but was also justified in the eyes of the British public as retaliation for German attacks .... Roosevelt himself was an inspiration behind the planning of a bombing offensive as a central part of American preparation for war."[35]

When Slessor arrived in the United States on 11 November 1940, isolationism was a potent, if diminishing force, nourished by German propaganda. The mawkish sentiment of the "America First" movement was both vociferous and influential. When it became apparent that Great Britain would be an ally if the United States became

---

[32] Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-1941,* p. 212, the AEF refers to the U.S. military force in France during WWI.
[33] Dr. Noble Frankland quoted in Horst Boog, ed., *The Conduct of the Air War in the Second World War: An International Comparison* (New York, 1992), p. 489.
[34] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Implications* (New York, 1977), pp. 254 & 258.
[35] Overy, *Why the Allies Won,* p. 109.

involved in the war, Anglo-American planners met at Washington from late January until early March 1941 to discuss a mutual strategy. The presence of Slessor and "United Kingdom Delegation" that arrived on 23 January 1941 was political dynamite. British officers wore plain clothes, as befit visitors to a neutral power, and were extremely discreet. Their presence, movements, and the ABC discussions were kept absolutely secret.[36] American airmen played a more important part in these talks with the British than they had in shaping a purely American strategy because Britain's Royal Air Force was a separate service, the equal of the Royal Army and Navy. Discussions with the British required the participation of a high-ranking American airman who could deal directly with Slessor.[37]

The Slessor Mission to America was a success in instigating Anglo-American air power cooperation—a fact completely overlooked by historians in favor of other political and military aspects of the emerging alliance. Slessor's contributions were, of course, just one part of the gradual evolution towards the alliance of the United States and Great Britain. Other events of the early 1940s were equally important in this transformation, including the destroyer-for-bases deal and Lend-Lease. Of all these events, however, Slessor's involvement with the ABC-1 Agreement stands out as providing a profound psychological impact to the military relationship, by stripping away any pretense of petty nationalistic security concerns, which would otherwise have impeded the free and open exchange of information. It is no coincidence that Anglo-

---

[36] Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins,* pp. 272-273; Copp, *Forged and Fire*, p. 118; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 340-341.
[37] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 340-342.

American intelligence cooperation really began to develop after Slessor returned to Britain.

Little has been written about the "Slessor Agreement" and its importance to Anglo-American strategy during the war. The strategy Slessor promoted in ABC-2 revolutionized Britain's prospects for victory. To achieve its objective within a reasonable time, the bombing offensive needed to be of the heaviest possible scale. The British delegation attempted to meet the security needs for the United Kingdom and then give the heavy bomber first priority in production. British air policy in 1941 was to concentrate on targets that affected the German transportation system thereby exploiting weaknesses already created by the blockade. The targets selected were in highly industrial and thickly populated areas, and their destruction was expected to affect German morale.[38]

Under conditions of war, Slessor contributed significantly to Anglo-American planning. As the principal Air Ministry planner, Slessor played a sustained part in initiating Anglo-American priorities and strategies. His position on the Air Staff required a high level of technical knowledge and competence, as well as a thorough familiarity with all aspects of tactics and organization. He helped to conclude arrangements, such as the Arnold-Portal agreement of June 1942, by which a substantial flow of American aircraft was assured for the RAF despite America's own entry into the war. Slessor and the RAF gave generous help to the USAAF as they deployed their air forces in Britain. His determination that this vast enterprise, which involved the

[38] The "Slessor Agreement", March 1941, PRO AIR 45/12; R. J. Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945,* p. 61.

accommodation on British soil of some 400 American squadrons, and over 350,000 American airmen, should proceed rapidly and harmoniously was echoed throughout the air partnership. As a result, the Anglo-American air effort from Britain became a miracle of almost frictionless cooperation.[39]

Many examples of Slessor's helpfulness to American air forces could be given. When, for instance, the American policy of daylight bombing was being seriously called into question in 1942, Slessor gave it valuable support. Several kinds of British support were vital to the American bombing offensive. British airfields helped the United States Army Air Forces overcome the problem of limited range, with the advantage of operating out of an industrial country speaking the same language. British intelligence and air-sea rescue expertise and facilities were vital to the American effort, greatly accelerated air operations, and made them easier and less costly to carry out. Anglo-American air force officers during the Second World War also carefully coordinated air strategy and tactics, often together in opposition to the ground and naval leaders of their respective countries.[40]

Regarding the desirability of an air force existing as a third service in its own right, Slessor's advice, confidentially sought by Spaatz, Eaker and Arnold and equally discreetly given, bore fruit in postwar American reorganization. The close ties between British and American airmen are reflected in the papers of General Carl Spaatz, who became commanding general of the Army Air Forces in March 1946 and, subsequently,

---

[39] Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe,* Appendix 3; Hansell, *The Air Plan that Defeated Hitler*, Appendix 2.
[40] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 6, p. 621.

the first Chief of Staff of the independent U.S. Air Force. Upon assuming the latter position, he wrote to British Air Marshal Sir Hugh Sanders: "It is almost impossible to say what a help to us the precedent set by the RAF has been. In the recent gaining of our parity with the other two services, the background of your own struggle for the organization of the RAF was an immeasurable aid."[41]

Out of the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 came the strongest and clearest endorsement of Allied strategic bombing doctrine yet approved. The original Casablanca Directive carried no provision for an invasion of Western Europe. Slessor strongly opposed an invasion strategy for Western Europe, and in an afterword to Raymond H. Fredette's *The Sky on Fire*, Slessor postulated: "It seems impossible to resist the conclusion that if, when the Americans entered the war, our Governments had allocated the necessary priority in man-power, materials and scientific effort to the bombing offensive, German resistance would have been broken, as Trenchard said, well before it was, and a relatively small army could have gone into Germany before June 1944, on a march-table instead of the operation order that hurled them against the Normandy beaches."[42] Slessor's faith in the efficacy of air power never diminished during the Second World War or in retirement.

