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BCMH Spring Conference Report

Lady Margaret Hall

7 May 2005

This year our Spring Conference commemorated the contributions made by John Terraine and David Chandler to the study of military history. It was both fitting and pleasing that there was, in the view of the Committee, a record turnout for what is always a popular event.

The programme was as follows:

- Toby McLeod – Napoleonic Studies since "The Campaigns of Napoleon"
- Correlli Barnett – John Terraine and the BBC TV "Great War" Series
- Gary Sheffield - John Terraine & the Revolution in First World War Studies
- John Peaty – "The Right of the Line" and the Role of the RAF in WW2
- Panel Discussion

In introducing the Conference, Brian Bond indicated that the emphasis leaned towards John Terraine rather than David Chandler. This had in no way been sought by the organisers but simply reflected the balance of the papers that had been received.

I should also explain that it had been my intention to provide full references to all the works cited by the speakers where they had not already done so. Unfortunately time has precluded my doing this consistently for all the papers and so I have left this aspect "as is". I do apologise to speakers and readers for this.

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Napoleonic Scholarship since the 'Campaigns of Napoleon'

Toby McLeod

Napoleon, in conversation with the Comte de Las Cases on St. Helena, 20 November 1816

It must be admitted that the true truths are very difficult to ascertain in history. Fortunately they have more curiosity interest than real importance. There are so many truths! ... Historical fact, which is so often invoked, to which everyone so readily appeals, is often a mere word: it cannot be ascertained when events actually occur, in the heat of contrary passions; and if, later on, there is a consensus, this is only because there is no one left to contradict. But if this is so, what is this historical truth in nearly every case? An agreed upon fiction, as has been most ingeniously said.

In all such things there are two very distinct essential elements - material fact and moral intent. Material facts, one should think ought to be incontrovertible; and yet, go and see if any two accounts agree. There are facts that remain in eternal litigation. As for moral intent, how is one to find his way, supposing that the narrators are in good faith? And what if they are prompted by bad faith, self-interest and bias? Suppose I have given an order: who can read the bottom of my thought, my true intention? And yet everybody will take hold of that order, measure it by his own yardstick, make it bend to conform to his plans, his individual way of thinking.... And everybody will be so confident of his own version! The lesser mortals will hear it from privileged mouths, and they will be so confident in turn! Then the flood of memoirs, diaries, anecdotes, drawing-room reminiscences! And yet, my friend, that is history!

The Mind of Napoleon, trans. and ed. J. Christopher Herold, Columbia University Press, 1955, pp. 50-1.

To expect from history ... [such] final conclusions, which may perhaps be obtained in other disciplines, is ... to misunderstand its nature.... It is impossible that [any] two historians, especially two historians living in different periods, should see any historical personality in the same light. The greater the political importance of an historical character the more impossible this is. Is there anyone whose decisions have been more affected by the ever-widening network of international relations than Napoleon? Is there anyone whose decisions have had greater consequences for the whole of Europe? ... No human intelligence could hope to bring together the overwhelming multiplicity of data and of factors, of forces and of movements, and from them establish the true, one might almost say, the divine, balance. That is literally a superhuman task.... Truth ... assumes many shapes to men.... The study even of contradictory concepts can be fruitful. Any one thesis or presentation may in itself be unacceptable, and yet, when it has been jettisoned, there remains something of value. Its very critics are that much richer. History is indeed an argument without end.

Napoleon: For and Against, Pieter Geyl, 1964

Perhaps more than any other figure, Napoleon I has inspired far more controversy and debate after his death than during his life. The scale of his triumph, the disaster of France's defeat, and the epic story of his life have inspired hero-worship and loathing in equal measure. His

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career provided fame and writing careers for many military men, such as the Baron de Jomini and General Napier, after his exile and death, and posthumous recognition for pundits like the military theorist Von Clausewitz.

It is ironic then that the definitive modern text on Napoleon's military career was produced by a native of the homeland of his most implacable enemy, England. Of course, military histories of the Napoleonic Wars had been produced in abundance before its publication, but this was the first authoritative account to appear in the post-war period, and the discipline of history, in particular military history, had changed out of all recognition after 1945. There were two main strands to these changes: the importance of social and economic history; and the rehabilitation of operational military history as a serious discipline. Chandler's book sits astride the cusp of this transition from history in the style of the venerable Lewis Namier, drawing on the Rankean tradition, and the new integrative history. Indeed, it could be argued that this was the first text of the New Military History.

It is not the purpose of this piece to attempt a critical analysis of *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, rather to see what has changed subsequently, and to chart the arc of historical study of Napoleon's career and *inter alia* the military history of the period. Teaching the Napoleonic Wars in a British University gives one a useful insight into current understanding of the period and the opportunity to keep up to date with new publications and schools of thought. Of necessity, this will be a personal and even idiosyncratic account of the current state of Napoleonic scholarship, but as a practitioner, I am in the fortunate position of being able to offer a broad overview, and a synthesis of contemporary writing and thought on the topic. Any glaring omissions or unjustified assertions are purely the result of my own prejudice.

Inevitably, Napoleonic scholarship is highly dependent on the position of the writer or researcher: their political views, attitude to the military, and above all their national identity. This makes a convenient approach by which we can understand the different threads and traditions, and in the following I will attempt to tackle the state of recent studies of the period in three countries: the UK, United States and France. Of course, the topic has been studied elsewhere, such as in Germany, but space precludes a full treatment of all but the three major national traditions. Perhaps in an expanded survey it would be interesting to look at German and Spanish texts?

If anything, Chandler's *Campaigns* was somewhat ahead of its time. The late sixties and early seventies saw a reaction against militarism and war in academe and publishing, partly due to the Vietnam War and the counterculture movement. The appetite for the doings of the Emperor however remained undiminished, not least in view of his colourful private life. It was in this context then, that Vincent Cronin's *Napoleon* was published in 1971. It is a curious volume, not without merit, which attempts a psychological survey of the man's life, but it largely eschews military detail, in favour of a thoughtful and sympathetic picture of the man. 1978 saw the publication of Correlli Barnett's *Bonaparte* which he tells me was very much a counterblast to Chandler's admiration of Napoleon's system of making war, highlighting chiefly the frequent and calamitous breakdown of the Emperor's logistic arrangements for his army

While the *Campaigns* covers the military aspects of the period in comprehensive detail, it only deals with those actions where the Emperor was present, and avoids any in-depth

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discussion of the wider political, diplomatic and social aspects of the period. However, other British academic historians have picked up the baton: Charles Esdaile in *The Wars of Napoleon* (1995) has contributed much to our understanding of the period, showing that Napoleon's predilection for using a military solution to diplomatic problems caused the continuation of the conflict, and that his opponents, once united, were able to decisively defeat his supposedly invincible military system. He puts forward the idea that the Empire collapsed under the weight of its own internal contradictions as much as by the actions of its enemies, but interestingly he debunks the legend of popular resistance, especially with regard to the *Befreiungskrieg*, pointing out that post 1815, Europe returned to the status quo ante bellum of absolutist monarchies. Charles Esdaile's reading, which seems to owe much to Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Revolution* (1962), has not found favour in all quarters. For example, David Gates, author of what is for my money by far and away the best account of the Peninsular War, *The Spanish Ulcer* (1986), returns to a more sympathetic account of Napoleon's genius in *The Napoleonic Wars* (1997). Gates stresses the role of Great Britain's implacable hostility to Napoleon in prolonging the war and provides a convincing account of the role of nationalism in France's eventual defeat.

Rory Muir expands on Gates' thesis in *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon* (1996), which is a masterly survey of the relationships between Britain and the continental powers and makes an excellent case study on how coalition warfare is waged. Perhaps the best summary of current British, and Anglo-Saxon, thinking on this period is to be found in the collection of essays edited by Philip Dwyer called *Napoleon and Europe* (2001), placing it firmly within the tradition of the development of European identity in the early modern period.

Yet one of the most interesting developments since the *Campaigns* was published and found a wide readership, has been the growth of the amateur historian or hobbyist. Peter Young and others rediscovered H.G. Wells' 'Little Wars' and the pastime of wargaming was born. The set-piece battles and colourful uniforms and personalities of the Napoleonic era immediately enthused armchair generals, who quite soon began to develop their own research, not always of the highest quality, but making up for it in the depth, breadth and range of topics covered especially in battle tactics, military costume and operational history. This is now a publishing phenomenon – a trip to your local Waterstone's will reveal shelves of material, such as the worthy Osprey books, aimed at the amateur, with lavish detail of badges and buttons, and not a little history interspersed in between. Indeed, David Chandler was the series editor for the Osprey *Campaign* series, many of which sit comfortably on my shelves cheek by jowl with F. Lorraine Petre, Christopher Duffy, and other luminaries.

It was truly the amateurs, who like the *volontaires* of 1793, who led the charge in Napoleonic scholarship. DGC's chief achievement with the *Campaigns* and his later writings was to communicate in a simple and direct way with ordinary people. Although some may sneer, his love of the theatre of history, and his various costumes, brought the period alive for many people. He was always generous with his time, frequently attending conferences and meeting the fans, as it were. At first the academy shunned the Napoleonic Wars, dismissing it as the preserve of crusty retired colonels and generals and not really worthy of serious academic study. However, as young enthusiasts arrived on campuses up and down the country and demanded courses on military topics, University professors were forced to sit up and take notice. Many of these enthusiasts then became postgraduates and in the fullness of time joined the staff of many British universities. With the introduction of top up fees, where people will

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demand that they are able to study what they like, and not what they're told is good for them, this trend is set to continue.

Indeed the democratisation or 'mediatisation' of Napoleonic history has continued apace with the rising importance of television since the 1970s. Purists may balk at the gung-ho swashbuckling of the Bernard Cornwell *Sharpe* books and subsequent television adaptations, but nonetheless these have brought the period the attention of a very wide public, and inspired not a few undergraduate dissertations and even PhD theses. Moreover, television when used sensitively and thoughtfully can uncover new and hitherto unconsidered angles on the period. Two examples immediately spring to mind: the *Great Commanders* (1993) series episode on Austerlitz (in which David Chandler appeared as a talking head) which was seminal in its use of computer graphics to explain the battle; and the more recent *World in Arms* from Channel 4 (2004), a thoughtful revisionist interpretation of the period. Even television costume dramas, like the adaptation of Forrester's *Hornblower* books, can show a regard for historical accuracy and whet the appetite for further study and reading on the period.

The attitude to Napoleon and his period in the United States is in some way the most interesting. In a nation born of democratic and republican ideals, and opposition to tyranny, the fascination with a French military dictator knows no bounds. It is true to say that there has been a long standing alliance between US and France, in fact since Saratoga in 1777, the 'Lafayette' link has survived to this day, weathering even George W. Bush's spat with Chirac. Perhaps it is gratitude for Napoleon's bargain basement price of the Louisiana Purchase in 1804? Who knows? For some Americans Napoleon is the embodiment of the American dream, not so much 'from log cabin to White House' as from 'Corsican Maquis to Tuileries'! The fact that Napoleon changed the constitution to suit himself when he got there is conveniently forgotten. Equally overlooked is the fact that he was comprehensively defeated not once, but twice, and that he died as a prisoner of his enemies, chained to a rock like Prometheus. The International Napoleonic Society counts amongst its ranks many followers of this ilk.

Nonetheless, it is to the Americans that we owe the very existence of the *Campaigns*. Chandler originally wanted to write a book on his first love, the Duke of Marlborough, but his US publisher pointed out that most Americans associated Marlborough with a popular brand of cigarettes and had never heard of the Duke, and suggested that a book on Napoleon would sell well. So the idea was born. In fact the great military historian Trevor Nevitt Dupuy, inspired by his father, was already teaching the Napoleonic Wars at Harvard, and had even written his own text book for his courses. Given that the study of Napoleon had been a fixture in the West Point syllabus since before the Civil War, the book was bound to find a receptive market.

Career soldiers, and sailors, like Colonel John R. Elting, seemed to be inspired by the career of *le petit caporal*. Elting's *Swords Around A Throne* (1988) is an extended elegy to the army of the *epopée*, lavish in detail and written with a true love of the subject. However the US Navy Officer George Nafziger's Napoleon's Invasion of Russia (1998) is a very poor treatment of the subject, and fails to see the wood for the trees. Its exhaustive army lists and casualty states do not really explain that the whole was more than the sum of its parts.

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But it was civilian authors that were to make the greatest strides forwards in transatlantic Napoleonic scholarship. Inevitably the Americans were quick to seize on the opportunity presented by advances in the desktop publishing phenomenon, which allowed low print run books to be produced at reasonable cost. Going back to original French archival sources with the co-operation of the French army (especially the unfortunately named SHAT), Scott Bowden and Charles Tarbox, founders of the appropriately titled Emperor's Press, produced *Armies on the Danube 1809* (1989) and a slew of other works too numerous to mention here. All were meticulously detailed, and while not of startling originality they were vital in putting a great deal of data into the public domain, and inspiring a generation of scholars and enthusiasts. They even managed to teach George Nafziger English, and he produced an excellent series of three books on the 1813 campaign for them. These publications are now highly sought after and invaluable reference works for serious students and the wargames fraternity alike.

No doubt inspired by this rash of scholarship, US Army Major John Gill, sought out the German archives and produced an authoritative account of the role played by the Confederation of the Rhine troops in the Grande Armée in his *With Eagles to Glory* (1992), which is a useful balance to Colonel Elting's rather francocentric approach.

Perhaps one of the best books to come from the U.S. is Owen Connelly's *Blundering to Glory* (1987) which departs from Chandler's notion of Napoleon as the ultimate strategist, rather Connelly sees him as the master of *Auftragstaktik*, setting up situations and then relying on his ability to react faster than the enemy to events as they unfolded. On the other hand, the best work on Napoleon's enemies, and in particular the Austrians, is by Gunther Rothenberg. His *Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (1978) is a superb technical examination of the mechanics of battle. This theme has been expanded by Canadian Brent Nosworthy (another wargamer, war games designer at SPI, no less), in his fascinating *Battle Tactics of Napoleon and his Enemies* (1995), the mechanics of Napoleonic warfare are dissected in exhaustive detail. Both Rothenberg and Nosworthy are continuing in the tradition of academic operational and tactical history using scholarly apparatus, and done purely for its own sake, that Chandler's *Campaigns* first initiated. Another wargamer and military historian, James Arnold, said that the *Campaigns* had inspired him to write *Crisis on the Danube* (1990) and *Napoleon Conquers Austria* (1995), which have become standard works on the topic, Chandler even provided him with much encouragement during the project, which he acknowledges in the foreword to the latter work.