The strategy agreed upon at Casablanca called for a "fatal weakening" of Germany by air warfare. Slessor believed that only after such a fatal weakening could a ground campaign in northwest Europe be undertaken, if it should prove necessary. His

---

[41] Letter, Spaatz to Sanders, 19 September 1947, AFHRC, MICFILM 23262; Arnold, *Global Mission*, p. 607.
[42] Fredette, *The Sky on Fire*, p. 260.

plan accorded air power a primary, war-winning role in pursuit of the objectives of the Casablanca Directive. On the basis of performance, the Anglo-American strategic bombing campaign fulfilled three quarters of Slessor's Casablanca Directive: it brought about "the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system;" it did not, however, significantly undermine the morale of the German people.[43]

Slessor aided in the creation of an atmosphere and organization that allowed for the most extensive collaboration of two air forces in history. This collaboration, however, was not always perfect. In 1943, for instance, the Anglo-American air battle against the U-boat menace approached complete breakdown. This occurred after the RAF had made their most significant advances in combating U-boats from the air. This was a particularly painful episode for Slessor, who knew that the American support could have saved lives and brought the Battle of the Atlantic to a quicker conclusion. Cooperating with the U.S. Navy required all the tact, perseverance, and restraint the British could muster. Sometimes it even required audacity, as Slessor discovered in his dealings with Admiral Ernest J. King in July 1943. The near rupture of relations was caused by interservice rivalry in America, by the desire of King to exert his dominance in the Atlantic, and by a simple lack of communication. The U.S. Navy's refusal to fully cooperate in the Atlantic in 1943 marked the least successful aspect of the Anglo-American air alliance.[44]

---

[43] Directive on the Bomber Offensive, 21 January 1943, PRO AIR 8/78.
[44] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 499; Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945*, pp. 710-711.

Historians have undervalued Slessor's assistance in building a coalition air force in the Mediterranean Theater. In tandem with Ira Eaker, he was the architect of an effectual and harmonious command, without which the success of the Mediterranean campaign would have been difficult to accomplish. Slessor paid tribute in his memoirs to the spirit of cooperation that was displayed throughout the campaign between the airmen of the MAAF, not just by commanders but in all grades. Formations of diverse nations, languages, and peoples took part in the campaign and served gallantly under the designated commanders without thought to their nationality. This sentiment produced excellent team work throughout the Italian air campaign—a tribute both to Slessor and the Anglo-American personnel in all three services as well as to the unity of purpose of the Allied forces.[45]

Much has been written about the disagreements between allies during the Second World War. Little has been written about the deep friendships that appear among comrades in arms of different nations. The personal ties they formed fostered trust and understanding which enabled the Allies to engage in frank and open discussions of thorny issues without disrupting the Anglo-American partnership. Good relations between British officers and their American opposite numbers were important in order for the Anglo-American military machinery to function smoothly. Jack Slessor developed personal relationships with his American counterparts that became the

[45] Report by the Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Italian Campaign, Part II, 12 December 1944, AFHRC document 623.101-3; Slessor, *The Central Blue,* pp. 558-559.

foundation of collaboration. He exemplified the mutual respect and friendship that developed between airmen of the United States and their counterparts in Great Britain.

The friendship between Slessor and General Eaker was of particular value in this regard. Eaker obviously held Sir John Slessor in high regard when he introduced him at a World Affairs Council–English Speaking Union dinner in Los Angeles on 27 February 1956: "There were many great land, sea and air leadership teams in the war. To name but a few, Eisenhower-Spaatz, MacArthur-Kenney, Montgomery-Cunningham, yet I feel no one had a better partner than it was my good fortune to have in Jack Slessor in the Mediterranean Theater in the late years of the last war." Eaker later added that "it was primarily due to the skill, patience, and geniality of Slessor that interchange between Britain and the United States, on the development of a common strategy, was put into effect and made fully operative, long before the America entered the war."[46] There is no doubt that Eaker believed this collaboration resulted in a more effective war effort and contributed significantly to ultimate victory for the Anglo-American alliance.

The esteem in which the Americans held Slessor arose partly from his professional competence and partly from personal qualities. Among these, the Americans especially appreciated his intelligence, equanimity, courtesy, and integrity, along with the impartiality which he brought to the study of emotionally charged issues. This respect was repeatedly noted by General Arnold, who remarked how Slessor brought "amity and accord to all joint British-American sessions." Eaker added: "Jack

[46] Eaker address, 27 February 1956, AFHRC, MICFILM 23335.