It is now to Napoleonic Scholarship in France that we must turn. The *Campaigns* had an immediate impact in the Emperor's adopted homeland. De Gaulle wrote a congratulatory letter to Chandler, saying that he had surpassed every other writer on the subject. High praise indeed. I can only speculate on CDG's view of Bonaparte: both were military men who had led France in times of crisis, both were 'outsiders' in different ways, albeit from widely disparate backgrounds. Herein lies the rub, the study of Napoleon and the Empire in France has always had a deeply political flavour. Perversely, and in a typically Gallic way, he has been adopted by both the right and the left in France since his death in 1821. On the one hand he was the guardian of the liberal and republican values of the Revolution, and on the other the military strong man, who rescued France from revolutionary chaos. In fact he was neither – but in some ways the legend in France has become more important than the reality and has enduring resonance. French politics are deeply suffused with symbols and icons and

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Napoleon, more so perhaps even than Joan of Arc, is the most powerful of these. In fact attitudes to his life and memory are a reliable integer of a Frenchman or woman's political stance.

Chandler's work came at a crucial time in the life of the Fifth Republic, memories of the attempted OAS coup by army officers of 1961 were fresh, even raw, and politics had coalesced into broad left and right coalitions (UNR and FGDS, later PS) ranged against each other in unyielding hostility. It is against this background that we must view French academics' hostility to military history, although now happily they are making great strides, and figures like André Corvisier have made a huge contribution to our knowledge of French and European military history. Post-war French historical study was greatly influenced by the *Annales* and *Longue Durée* schools, whose adherents largely devoted themselves to economic and social history, producing such riveting material as detailed analyses of grain production in the Limousin in the 1630s and so on. The caricature is only slightly exaggerated. For a French historian to show an interest in operational and tactical history was for a long time considered deeply sinister.

With this in mind, I conducted a lengthy fact finding mission to Toulouse in April, home to two major universities, living on a diet of dry bread and Perrier. I am pleased to report that France rejoices in a plethora of interesting and exciting works of scholarship on the Napoleonic era. Things have changed in France since the *Campaigns* was published. The figure of Jean Tulard looms over the rise of serious and considered approaches to the period through his masterly two volume dictionary of the Napoleonic era, and the sterling work of the Institut Napoléon and the Fondation Napoléon, particularly the latter's extensive series of publications under the imprint Bibliothèque Napoléon on a very wide range of topics. Tulard's *Napoleon: the Myth of the Saviour* (1977, trans. 1984) is a magisterial revision of the legend. Tulard questions Napoleon's grasp of political and military realities, and points out that even at the height of the Empire in 1808, the army was already a shadow of its former self. Tulard stresses that once the revolutionary zeal had gone, and that France's wars were increasingly being fought by foreigners, the days of victory were numbered. He even pours cold water on the idea of Napoleon's military genius: the Corps d'Armée system was not Napoleon's invention, and was quickly copied by his enemies. Moreover, Tulard says, his battles were in reality gigantic slugfests in a war of attrition that he could never hope to win. He then goes on to explain, that Napoleon's position became untenable as the lower and middle classes no longer supported him, as the strain of total war began to take its toll.

In any discussion of French Napoleonic scholarship we must not forget Alain Pigeard either, especially his work for La Revue Napoléon and his extremely interesting recent work *L'armée de Napoléon: Organisation et vie quotidienne* (2002) where he builds on and expands on the work of Georges Blond in his seminal if emotional book *La Grande Armée* (1979). Nowadays, French scholars are moving into some very exciting new areas of research, *Napoléon, le monde et les anglais* (2004), by Jean Paul Bertaud, Alan Forrest and Annie Jourdan is a fascinating look at the world of spin and the propaganda war carried on by the British and French. In many ways Annie Jourdan is typical of the New Wave (Nouvelle Vague?) of French Napoleonic scholars: incisive, thoughtful and prolific. Her *Mythes et legendes de Napoléon* (2004) is probably a reliable indicator of the future direction of European scholarship on the subject.

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Moreover, the French are a nation of very competent and very keen wargamers. Perhaps the abandonment of universal military service has left them longing for the joys of pinard, Gauloises troupes and painting stones white, and certain nostalgia for a time where the *furia francese* swept all before it. The quality of publishing on the period is astounding: *Napoleon Ier* magazine is worth every cent of its €5.95 cover price. The publisher *Histoire et Collections* has produced some very lavish full colour volumes on Napoleon's battles, such as *Jena Auerstadt. The Triumph of the Eagle* (F.-G. Hortoulle, 1998), aimed at wargamers, and even translated into English.

What can we say then, in summary of the lasting influence of the *Campaigns of Napoleon* published some 39 years ago? Firstly, Chandlers work was important in connecting with a very wide readership and contributing to the 'civilianisation' of military history and its current widespread popularity on television and in popular fiction. Moreover, many of the public he inspired went on to become important researchers and scholars in their own right, and contributed much to the professionalisation and rigour of Napoleonic scholarship. But lastly, and most importantly, his democratic, no nonsense approach to the topic was instrumental in ensuring that studies of the 'Corsican Ogre' and his dynamic age now have a permanent and respected place in the most august of educational institutions, and will continue to do so until long after I for one retire and hang up my musket and cartridge case…

Napoleon als Deserteur nach der Schlacht bei Waterloo.
Radierung von Frédéric Dubois, 1815.

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John Terraine and the BBC TV "Great War" Series

Corelli Barnett

[Quotations from John Terraine's letters by permission of Kathy Stevenson, his literary executor]

The first thing to say is that while I will concentrate on the Great War series, I shall also touch on John's later television work - that is, 'The Lost Peace', 'Mountbatten: A Television History' and 'The Mighty Continent'. In particular, it is correspondence between John and myself in relation to these later series which brings out John's own views on writing history for television. I am grateful to Kathy Stevenson for permission to quote from John's letters to me.

I should also say that my talk will be as much about how you make a television historical documentary as it will be about the scripts considered purely as historical interpretations.

Unlike a book, television is a team effort involving the producer/director, the historian/script-writer, the film and stills researchers, the interviewer of the talking-heads, etc etc. Obviously the producer and the historian-scriptwriter constitute the key partnership. And inevitably there are tensions between the man who wants to write a sound historical narrative, and the man who wants to cut memorable film. Sometimes these tensions can lead to real crises, as I shall explain later.

You probably already know this, but writing for film is an entirely different exercise from writing an article or a book. In an article or a book, you can discourse freely about the complications of some political or strategic situation. You can discourse about the dilemmas facing a political or military leader, and how he solved them. With television, you are limited to what is available on film, or in stills, to cover what you say. In the case of the Great War, for instance, there is NO film of Joffre's thoughts during the battle of the Marne, or Haig's thoughts before the Somme or Third Ypres, or even of either of them actually thinking. Since you cannot have a blank screen while you fully analyse their thought processes, you have somehow or other to peg the briefest summary to whatever film or still pics the producer reckons will best fit, and you have to do so to a very short length: ie, timed in seconds.

Moreover, the actual film supplies the sort of description you would have to put down in words in a book like, say, the state of a battlefield, or the back beach areas on Gallipoli, or the wounded and the dead. So the script supplements the visual images, it explains them, and it links them together into narrative. In short, the script and the images have to marry, though NOT in an absolutely literal sense. Thus in a 1915 programme a marvellous lingering shot of observation balloons being gradually lifted off carried the script message that the armies were quietly waiting and preparing for another campaign to open.

Now, the BBC Great-War series was the FIRST major historical documentary series ever - 26 forty-minuters; 17 hours of television. But for the co-producers of 'The Great War', Tony Essex and Gordon Watkins, it meant embarking on something entirely novel and unknown, not least in terms of sheer scale, their previous experience being five-minuters for the 'Tonight' programme. You could compare it in its small way with the British generals after

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1914 faced with changing mental gear from colonial expeditions to mass warfare on the Western Front.

Equally, John and I came to the series as complete novices in writing to film, although John at least had had experience in radio scripting at Bush House.

So we are talking about a vast enterprise by people who would have to learn as they went, and in short order, because the unit was set up in the late summer of 1963 and transmission as due to start in May 1964 as the flagship of the launch of the new BBC 2 channel.

The creative main-spring of the entire enterprise was Tony Essex, a man utterly ruthless in getting his way in making what he passionately wanted to be a film epic on the grand scale. It is thanks to him that words, film, sound-effects, eyewitnesses, and music were welded together into the finished product which you know. Essex's formula has since supplied the model for 'The World at War' (the Granada series on WW2), and recently, 'The Nazis: a Lesson from History', at present being repeated on the BBC.

What is that formula? A 'voice of history' script written by the historians, spoken by a famous actor over the visuals; contemporary quotes from politicians or servicemen, or, it might be, from verse; talking-heads who were actually there at the time. BUT, unlike many of today's historical programmes on TV, NO celebrity presenter doing his stuff to camera: no academic talking-heads earnestly chuntering on to camera either.

Now, Tony Essex himself had also read an awful lot about the war, and had his own clear views on historical interpretation. It was he who drafted the overall strategic frame for the narrative, broken down into 26 programme synopses on five foolscap pages. Although there was to be some amendment and switching of the order of subjects, this frame served as the basis for John's and my work as well as the whole production process.

Let me quote you Tony Essex's introduction to his strategic plan:

> In a series of this kind, there are three possible structural approaches:
>
> a) HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY (which in a long sprawling history is impracticable)
>
> b) ISOLATED THEMES (a better way, but which will fail to preserve the essential unity of a television series, and indeed the unity which made the war one vast historical fact)
>
> c) DEVELOPING THEMES (which is a combination of (a) and (b))
>
> Thus the Theme governs the area of space and time for each programme, and leads from one programme into another in logical steps. Only in this way can a rough chronology be preserved and the unity of a television series be secured.

A couple of comments on this: Firstly, strict chronology across all events and topics would have led to the kind of formless muddle you find in Martin Gilbert's Churchill biography. But

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lack of basic chronological sequence would have led to the equally frightful muddle of Jay Winter's BBC TV series, '1914-18', where earlier battles and campaigns happened AFTER later ones. So, as John and I agreed at the time, Tony Essex got it right.

But as John pointed out to me in a letter a year later, the very nature of the Great War as a topic helped us, because (and I quote John) *'it comprised a closely defined span of action (Sarajevo to Armistice), taking place in defined areas for defined purposes on defined lines.'* Can I just say here that this dramatic cohesion was quite absent from the later historical series which either John or I myself had to write, like The Lost Peace (ie, world history 1918-1933), or Mountbatten's long life and times, or The Mighty Continent (meaning European history in the 20th century).

How did the Great-War scripts evolve? First, John or I would write an outline script covering the main historical themes of a programme, but written very much in terms of future possible film once it came in. So these were NOT essays, but outline film scripts. They would then be the subject of historical and programmatic debate and criticism between us, and with Essex and Watkins. This resulted in a second version which served as the basis for the assembly and the rough cut of the film.

Let me quote here from a letter from John to me after the event:

> *'the film available was suitable for illustrating the themes, because it was largely generalised (men marching about, standing about, attacking, retreating, guns firing, more guns firing, ships in line ahead etc, which could be used in any number of ways, and we used it to "document" our theme. This film was nevertheless gripping, because it was old, stretched, and because war is just interesting to watch.'*

I would add that such was the abundance and variety of film found in archives all over the world that there were visuals to cover everything the historians wanted to say, even down to specific detail. So when Tony Essex came to assemble material for a programme he always found film or stills which married with the topics in our outline scripts - and sometimes married brilliantly and unexpectedly.

At the point of the fine cut, John or I would rewrite, or write in, bits of script to accommodate particular shots or sequences. That made the final dubbing script. But even at that stage, when John and I would have finished our work on a programme, Tony Essex could use film that we had never seen, and might not have thought appropriate - like the Emden becoming a battleship, and artillery bombardment at Le Cateau becoming that famous postwar reconstruction shot of a 13-pdr horse-artillery battery at full gallop and turning over.

Now I myself only wrote seven of the programmes plus a bit of ghosting, while John wrote, I think, seventeen. He was also an associate producer. So he was much more intimately involved with the whole production, and particularly with Essex and Watkins, than I was; and he felt the stresses and strains of the whole hectic operation more than I did.

Now I turn to the actual historical interpretations. Firstly, we and the producers played out all over again the 'Easterners' versus 'Westerners' debates, John and I obviously being the Westerners, but Essex and Watkins broadly following the Lloyd George line. It was strenuous

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stuff, but great fun, especially in our Tac HQ in the Uxbridge Arms in Notting Hill. Anyway, we did all of us agree that the central scene of the War, round which everything else pivoted, was the Western Front. But we also agreed that the great battles on the Eastern Front, like Gorlice-Tarnow, must be well covered too.

John strongly wished to present the Western Front and Haig's leadership from his revisionist point of view, in contrast to the then prevailing 'Oh What Lovely war' myth. In general terms, I took much the same view, having been previously converted by John from a facile acceptance of Liddell Hart and all that. But as critics later pointed out, the trouble was that our revisionist scripts were playing against the most powerful possible film images of the horrors of trench stalemate. And, of course, film is stronger than words.

The sharpest disputes within the team broke out over the Somme and Third Ypres programmes, particularly Third Ypres, where I myself have always disagreed with John over Haig's ambitious strategic hopes and assumptions. Did Haig count on Petain doing his stuff? Or did Haig rest the case for his campaign on French weakness after the mutinies, and therefore the need for the British army take the weight of the war by attacking in Flanders? I sometimes felt that John, and perhaps Haig too, tried to have it both ways.

I should say here that Essex and Watkins had hired Basil Liddell Hart as a historical consultant. John and I had nothing to do with this choice. I'm sure that Essex would simply have thought of it as getting the great military pundit of the day on to his film credits. But of course Basil expected to be really consulted. He expected to have his criticisms of draft scripts properly heeded. Needless to say his crits were NOT heeded very much, least of all by John.

In the case of the programmes on the Somme and Third Ypres, this caused a major row, with Basil writing a formal letter of complaint to Alistair Milne, the BBC group-head in overall charge of the project and with Alun Gwynne-Jones (Lord Chalfont as he became) reporting in The Times that among historians there were widespread doubts about the historical objectivity of the series.

The truth is, as I privately wrote to Alistair Milne at the time, that Essex had no idea how to handle a vain old pundit like Basil, and his casual neglect had simply inflamed the said vain old pundit. A little bit of flattery and diplomacy and all might have been OK. As it was, Basil very publicly withdrew his name from the series.

In the end, not even John was entirely happy with the final Somme and Third Ypres programmes. Essex and Watkins DID edit out some of the more contentious material in John's scripts, and so John regarded the two programmes as broadcast as producing impressions very different from his own convictions.