Slessor possesses intelligence and personality", he declared at their 1945 farewell party in Italy.[47]

How is one to judge the effectiveness of the Anglo-American air alliance in defeating Nazi Germany? Williamson Murray argues: "It is impossible to separate the individual contributions of British and American bomber forces into distinct contributions. In the end, they achieved synergistic effects: the sum of their efforts was greater than the parts. Together, there is no doubt that strategic bombing played a crucial role in Nazi Germany's defeat."[48] Overy contends that "air power did not win the war on its own, but it proved to be the critical weakness on the Axis side and the greatest single advantage enjoyed by the Allies."[49]

In a small way, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor helped erase a long history of Anglo-American mutual suspicion and misunderstanding. He was committed during the Second World War to expanding the "mixing up" process, thereby transforming the relations between the United States and Great Britain.[50] H. C. Allen asserts in *Great Britain and the United States* that "the Second World War ... formed an altogether fitting climax in the long drama of Anglo-American friendship." Slessor assisted in what General Marshall called "the most complete unification of military effort ever achieved by two allied nations".[51]

---

[47] Arnold quoted in Eaker address, 27 February 1956, AFHRC, MICFILM 23335.
[48] Williamson Murray, *"Did Strategic Bombing Work,"* MHQ: *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, 1996, vol. 8, p. 40.
[49] Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, p. 323.
[50] Letter, Slessor to Professor A. J. Toynbee, 29 July 1941, PRO AIR 75/114.
[51] H. C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations (1783-1952)* (London, 1954), p. 781.

Slessor must be ranked as one of the premier airmen of World War II for his contribution in forging a groundbreaking military alliance. He was outgoing, articulate, and a military intellectual, as well as an excellent coalition airman, cooperating loyally with Spaatz in Britain and Eaker in the Mediterranean. Slessor was fortunate to contribute to the closest approximation of full partnership ever achieved in Anglo-American relations. Their air force needs matched; their contributions, if not exactly equal, were vital and complementary. W. F. Craven and J. L. Cate contend: "It was possible to draw upon the rich operational experience of the RAF, however, and during the spring and early summer of 1942, basic decisions in the field of operational planning prepared the way for a degree of co-operation and combined action probably never before equaled by military forces of two great nations. The story provides another significant chapter in the long history of Anglo-American relations."[52] For much of the Second World War the USAAF and the RAF were interdependent, and Slessor's role in that relationship was a significant one. He was instrumental in making air force relations indispensable to the functioning of the wartime alliance. The long-term interaction between the United States and Great Britain in all areas of military strategy, operations, aircraft production, and technology had a major impact on the course of the war and continued to influence the development of the two air forces in the postwar period.

---

[52] Craven and Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vol. 1, p. 621.

WORKS CITED

Primary Works

British Papers, Records and Documents

Christ Church College, Oxford
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Portal of Hungerford Papers

Public Record Office (PRO), Kew, London
Air Ministry Records (AIR)
AIR 2: Registered Papers
AIR 8: Chief of the Air Staff Records
AIR 9: Director of Plans Records
AIR 19: Air Department Papers
AIR 20: Unregistered Papers
AIR 41: RAF Narratives
AIR 45: RAF Delegation, Washington
AIR 75: Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor Papers

Air Historical Branch, London
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor Papers

Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon, London
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor Papers
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Trenchard Papers

U.S. Papers, Public Records and Documents

Air Force Historical Research Center, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama (AFHRC)
Interviews
Manuscript Collections
Annual Reports, Chief of the Air Corps, 1927-1945
Unit Histories
Uncatalogued Material
John Cannon Papers
Ira Eaker Collection

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York
Henry Morgenthau Papers
President's Secretary's File (PSF)

Newspapers

Daily Telegraph (London)
The New York Times
The Times (London)

The Washington Post

Periodicals

Fortune Magazine

Official Histories and Documents

Blumenson, Martin. *Salerno to Cassino.* Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History (OCMH), U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), 1969.

Butler, J. R. M. *Grand Strategy,* vol. 2: *September 1939 – June 1941.* London: HMSO, 1957.

Craven, Wesley Frank and James Lea Cate, eds. *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* vols. 1-3, 6. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1948-1949, 1951 and 1955.

Cline, Ray S. *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division.* Washington, D.C.: OCMH, GPO, 1951.

Greenfield, Kent Roberts, ed. *Command Decisions.* Washington, D.C.: OCMH, Department of the Army, 1960.

Greenhous, Brereton, Stephen J. Harris, William C. Johnston and William G.P. Rawling. *The Crucible of War, 1939-1945: The Official History of The Royal Canadian Air Force,* vol. 3. Toronto: University of Toronto Press & Ministry of Supply and Services, 1994.

Holley, Irving Brinton, Jr. *Buying Aircraft: Materiel Procurement for the Army Air Forces.* Washington, D.C.: OCMH, GPO, 1964.

Howard, Michael. *Grand Strategy,* vol. 4: *August 1942 – September 1943.* London: HMSO, 1972.

Jones, Henry A. *The War in the Air*, vol. 3. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931.

Leighton, Robert W. and Richard M. Coakley. *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940-1943.* Washington, D.C.: OCMH, GPO, 1955.

Matloff, Maurice and Edwin M. Snell. *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942.* Washington, D.C.: OCMH, GPO, 1953.

Matloff, Maurice. *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944.* Washington, D.C.: OCMH, GPO, 1959.

Morton, Louis. *Strategy and Command: The First Two Years.* Washington, D.C.: OCMH, GPO, 1962.

Nalty, Bernard C., ed. *Winged Shield, Winged Sword: A History of the United States Air Force,* vol. 1, *1907-1950.* Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, United States Air Force, 1997.

Pogue, Forrest C. *The Supreme Command.* Washington, D.C.: OCMH, GPO, 1954.

Richards, Denis. *The Royal Air Force, 1939-1945,* vol. 1: *The Fight at Odds.* London: HMSO, 1953.

Richards, Denis and Hilary St. George Saunders. *The Royal Air Force, 1939-1945,* vol. 2: *The Fight Avails.* London: HMSO, 1954.

Saunders, Hilary St. George. *The Royal Air Force, 1939-1945,* vol. 3: *The Fight is Won.* London: HMSO, 1953.

United States Strategic Bombing Survey, 10 vols. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1945-1949.

Watson, Mark S. *Chief of Staff: Pre-War Plans and Preparations.* Washington, D.C.: OCMH, GPO, 1950.

Webster, Charles and Noble Frankland. *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany,* 4 vols. London: HMSO, 1961.

Memoirs and Published Diaries

Alexander, Earl of Tunis. *The Alexander Memoirs, 1940-1945.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962.

Arnold, H.H. *Global Mission.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949.

Blum, John Morton, ed. *From the Moganthau Diaries,* vols. 2-3. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965 and 1967.

Churchill, Winston S. *The Second World War,* 6 vols. London: Casswell, 1948-1954.

Cox, Sebastian, ed. *Sir Arthur T. Harris: Despatch on War Operations, 1942-1945.* London: Frank Cass & Co., 1995.

Danchev, Alex, ed. *Establishing the Anglo-American Alliance: The Second World War Diaries of Brigadier Vivian Dykes.* London: Brassey's (UK), 1990.

Danchev, Alex and Daniel Todman, eds. *War Diaries 1939-1945, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001.

Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Crusade in Europe.* London: Heinemann, 1948.

Halifax, Lord. *Fullness of Days.* New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1957.

Harris, Sir Arthur. *Bomber Offensive.* London: Collins, 1947.

Ismay, Lord. *The Memoirs of Lord Ismay.* New York: The Viking Press, 1960.

King, Admiral Ernest J. and Walter M. Whitehill. *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record.* London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953.

Leahy, William, D. *I Was There.* London: Gollancz, 1950.

Leutze, James R., ed. *The London Journal of General Raymond E. Lee, 1940-1941.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971.

Slessor, Sir John. *The Central Blue: The Autobiography of Sir John Slessor, Marshal of the Royal Air Force.* New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957.

Tedder, Lord. *With Prejudice: The War Memoirs of Marshal of the Royal Air Force.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966.

Zuckerman, Solly. *From Apes to Warlords.* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978.

Secondary Works

Monographs

Adams, Henry H. *Harry Hopkins.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977.

Adams, R. J. Q. *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

Adams, R. J. Q., ed. *British Appeasement and the Origins of World War II.* Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1994.

Andrews, Allen. *The Air Marshals: The Air War in Western Europe.* New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1970.

Bartlett, C. J. *'The Special Relationship': A Political History of Anglo-American Relations since 1945.* London: Longman, 1992.

Baylis, John, ed. *British Defence Policy in a Changing World.* London: Croom Helm, 1977.

_____. *Anglo-American Relations since 1939: The Enduring Alliance.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Baylis, John. *Anglo-American Defense Relations 1939-1984: The Special Relationship.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981.

_____. *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy 1945-1964.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

Best, Richard A. *"Co-Operation with Like-Minded Peoples": British Influences on American Security Policy, 1945-1949.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Blair, Clay. *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted 1942-1945.* New York: Random House, 1998.

Blake, Lord and C. S. Nicholls, eds. *The Dictionary of National Biography, 1971-1980.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Blumenson, Martin. *Anzio the Gamble that Failed.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1963.

Bond, Brian. *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

_____. *France and Belgium 1939-1940.* Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1975.

Boog, Horst, ed. *The Conduct of the Air War in the Second World War: An International Comparison.* New York: Berg, 1992.

Boyle, Andrew. *Trenchard.* London: Collins, 1962.

Brookes, Andrew. *Air War Over Italy 1943-1945.* Surrey: Ian Allen, 2000.

Buckley, John. *Air Power in the Age of Total War.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Buell, Thomas B. *Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980.

Caine, Philip D. *American Pilots in the RAF: The WWII Eagle Squadrons.* Washington: Brassey's, 1998.

Charmley, John. *Churchill's Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship 1940-57.* San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995.

Copp, DeWitt S. *Forged in Fire: Strategy and Decisions in the Air War over Europe 1940-45.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1982.

Crane, Conrad C. *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II.* Kansas: University of Kansas, 1993.

Dallek, Robert. *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Danchev, Alex. *Very Special Relationship: Field-Marshal Sir John Dill and the Anglo-American Alliance 1941-44.* London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1986.

Daso, Dik Alan. *Hap Arnold and the Evolution of an American Airpower.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.

Davis, Richard G. *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

Duke, Simon. *US Defence Bases in the United Kingdom: A Matter for Joint Decisions?* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.

Ellis, John. *Cassino, The Hollow Victory.* London: McGraw-Hill, 1984.