Now I come to John's contribution as a historian to the series. Above all, his scripts were the distillation of all his accumulated knowledge and understanding of the war, the Western Front, and indeed Haig himself. I repeat: a distillation. I will circulate (under Chatham House rules: ie, NOT for reproduction because of BBC copyright) the first five pages of his outline script for the Somme programme so that you can see what I mean. He knew just what was important, what must be said, and what, in television terms, would simply be redundant

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padding. And the resulting distillation was a brilliant accomplishment. It wonderfully combined essential fact, crystal-clear explanatory narrative, sharp phrase-making, and, not least, deep compassion.

A distillation then. So I would say - and this is true of my programmes as well, that John's scripts in themselves were NOT fresh contributions to knowledge, like his books, but dissemination of knowledge to a mass audience. But his was a unique achievement, and he fully deserved the Screenwriters' Guild Award for the Best Documentary Script of 1964.

Now I turn to later television series. Firstly, 'The Lost Peace: 1918-1933'. This was designed as a sequel to 'The Great War', with thirteen 50-minute programmes covering the full scope of world history over the period. It was made in 1965-66. Once again, Tony Essex was the producer. Once again John and I were the principal scriptwriters. But this time the experience was a total disaster.

For a start, and I quote from a letter from John to me at the time, *'the big difference is that this story has no centrepiece, no main stage, no hard core of continuous (and interesting) action: in other words, no Western front. This story is really a mass of "meanwhiles". "Meanwhile in Manchuria…" "Meanwhile in Detroit…" "Meanwhile at the Oval…"*

I completely agreed with this diagnosis. I wrote back to John as follows:

> *'If you and I were seeing and choosing the film and writing the scripts concurrently, I would be quite happy. But Essex is choosing the film, and assembling it, and, far more than in the Great War, telling us that the script lines must follow the film.'*

So almost from the start of the production progress, John and I feared disaster.

In particular, we never solved the problem of whether the film assembly should broadly follow the outline scripts, as with The Great War, or whether the scripts would have to be written to the assembled film. In which case, Tony Essex, not us, would have the dominant role in shaping the narrative. And anyway, how could you recount the political and social history of the world over 15 years in terms of very specific newsreel shots and events?

Then again, this time round, John and I were NOT distilling previously acquired knowledge and understanding, but mugging it up as we went. Truly instant history.

And also this time round, John and I came to criticise each other's work pretty harshly - not so much in regard to historical judgement, but in regard to the scripts as scripts. He thought my scripts were muddled and followed no clear story line; I thought much the same of his. Worse still, John and Tony Essex fatally quarrelled on how the series should evolve. Meanwhile, production fell so far behind schedule that John's contract expired, and he accepted the job of principal scriptwriter to the projected television life and times of Lord Mountbatten. So John is only credited with writing two of the Lost Peace programmes.

Sadly, John and I also fell out personally over The Lost Peace. He thought the series was mostly crap, largely thanks to Essex, and was happy to get out of it. I stayed on to save Essex's bacon by writing or re-writing the remainder of the programmes. I justified myself to

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John in a letter on Trafalgar Day 1966, saying: *'I personally think – and hope ---- the series will get by. I was always more optimistic (or if you like, more easy-going in my standards) than you about the chances of the thing coming off.'*

This letter evoked a blast from John, attacking one particular broadcast programme as *'pure scrapbook'*, and going on as follows:

> *'I am quite certain (from things you have said to me) that you adopt a lower standard for "television history" than you would for another form. I am equally certain that the eminent advisers do the same: I am quite sure they say to themselves "Oh well, it's not the way I should do it myself, but I suppose it will do for television" - and possibly add, as you do, that with all its faults it is still better than a great deal of TV output. But all that leaves me cold. The form of TV history is as important as the form of any other history.'*

The point about these exchanges is the light they cast on John's evolution as a television historian. In the Mountbatten series he achieved the position he really wanted, as the unrivalled mastermind, sole scriptwriter and historical arbiter, and working with a producer, Peter Morley, who was content to take second place.

How did John mean to set about this new role? He told me exactly how in a long letter in October 1966:

> *'My task, as defined by Peter Morley, is curious: "Mister Words"; ie, all words. That means: script for Narrator, which is something we understand - in this case, creating a setting for a man born in 1900, who retired in 1965; in other words, the story of the 20th Century, as it impinges (but evidently not in all its roundness): the message for each talking head - a careful brief to each, to see that each one occupies a pre-ordained slot in the final product…; and finally, words for Mountbatten himself, closely based, of course on his own words, but tightly edited for content and length - this is a sort of television ghosting for autobiography, requiring a constant exercise of humility (because it is his autobiography after all) and assertion (because I reckon I know better than he does what will wash).'*

What's more, John was also to brief the film researchers, the locations people, and the film editors on *'what will wash'* in regard to their own functions.

Well, what about the finished product after two years of intense work and travel? This is what I wrote to John in January 1969:

> *'It is an extremely smooth, exactly put-together professional job - a piece of cabinet work. Your own commentary is absolutely lucid and well-judged, although necessarily so telegraphed an account of the twentieth century that it can only record events as events. Your briefs to Mountbatten equally make him say sense and yet remain personal. Given the problems, I don't see how you and Morley could have done better.*
>
> *'My criticisms are these: I wonder if isn't all too smooth, too coolly lucid. I still think that the kind of craggy unexpectedness of a talking-head getting out his own story,*

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> *alive in the true sense, gets missed when a man is produced. If, as I've said, Prime Ministerial broadcasts. I miss a sense of involvement and excitement, which, for all his vulgarisms, Essex got into his series.'*

Now thus far, this letter of mine was an appraisal of the Mountbatten series as television. What about the series as history? To me, it raised - it raises - a basic issue as to whether or not television could be ranked as an equivalent to books as a medium for writing history. Tony Essex pretty obviously believed that television was the modern way to do it. So too did Mountbatten, which is why he wanted a major television series rather than an authorised biography. What about John?

In that latter to John I have been quoting, I expressed my own view that in the Mountbatten series

> *'the limitations of the medium display themselves again. Who would have guessed from the passing references to fleet aviation and Oerlikon guns, radio and cipher machines that you yourself had done an immense amount of boning up, that you and Mountbatten had had endless discussions on the topics? I know the problems of the credits, but I think the phrase openly stated, 'A Television History', draws attention to just how superficial and precis-ed television 'history' is; in other words, not 'history' in the full professional sense at all, but a popularisation. I mean this quite as much of 'The Great War' and 'The Lost Peace'.'*

Or to put it another way, how far should freelances like John and I have looked on telly as a money-making pot-boiler to do the best you can with, and how far as an alternative to writing heavy-weight books? I myself had no doubt that it was a pot-boiler to be done as best one could, in order to subsidise the writing of big books - in my case at that period, Britain and Her Army and The Collapse of British Power. John himself more and more took the opposite view that television could be made to bear the weight of detailed argument, analysis, and information.

For instance, take this letter of his to me in 1970 talking in retrospect about The Great War series:

> *'I am now sick to death of being told how good it was by people who know nothing of the subject, but were "moved" by it, usually in directions precisely opposite to what I would wish. I am sure that the great reclame was due to its emotional impact, almost undefiled by celebration. Where, for example, was there any analysis of the leading characters of the War, military or civil? How could there be, in that style? Where was the strategic debate? Where were the tactical innovations? Where was the war in the Air? I am quite sure the Mountbatten series failed at many points. But at least I was able to try to deal with some of these matters.'*

As I told John either in conversation in the Uxbridge or in letters, I profoundly disagreed with these now matured views of his on the possibilities of television. I just don't believe you can marry intellectual complication and factual detail with archive film. It's different, perhaps, with a celebrity presenter like Schama or Richard Holmes who can expound the complication

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in some suitable locale, be it the Somme battlefield or Queen Elizabeth's bedroom. But that was not in question with any of our series.