Feis, Herbert. *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Ford, Corey. *Donovan of OSS.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970.

Frankland, Noble. *Bomber Offensive: The Devastation of Europe.* New York: Ballantine Books Inc., 1970.

Franks, Norman. *Conflict Over the Bay.* London: Grub Street, 1999.

Fraser, David. *Alanbrooke.* New York: Atheneum, 1982.

Fredette, Raymond H. *The Sky on Fire: The First Battle of Britain 1917-1918 and the Birth of the Royal Air Force.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1966.

Furse, Anthony. *Wilfrid Freeman: The Genius Behind Allied Survival and Air Supremacy 1939 to 1945.* Kent: Spellmount Limited, 2000.

Garrett, Stephen A. *Ethics and Airpower in World War II: The British Bombing of German Cities.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Gilbert, Martin. *Winston S. Churchill,* vol. 6, *1939-1941 Finest Hour.* London: Heinemann, 1983.

_____. *Winston S. Churchill,* vol. 7, *1941-1945 Road to Victory.* London: Heinemann, 1986.

Gooderson, Ian. *Air Power at the Battlefront: Allied Close Air Support in Europe 1943-1945.* London: Frank Cass, 1998.

Goodhart, Philip. *Fifty Ships that Saved the World: The Foundation of the Anglo-American Alliance.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965.

Goulter, Christina, J. M. *A Forgotten Offensive: Royal Air Force Coastal Command's Anti-Shipping Campaign, 1940-1945.* London: Frank Cass, 1995.

Greenfield, Kent Roberts. *American Strategy in World War II: A Reconsideration.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963.

Griffith, Charles. *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II.* Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1999.

Hachey, Thomas E., ed. *Confidential Dispatches: Analyses of America by the British Ambassador, 1939-1945.* Evanston, Illinois: New University Press, Inc., 1974.

Haight, John McVickar, Jr. *American Aid to France, 1938-1940.* New York: Atheneum, 1970.

Hall, R. Cargill, ed. *Case Studies in Strategic Bombardment.* Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1988.

Hansell, Major General Haywood S., Jr. *The Air Plan that Defeated Hitler.* Atlanta: Higgins-McArthur/Longino & Porter, Inc., 1972.

Hastings, Max. *Bomber Command.* New York: The Dial Press/James Wade, 1979.

Hibbert, Christopher. *Anzio: The Bid for Rome.* New York: Ballantine Books Inc., 1970.

Higham, Robin. *The Military Intellectuals in Britain: 1918-1939.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1966.

Horne, Alistair. *A Bundle From Britain.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Howarth, Stephen and Derek Law, eds. *The Battle of the Atlantic 1939-1945: The 50th Anniversary International Naval Conference.* London: Greenhill Books, 1994.

Hughes, Thomas Alexander. *Over Lord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II.* New York: The Free Press, 1995.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957.

Jackson, General Sir William and Field Marshall Lord Bramall. *The Chiefs: The Story of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff.* London: Brassey's (UK), 1992.

Jordan, Robert S. *Norstad: Cold War NATO Supreme Commander.* New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000.

Kennett, Lee. *A History of Strategic Bombing.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982.

Kimball, Warren F. *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939-1941.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.

_____. *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Lamb, Richard. *Churchill as War Leader.* New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1991.

Langer, William L. and S. Everett Gleason. *The Undeclared War 1940-1941.* New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953.

Largent, Will. *RAF Wings over Florida: Memories of World War II British Air Cadets.* West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2000.

Lash, Joseph P. *Roosevelt and Churchill 1939-1941: The Partnership That Saved the West.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976.

Leutze, James R. *Bargaining for Supremacy: Anglo-American Naval Collaboration, 1937-1941.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977.

Lewin, Ronald. *ULTRA Goes to War: The First Account of World War II's Greatest Secret Based on Official Documents*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978.

Lowenthal, Mark M. *Leadership and Indecision: American War Planning and Policy Process, 1937-1942*. Vol. I. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1988.

_____. *Leadership and Indecision: American War Planning and Policy Process, 1937-1942*. Vol. II. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1988.

Majdalany, Fred. *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle*. London: Ballantine Books Inc., 1957.

Mason, Air Vice-Marshal Tony. *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal*. London: Brassey's, 1994.

McFarland, Stephen L. *America's Pursuit of Precision Bombing, 1910-1945*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.

McNeill, William Hardy. *America, Britain, and Russia: Their Co-operation and Conflict 1941-1946*. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970.

Meilinger, Col Philip S., ed. *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower History*. Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1997.

Mets, David R. *Master of Airpower: General Carl A. Spaatz*. Novato, California: Presidio, 1988.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. 10, *The Atlantic Battle Won, May 1943-May 1945*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1956.

Murray, Williamson. *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939: The Path to Ruin*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.

_____. *The Luftwaffe, 1933-45: Strategy for Defeat*. Washington: Brassey's, 1996.

Murray, Williamson and Allan R. Millett, eds. *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Orange, Vincent. *Coningham: A Biography of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham*. Washington, D. C.: Center for Air Force History, 1992.

Overy, R. J. *The Air War 1939-1945*. Chelsea, Michigan: Scarborough House/Publishers, 1991.

_____. *Why the Allies Won*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995.

Paret, Peter, ed. *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Parton, James. *"Air Force Spoken Here": General Ira Eaker and the Command of the Air*. Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2000.

Parrett, Geoffrey. *Winged Victory: The Army Air Forces in World War II.* New York: Random House, 1993.

Pierre, Andrew J. *Nuclear Politics: The British Experience with an Independent Strategic Force 1939-1970.* London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Pogue, Forrest C. *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory 1939-1942.* New York: The Viking Press, 1965.

_____. *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory 1943-1945.* New York: The Viking Press, 1973.

Probert, Air Commodore Henry. *High Commanders of the Royal Air Force.* London: HMSO, 1991.

Reynolds, David. *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-1941: A Study in Competitive Co-operation.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982.

_____. *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945.* New York: Random House, 1995.

Reynolds, C. G. *Admiral John H. Towers: The Struggle for Naval Air Supremacy.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991.

Richards, Denis. *Portal of Hungerford.* London: Heinemann, 1977.

Ritchie, Sebastian. *Industry and Air Power: The Expansion of British Aircraft Production, 1935-41.* London: Frank Cass, 1997.

Rock, William R. *Chamberlain and Roosevelt: British Foreign Policy and the United States, 1937-1940.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988.

Saward, Dudley. *Bomber Harris.* New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985.

Schaffer, Ronald. *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Sherry, Michael S. *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Sherwood, Robert E. *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948.

Slessor, Marshal of the RAF Sir John C. *Air Power and Armies.* London: Oxford University Press, 1936.

_____. *Strategy for the West.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1954.

_____. *The Great Deterrent.* New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957.

_____. *What Price Coexistence?: A Policy for the Western Alliance.* New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1961.

Smith, Bradley F. *The Shadow Warriors: O.S.S. and the Origins of the C.I.A.* New York, Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1983.

Smith, Malcolm. *British Air Strategy Between the Wars.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

Stoler, Mark A. *The Politics of the Second Front: American Military Planning and Diplomacy in Coalition Warfare, 1941-1943.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977.

Taylor, A. J. P. *Beaverbrook.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972.

Terraine, John. *Business in Great Waters: The U-Boat Wars, 1916-1945.* London: Leo Cooper, 1989.

_____. *A Time for Courage: The Royal Air Force in the European War, 1939-1945.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985.

Tuttle, Dwight William. *Harry L. Hopkins and Anglo-American-Soviet Relations, 1941-1945.* New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1983.

Underwood, Jeffrey S. *The Wings of Democracy: The Influence of Air Power on the Roosevelt Administration, 1933-1941.* College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1991.

Walford, Geoffrey. *Privatization and Privilege in Education.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations.* New York: Basic Books, 1977.

Wells, Mark K. *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War.* London: Frank Cass, 1995.

Werrell, Kenneth P. *Blankets of Fire: U.S. Bombers over Japan during World War II.* Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.

Winterbotham, F.W. *The Ultra Secret.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974.

Young, Kenneth. *Churchill and Beaverbrook: A Study in Friendship and Politics.* London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966.

Articles

Beaumont, Roger, "The Bomber Offensive as a Second Front," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 22 (1987): 3-19.

Biddle, Tami Davis, "British and American Approaches to Strategic Bombing: Their Origins and Implementation in the World War II Combined Bomber Offensive," *The Journal of Strategic Studies,* vol. 18 (March 1995): 91-143.

Buckley, John, "Atlantic Airpower Co-operation, 1941-1943," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 18 (March 1995): 175-197.

Davis, Richard G., "Carl A. Spaatz and the Development of the Royal Air Force-U.S. Army Air Corps Relationship, 1939-1940," *The Journal of Military History,* vol. 54 (October 1990): 453-472.

Eaker, Ira C., "Memories of Six Air Chiefs," *Aerospace Historian*, (December 1973): 188-96.

Kuter, Laurence S., "The General vs. The Establishment: Gen. H. H. Arnold and the Air Staff," *Aerospace Historian*, (September 1973): 185-89.

Murray, Williamson, "Did Strategic Bombing Work," MHQ: *The Quarterly Journal of Military History,* vol. 8 (1996): 28-41.

Reynolds, David, "Lord Lothian and Anglo-American Relations, 1939-1940," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society,* vol. 73 (1983): 1-65.

Schaffer, Ronald, "American Military Ethics in World War II: The Bombing of German Cities," *Journal of American History 67*, no. 2 (1980): 318-34.

Werrell, Kenneth R., "The Strategic Bombing of Germany in World War II," *The Journal of American History,* vol. 73 (December 1986): 702-713.

Wolk, Herman S., "Men Who Made the Air Force," *Air University Review,* vol. 25 (September-October 1972): 9-23.

Dissertations

Davis, Richard Green. "The Bomber Baron: Carl Andrew Spaatz and the Army Air Forces in Europe, 1942-1945" (Ph.D., George Washington University, 1986).

Fanton, Jonathan Foster. "Robert A. Lovett: The War Years" (Ph.D., Yale University, 1978).

Fabyanic, Thomas Allen. "A Critique of United States Air War Planning, 1941-1944" (Ph.D., Saint Louis University, 1973).

Personal Interviews

Sebastian Cox, 22 May 2000.

Group Captain Barry T. Dingle, 6 June 2001.

Whitelaw Reid, 30 August 2000.