By the beginning of the 1970s, therefore, John had come to believe that television history should be very much like a wordy lecture illustrated with film clips or slides. At the end of 1974, I wrote this to him after one of our meetings:

> *'Surely you don't mean what you appeared to be saying about the way to write TV films. I don't think any of the four producers I've worked with since Essex would tolerate for a moment anyone handing them a script and expecting them to manifest it in full as closely as possible. If Morley did that, or something like it, you were bloody lucky.'*

This brings me to John's last major television series, The Mighty Continent, broadcast in 1974-75. It was colossally ambitious, tracing the history of Europe in a world setting over a whole century. It was made by the BBC, with Peter Morley again as producer. But this time there was a front man to camera at the start of each programme - Peter Ustinov. He was imposed by Richard Cawston, the BBC departmental head, and a low-brow who began the decline of BBCTV documentary into cheap popularism. Anyway, Ustinov was an absurd choice for such a series, and he proved a major handicap. So John's letters to me about Ustinov's blundering are full of fury and frustration.

But I have to say that John's own treatment of the narrative of The Mighty Continent seemed to me to manifest John's belief that television could be made the vehicle for heavyweight statements equivalent to a book. The result was, to my mind, a densely complex and wordy narrative really hard to take in. I wrote to John at the time that

> *'… my conviction hardens that what we are watching is a series of illustrated lectures: that is, the lecturer flows on and the pictures change appropriately, like a moving version of those remote-triggered slide machines. Of course, the sequences of the script marry with the film sequences, but one does not have the sense that the script changes gear because the pictures have changed. The voice flows on at an even pace. I've always felt that documentary script is more akin to caption-writing than continuous narrative; captions which do course link up into a story.…*

And I went on:

> *'I equally think that the script is pretty relentless with its analysis and information. This raises the general question of whether you have set yourself an insoluble problem - to present on television what is really better suited to a book or a radio script. The information and analysis which one readily absorbs in reading, or even on radio, somehow becomes vastly more prolix and oppressive when translated to television. I mean here information and analysis about abstractions like power rivalry, foreign policy, Cabinet decisions, with which your series is much concerned.'*

John replied as follows:

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> *'I think we do have a fundamental difference of approach which we shall never resolve. I firmly believe that the film must follow the script in a history series…'*

Follow, yes, but just how slavishly? That is the question. My own belief, as expressed in my reply to John at the time, is that

> *'the broad line of development, or strategy, of the programme must be the historian's, as sketched out in a preliminary draft. The detailed tactical or filmic line ought to be the producer's, though obviously in close collaboration with the writer.'*

I think it's interesting that in John's book of The Mighty Continent, whole passages are virtually the same as his film scripts; and this, as I told him, reinforced *'my feeling that your technique makes a beautifully easy, elegant, and lucid read, but an over-full, over-wordy spoken script to film…'*

Well, there we must leave the question of John's approach to television history. I have quoted from my letters because the criticisms in them were made straight to John at the time, rather than freshly and retrospectively made today after his death. What's more, quoting our correspondence to you also gives him the chance to reply.

Just the same, John's concentration on television work raises a fundamental issue in regard to his career as a military historian. It is true to say that John published no major work based on original research between 'Haig' in 1963 and 'The Road to Passchendaele' in 1977. What he DID publish were 'books of the film' of The Great War, of Mountbatten and of The Mighty Continent, plus 'Impacts of War' in 1970 (a collection of essays on the Great War), and, as editor, 'General Jack's Diary'.

Yet after The Mighty Continent, his last television series, there ensured what I personally judge to be his most fruitful period as a military historian. I've mentioned 'The Road to Passchendaele' of 1977. That was followed in the next twelve years by such important books as 'To Win a War, 'The Smoke and the Fire', 'The Right of the Line: the Royal Air Force in the European War', and 'Business in Great Waters: the U-boat Wars 1916-1945'. It is on 'Haig: the Educated Soldier' and these later works that rests John's lasting reputation which we are here to celebrate today.

So I will just express my own opinion that John did make a mistake in believing that television could be an alternative to books as a medium for heavyweight history. I just wish that in the years 1965-1977 he had instead treated television as a necessary subsidy for book projects, and during that period had published at least a couple of major original contributions to the historiography of the Great War, the Western Front, and the British Army's role.

I am going to end by running some ten minutes of John's Third-Ypres programme, which Kathy tells me was John's favourite in The Great War series. The sequence begins on the eve of Messines, and ends on the eve of the launch of Third Ypres. Thank you.

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John Terraine as a Military Historian[1]

By Gary Sheffield

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John Terraine, who died in December 2003 at the age of 82, was one of the most significant British military historians of the twentieth century. He played a primary role in reshaping the debate on British generalship in WW1. Terraine's views, although contested and even reviled, have never been definitively refuted, and indeed have entered the mainstream of historical debate. What follows is a brief, personal assessment view of John's work as a military historian.[2] He certainly deserves a full-scale study.

John Alfred Terraine was born in London in 1921. He thus grew up in that period when Britain was struggling to come to terms with the shock of WW1. His father, badly wounded in WW1, died when John was only six. Contrary to popular myth, the entire country was not swept up in a wave of pacifism in the interwar period. Alongside the idea that the war had been a futile waste, there was another strand of thinking; a patriotic view of the war. In an extreme form, this gave birth to The Crown of Honour: Being Stories of Heroism, Gallantry, Magnanimity, and Devotion from the Great War of 1914-18, a book that John Terraine was awarded as a school prize in 1933. *'Unfortunately,'* Terraine was, much later, to write, *'the act of sweeping away this sort of rubbish led to the opposite extravagances'* – the disenchanted, 'lions led by donkeys' school of thought. *'Weaned on such soft diet as* 'The Crown of Honour', Terraine continued, *'then appetized afresh by the sharper-flavoured victuals of the Disenchanted, I spent a long time with myths'*. By the late 1950s Terraine had come to believe that if WW1 was to be understood, myths *'no matter how seemingly authoritative'* had be swept aside. He was to devote his career as an historian to attacking myths of various sorts.[3]

Terraine argued that the conditions on the Western Front meant that there were no short cuts to victory.[4] Industrialised warfare, the toughness of the Germany army, and the lack of flanks to turn made an attritional strategy inevitable. The British army laboured under a number of handicaps; they were the junior partners in a coalition dominated by the French, the army of 1914 was, by continental standards, small, focussed on colonial warfare and ill-equipped for the battles to come. In Terraine's words *'The British Army, from Commander-in-Chief to drummer-boy had to be formed and trained in the field, in the face of a powerful, skilful well-*

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[1]I would like to thank Profs Martin Alexander, Peter Simkins, and Geoff Till, Drs Stephen Badsey, Tim Bowman, Mark Connelly, Christina Goulter, Andy Simpson, Dan Todman, and Andy Wiest, Gp Capt Martin Doel, Kathy Stevenson and several others who wish to remain anonymous, for sharing their views with me.