Group Captain J. A. G. Slessor, 23 May 2000.

APPENDIX A

SCHEME A[1]

Referred to Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) November 1933
Approved by Cabinet July 1934
Completion Date – 31 March 1939

Home Defence Force (HDF) front line on completion—1,252 aircraft
TOTAL FRONT LINE ON COMPLETION—1,544 aircraft

SCHEME C[2]

Referred to CID April 1935
Approved by Cabinet May 1935
Completion Date – HDF by 31 March 1937, Overseas by 31 March 1939

HDF – 1,512 front line aircraft on completion
TOTAL FRONT LINE ON COMPLETION—1,804 aircraft

SCHEME F[3]

Referred to CID May 1935
Approved by Cabinet February 1936
Completion Date 31 March 1939

HDF – 1,736 front line aircraft on completion
TOTAL FRONT LINE ON COMPLETION—2,204 aircraft

SCHEME H[4]

Referred to CID January 1937
Partially approved by Cabinet February 1937
Completion Date March 1939

HDF – 2,422 front line aircraft on completion
TOTAL FRONT LINE ON COMPLETION—2,770 aircraft

---

[1] Scheme A, PRO AIR 8/177.
[2] Scheme C, PRO AIR 8/186.
[3] Scheme F, PRO AIR 8/204.
[4] Scheme H – Interim Measures, PRO AIR 8/215.

SCHEME J[5]

Referred to CID October 1937
Approved by Cabinet December 1937
Completion of Front Line - March 1939, reserves by March 1941; bombers have priority

HDF – 2,387 front line aircraft on completion
TOTAL FRONT LINE ON COMPLETION—3,021 aircraft

SCHEME K[6]

Referred to CID January 1938
Approved by Cabinet March 1938
Completion of Front Line - March 1939, reserves by March 1941; bombers have priority

HDF – 2,305 front line aircraft on completion
TOTAL FRONT LINE ON COMPLETION—2,773 aircraft

SCHEME L[7]

Referred to CID March 1938
Approved by Cabinet April 1938
Completion Date 31 March 1940

HDF – 2,378 front line aircraft on completion; fighters to have priority
TOTAL FRONT LINE ON COMPLETION—2,863 aircraft

SCHEME M[8]

Approved by Cabinet 17 November 1938
Completion Date – March 1942

HDF – 2,549 front line aircraft on completion
- Fighters to have first call on pilots and reserves
- Fighter scheme to be complete by March 1941
- Existing Light Bombers to be converted to Fighters

TOTAL FRONT LINE ON COMPLETION—3,185 aircraft

---

[5] Scheme J, PRO AIR 8/222.
[6] Scheme K, PRO AIR 8/226.
[7] Scheme L, PRO AIR 8/237.
[8] Scheme M, PRO AIR 8/240.

APPENDIX B

RAF-AAF equivalent ranks:

Marshal of the RAF	General of the Army
Air Chief Marshal (ACM)	General
Air Marshal (AM)	Lieutenant General (Lt. Gen.)
Air Vice-Marshal (AVM)	Major General (Maj. Gen.)
Air Commodore (A/Cmdr)	Brigadier General (Brig. Gen.)
Group Captain (GC)	Colonel (Col.)

APPENDIX C

THE CASABLANCA DIRECTIVE ON THE BOMBER OFFENSIVE[1]

Directive to the appropriate British and United States Air Force Commanders, to Govern the operation of British and United States Bomber Commands in the United Kingdom. (Approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff at their 65th Meeting on January 21, 1943)

1. Your primary objective will be the progressive destruction of the German military industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their armed resistance is fatally weakened.
2. Within that general concept, your primary objectives, subject to the exigencies of weather and of tactical feasibility, will be for the present be in the following order of priority:

(a) German submarine construction yards.

(b) The German aircraft industry.

(c) Transportation.

(d) Oil plants.

(e) Other targets in enemy war industry.

The above order of priority may be varied from time to time according to developments in the strategical situation. Moreover, other objectives of great importance either from the political or military point of view must be attacked. Examples of these are:

(i) Submarine operating bases on the Biscay coast. If these can be put out of action, a great step forward will have been taken in the U-boat war which the C.C.S. have agreed to be a first charge of our resources. Day and night attacks on the bases have been inaugurated and should be continued so that an assessment of their effects can be made as soon as possible. If it is found that successful results can be achieved, these attacks should continue whenever

[1] Directive on the Bomber Offensive, 21 January 1943, PRO AIR 8/711.

conditions are favourable for as long and as often as necessary. These objectives have not been included in the order of priority, which covers long-term operations, particularly as the bases are not situated in Germany.

(ii) Berlin, which should be attacked when conditions are suitable for the attainment of specially valuable results unfavourable to the morale of the enemy or favourable to that of Russia.

3. You may be required, at the appropriate time, to attack objectives in Northern Italy in connection with amphibious operations in the Mediterranean theatre.

4. There may be certain other objectives of great but fleeting importance for the attack of which all necessary plans and preparations should be made. Of these, an example would be the important units of the German Fleet in harbour or at sea.

5. You should take every opportunity to attack Germany by day, to destroy objectives that are unsuitable for night attack, to sustain continuous pressure on German morale, to impose heavy losses on the German fighter force and to contain German fighter strength away from the Russian and Mediterranean theatres of war.