[2] For important assessments of Terraine as an historian, see K. Simpson 'The Reputation of Sir Douglas Haig' and A. Danchev '"Bunking" and Debunking: The Controversies of the 1960s' in B. Bond *WW1 and British Military History* (Oxford, 1991) especially pp.152 –55, 161-2, 273-80.

[3]J. Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire*: *Myths and Anti-Myths of War 1861-1945* (London, 1980) pp.13-14.

[4] For a concise summary of Terraine's thesis, see his chapter 'Haig' in M. Carver (ed.) *The War Lords* (London, 1976) pp.23-43.

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equipped and determined enemy – it is asking a lot'.[5] Yet in 1918 this army took the lead in defeating the Germans, under the command of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. Terraine argued that the victories of the Hundred Days could not be separated from the attritional campaigns of 1916-17 that wore down the German army and made victory possible. For Terraine, there is no doubt about Haig's status as a 'Great Captain'.

Terraine's ideas on WW1 first appeared in print in the late 1950s, in a series of articles eventually published as The Western Front (1964). His first book, Mons: The Retreat to Victory, was published in 1960. In many ways, Mons was an old fashioned piece of operational military history; well written, generally dependable, solidly based on official histories and published memoirs and diaries. Had it appeared a few years earlier it would have been unlikely to have excited much attention. But it appeared at what Terraine described as *'the beginning of probably the most disrespectful decade in British history'*.[6]

The 1960s – a period of social change, of the questioning of traditional values and mores – saw the appearance of a series of books such as Leon Wolff's In Flanders Fields and Alan Clark's The Donkeys, as well as the musical play and later film Oh What a Lovely War. [7] These presented WW1 as futile, and the generalship as disastrous.[8] While they said little that had not been said in the 1930s, these arguments were presented to a new audience. Dan Todman has recently argued persuasively that the 'donkeys' view did not become dominant until the 1970s or even later, but **it is** clear that the 1960s was a critical period.[9]

Such books – damningly described by Terraine as *'instant history'*[10] did not have it all their own way. Cyril Falls's The First World War, a well-balanced and accessible book written by a distinguished military historian and veteran of the war, appeared in 1960. But Falls's moderation and good sense did not have the same impact as the shriller tones of Clark et al; neither was Falls prepared to enter the lists.[11] John Terraine, by contrast, emerged as the principal enemy of the instant historians.

Terraine felt deep anger at books that he did not hesitate to denounce as 'rubbish', mercilessly pointing out their factual errors, dubious interpretations and suspect sources. Described as early as 1962 by Alan Clark as *'the official custodian of Haig's reputation'*,[12] he continued to confront and correct those with whom he disagreed for over thirty years, into the 1990s. Terraine's decision to take on the instant historians on their own ground, in popular and widely read books, in newspaper articles and letters, and in television scripts, rather than in the obscurity of academic journals or university seminars, was of very great significance. Although he was by no means the only popular historian of the 1960s to take a 'revisionist'

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[5] J. Terraine, 'British Military Leadership in WW1' in P.H. Liddle (ed.) *Home Fires & Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in WW1* (London, 1985) p.48
[6] Unpaginated foreword to *Mons: The Retreat to Victory* (1991 edition)
[7] Wolff's *In Flanders Fields* actually appeared in 1959.
[8] See also AJP Taylor, *WW1: an illustrated history* (London, 1963). In fact Taylor's argument was a good deal more subtle than it at first appears, but his subtlety was apt to be lost on the casual reader.
[9] D. Todman, 'Representations of WW1 in British popular culture, 1918-1998' (Ph D University of Cambridge, 2003)
[10] 'J. Terraine, 'Instant History', J[ournal] of the R[oyal] U[nited] S[ervices] I[nstitute] 107 (1962) pp.140-45.
[11] H. Strachan, '"The Real War": Liddell Hart, Cruttwell, and Falls' in B. Bond (ed.), *WW1 and British Military History* (Oxford, 1991) pp. 66-7.
[12] Simpson, 'Reputation of Sir Douglas Haig' p.152.

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line on the Western Front (his friend and admirer Correlli Barnett did so too), Terraine was the most important, and ensured that those who visited bookshops or public libraries had access to books that took a very different line from those of A.J.P. Taylor or Alan Clark.

In 1981, Hew Strachan accused Terraine of fighting old battles, while the historiographical debate - *'if we put aside the popular media'* had moved on.[13] Terraine's response was that the notion that the interpretations to which he was opposed had been *'laid to rest'* did not *'square with my own constant experience'*. [14] In fact, both men were right. The academic debate had indeed moved on. The years 1978-81 can be seen as the beginning of a productive period in which views on the subject were transformed through patient, archival-based scholarship. But in the popular mind, and in the media, the *'donkeys'* interpretation was more firmly entrenched than ever. The tone and arguments of books that appeared subsequently, such as Denis Winter's Haig's Command (1991) and John Mosier's The Myth of the Great War, (2001), not to mention the television series Blackadder Goes Forth, suggests that it remains influential in the early years of the 21st century. Terraine was not fighting *'toothless tigers'*.

Terraine was essentially an outsider, and was never part of the university-and Sandhurst based military history establishment, although he became an Honorary Fellow of his *alma mater*, Keble College, Oxford. His long association with the RUSI was in some respects a substitute. He was a Council member form 1976 to 1984, and in 1982, Terraine was awarded the Chesney Gold Medal. Terraine rather uneasily straddled the divide between 'academic' and 'popular' history. He was, for example, often criticised for over reliance on published sources and neglecting archival research.[15] There is some truth in this, but in Douglas Haig, he made extensive use of Haig's papers, which contain official and demi-official documents in addition to Haig's diaries and personal correspondence. Over the years he also used his 'author's papers', which contained 'letters, diary excerpts and documents from other sources which I have gathered over a period of some thirty years'. He also consulted Cabinet Papers held in the National Archives for The Road to Passchendaele (1977). There is no doubt that Terraine's work would have been enriched by greater use of primary source material. However, it is important to remember that from 1964 onwards Terraine earned a living from his pen, and simply lacked time for leisurely exploitation of archives. His early work was also criticised for lack of scholarly apparatus.[16] He seems to have taken this criticism on board, as his later books did make use of source notes. Those provided for The Right of the Line (1985) are very full indeed.

John Terraine was not short on resilience and moral courage. He was sensitive to hostile reviews and personal criticism; in short, he was a man who bruised easily. At various times, not perhaps without reason, it was suggested that Terraine was guilty of repeating himself; that he suffered from *'obsession'*;[17]; that his criticism of a biography of Haig was *'emotionally driven and very exaggerated'*;[18] even that his defence of Haig was motivated by

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[13] H. Strachan, review of *The Smoke and the Fire* in *J[ournal] of the S[ociety] for A[rmy] H[istorical R[esearch]* 59**,** (1981) p.177; *idem,* letter to editor, JSAHR, 60 (1982) p.53.
[14] J. Terraine, letter to editor, *JSAHR* 60 (1982) p.50.
[15] For a specific example, see David R. Woodward, review of *To Win a War: 1918, The Year of Victory* in *American Historical Review,* Vol.87, No.2, (Apr. 1982) p. 441.
[16] E.g. D.G. Chandler, review of *Douglas Haig the Educated Soldier* in *History Today*, XIII, (1963) p.504.
[17] Strachan, *Smoke and Fire* review, *JSAHR* (1981) p.177
[18] Simpson, 'Reputation of Sir Douglas Haig' p.161.