6. When the Allied Armies re–enter the Continent, you will afford them all possible support in the manner most effective.

7. In attacking objectives in occupied territories, you will conform to such instructions as may be issued from time to time for political reasons by His Majesty's Government through the British Chiefs of Staff.

APPENDIX D

GLOSSARY OF CODE NAMES AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAF	Army Air Forces
ABC	American British Staff Conversations, 29 January-27 March 1941
ABC-1	Anglo-American agreement to make Germany the No. 1 enemy
ABC-2	Anglo-American agreement on allocation of U.S. aircraft production, also known as the Slessor Agreement
ACAS	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff
ACAS (P)	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Policy)
AEF	American Expeditionary Force
AFB	Air Force Base
AFHQ	Allied Force Headquarters in the Mediterranean
AFHRC	Air Force Historical Research Center
AIR	Air Ministry papers (PRO)
ANAKIM	Plan for recapture of Burma
ANVIL	First code name for the landings in southern France
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
ARCADIA	Washington CCS Conference, 20 December 1941-14 January 1942
AS	Antisubmarine
A/S	Airborne search for anti-U-boat and anti-shipping operations
ASW	Antisubmarine warfare
ATFERO	Atlantic Ferrying Organization
AWPD-1	Air War Plans Division plan at the start of World War II
AWPD-42	Revised Air War Plans Division Plan, 1942
BDS	British Defence Staff

BG	Bomber Group, AAF
BOLERO	Build-up of American forces in the United Kingdom for the invasion of France
C/AAF	Chief of Army Air Forces
C/AC	Chief of the Air Corps
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff, RAF
CBO	Combined Bomber Offensive
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff, American and British
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CJCS	Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COMINCH	Commander in Chief, U.S. Navy
COS	Chiefs of Staff
COSC	Chiefs of Staff Committee
COSSAC	Chief of Staff, Supreme Allied Commander, established 1943
DIADEM	Code name for the campaign to capture Rome, March-June 1944
DELIBERATE FORCE	NATO Air Campaign over Bosnia, 1995
DRAGOON	Final code name for the invasion of southern France, previously called ANVIL
ESU	English Speaking Union
ETO	European Theater of Operations
ETOUSA	European Theater of Operations, United States Army
EUREKA	Tehran Conference, November-December 1943
FM	Field Marshal
GAF	German Air Force
GHQ	General Headquarters
GPO	U.S. Government Printing Office
HDF	Home Defence Force

HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HQ	Headquarters
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JPC	Joint Planning Committee
JSM	Joint Staff Mission
LUFTWAFFE	German Air Force, 1933-1945
MAAF	Mediterranean Allied Air Forces
MAP	Ministry of Aircraft Production
MASAF	Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force
MATAF	Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force
MTO	Mediterranean Theater of Operations
NAAF	Northwest African Air Forces
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OBOE	British blind-bombing device controlled by ground stations
OCMH	Office of the Chief of Military History
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
OVERLORD	Code name for the invasion of France, 6 June 1944
PINETREE	Code name for VIII Bomber Command HQ, subsequently, Eighth Air Force HQ, High Wycombe, England
POINTBLANK	Code name for the Combined Bomber Offensive
PRO	Public Record Office
PRO	Public Relations Office
PRU	Photo-reconnaissance Unit
QUADRANT	CCS Conference at Quebec, August 1943
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFDEL	Royal Air Force Delegation to Washington D.C.
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RDF	Radio Direction Finder, early name for radar
RFC	Royal Flying Corps, 1914-1918

ROUNDUP	Plan for possible invasion of France, 1943
SAC	Strategic Air Command
SAC	Supreme Allied Commander
SEXTANT	CCS Conference at Cairo, November-December 1943
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, 1944-45
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, NATO
SHINGLE	Code name for the landings at Anzio, January 1944
SLEDGEHAMMER	Code name for possible invasion of France, October-November 1942
SOE	Special Operations Executive, clandestine British organization
STRANGLE	Code name for MAAF interdiction campaign in Italy, March-June 1944
SYMBOL	Casablanca Conference January 1943
TORCH	Code name for the invasion of North Africa, November 1942
TRIDENT	CCS Conference, Washington, May 1943
ULTRA	Code name for the British breaking and intercepting of German codes
USAAF	United States Army Air Forces
USAAF/UK	United States Army Air Forces, United Kingdom
USAF	United States Air Force
USAFBI	United States Army Air Forces in the British Isles
USAFHRC	United States Air Force Historical Research Center, Air University, Maxwell AFB Alabama
USN	U.S. Navy
USSBS	U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey
USSTAF	United States Strategic Air Forces
VCAS	Vice Chief of the Air Staff
VLR	Very Long Range aircraft
WPD	War Plans Division, War Department General Staff

VITA

Name: Corvin J. Connolly, Maj, USAF

Work – Center for Air Force History
Bolling AFB,
Washington D.C., 20330
(202) 404-2167

Education:

Ph.D., History, Texas A&M University, December 2001
Dissertation: "Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Cotesworth Slessor and the Anglo-American Air Power Alliance, 1940-1945."

M.S., International Relations, Troy State University, August 1994

B.A., History, Assumption College, May 1983

Fields of Study/Interest:

Modern Britain
Aerospace History
Modern Europe
Military History
Russian Studies
Modern American