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his need for a father figure. [19] In spite of this, Terraine continued his revisionist campaign, but it is not surprising that the relative moderation of the tone of early works such as Mons and even Douglas Haig, was replaced in later years by a approach that was more trenchant and overtly polemical.

John Keegan's review of Terraine's To Win a War, published under the heading of 'Whole Stunt Napoo', was one that Terraine found deeply hurtful. Keegan parodied Terraine as the archetypal Tommy: *'Here he comes now, swinging down the duckboards... tin hat slung, cap comforter over his ears'* Keegan recognised the personal cost of Terraine's crusade.: *'There is emotion in the voice. And there are wound stripes on the cuff. The old warrior has suffered for his loyalties...'* Keegan perceptively identified Terraine as *'the Enoch Powell of British military historians'*. Like Powell, Terraine doggedly stuck, year in, year out, to what he believed to be true, despite the unfashionability of his cause, and the hostility he aroused. It is testimony to the strong feelings WW1 still arouse in the interwar generation that Keegan's language, referring for instance to the British generals as *'hideously unattractive... whose diaries reveal hearts as flintlike as the textures of their faces'* and indeed his later writings[20] reveals a response that is no less emotional than Terraine's.

For this is the measure of his achievement: John Terraine's influence has endured despite his many critics. His books are still being read (indeed, are being republished). Douglas Haig The Educated Soldier remains, in my view, superior to its rivals, although it needs to be supplemented by the up-to-date research in Brian Bond and Nigel Cave's 1999 collection of essays. Terraine's work, for all its faults, is more influential than Keegan's book on WW1 among revisionist military historians. Any serious historian of the Western Front has to engage with his arguments. Alex Danchev's words, written in 1991, long after the initial shock of Terraine's theses had died away, represent a mature reflection on Terraine's significance as an historian: *'Terraine's viewpoint, stripped of its rhetorical excess and forfeit of its emotional charge, served to reorient the historian's mental map of the war'*.[21] Twelve years later, Hew Strachan conveyed a similar sentiment: *'Few historians would now accept Terraine in his entirety, but he undoubtedly set an agenda which has influenced a whole generation of writers...'*[22]

Many of Terraine's views on WW1, formulated in the 1950s and early 1960s largely by reading published primary sources and memoirs, and secondary material, have stood the test of time remarkably well. Since many of the historians who from the late 1960s onwards have exploited the archives have, in Peter Simkins's words, reached *'roughly the same general position as he had long occupied, it would appear that John Terraine was blessed with a rare combination of instinctive historical insight, intellectual integrity and profound common sense'*.[23] The debate is moving beyond the parameters set by Terraine, but historians working in the field are standing upon his shoulders.

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[19] The suggestion was made by Robert Kee; cited in Danchev, '"Bunking" and Debunking' p.276.
[20] J. Keegan, 'Whole Stunt Napoo', *New Statesman* 17 Nov. 1978 pp.664-5; Id. *WW1* (London, 1998) esp. pp. xi, 3, 315-6; *Id.* 'A dreadful war, cruel in its conduct, destructive in its outcome' *JRUSI* 144, (1999) pp.99-101.
[21] A. Danchev, '"Bunking" and Debunking' p.278
[22] H. Strachan, review of G. Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* in *The Sunday Telegraph* 20 July 2003.
[23] Peter Simkins, 'John Terraine: A Personal Appreciation', on website of Centre of First World War Studies, University of Birmingham, http://www.firstworldwar.bham.ac.uk/news/terraine.htm, accessed 12 March 2004

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The most controversial part of Terraine's work remains his treatment of Douglas Haig. Without doubt, he did an enormous service in rescuing Haig's reputation. Terraine restored Haig to the position of a serious commander, rather than a pantomime villain. However, two criticisms remain. First, Terraine followed Haig too closely in arguing (in his Haig's Final Despatch, a skilfully crafted defence of his tenure as CinC) that the 'wearing out' battles of 1915-18 made the victory of 1918 possible. To a very large degree, this is correct, but in 1916 and 1917 Haig expected the operations to be of a much more decisive character, and the Final Despatch (and Terraine's thesis) smacks of *ex post facto* rationalisation.

Second, Terraine over-reacted against the accusations that Haig was a military dunce. Few recent historians, no matter how pro-Haig they might be, would fully subscribe to Terraine's claim that Haig was a 'Great Captain'. It is possible that Terraine was, for once, simply asking the wrong questions. Haig's task was more complex than that of pre-20th century commander, and given the size of his army, the nature of his job, and the type of warfare on the Western Front, he was above all a war manager rather than a field commander. Terraine quite rightly identified coping with coalition warfare as an enduring theme in British generalship down the centuries; but otherwise, matching Haig against someone like Marlborough was not really comparing like with like. Perhaps declaring Haig to be a 'Great Captain' has got in the way of assessing Haig's true significance, and achievement. Today many (although not all) historians follow Terraine in seeing Haig as a highly competent commander, a man who, like his army, underwent a learning curve, a man who had to shoulder a huge burden, greater than that of any other British soldier in history, and above all, a man who deserves a sizeable share of the credit for victory.

Arguably, Terraine's most important role as an historian was to ask awkward questions, and to carry on asking them over a period of three decades. His influence certainly inspired other historians. Sometimes this influence was negative, at least in part: Tim Travers framed part of the *Killing Ground* as a response to Terraine's work. [24] But very often it was positive, in getting scholars started in the first place. Having undertaken a small and decidedly unscientific straw poll of academic military historians, it is striking how many refer to his books as (to quote one of my correspondents) ~~as~~ a very *'seminal early influence'*. In some cases, including my own, his works acted as a springboard for research, which led to broadly similar, but not identical conclusions. I can still recall the shock when, as an undergraduate, I read the phrase, *'the victory won by Haig's army on the Somme in 1916'*.[25] Twenty or so years on from my initial scepticism, and after much research, my conclusions are largely comparable, but subtly different. The Somme was not a victory (I deliberately eschewed this term because of the emotional baggage attached to it) but it was a British strategic success with highly significant consequences for the eventual outcome of the war. [26]

Terraine has also been influential at a directly personal level. Although he could appear prickly, in fact there are many examples of his kindness to young historians. One, having been *'primed to expect an argumentative ogre'*, instead found a man who was *'extremely kind, moderate and informative'*. His leading and very active role as President of the Western Front Association, an organisation with thousands of members, further spread his influence through

[24] T. Travers, Introduction to *The Killing Ground* (Barnsley, new edition, 2003) p.xviii
[25] J. Terraine, *Douglas Haig The Educated Soldier* (London, 1990 edn.) p.229
[26] G. Sheffield, *The Somme* (London 2004) pp.160, 168

lectures, seminars, and participation in battlefield tours.[27] Terraine's role as an historian working in broadcasting is a major story in itself. At the BBC, he had worked as a recorded programmes assistant, and later for the BBC World Service as a programmes organiser. Not surprisingly, given this long apprenticeship, Terraine, proved to be a skilled scriptwriter who understood both radio and television. He was one of the principal scriptwriters for the epic BBC series The Great War and as such gave some of the episodes (notably the ones covering the Somme and Third Ypres) a distinctly 'revisionist' tone, although his success in shifting public opinion by this means seems to have been fairly limited. Although now overshadowed by The Great War, Terraine was also heavily involved in other major historical series, notably The Life and Times of Lord Mountbatten (1968) and The Mighty Continent (1974-5).

Although Terraine's main efforts were devoted to WW1, he wrote books on other topics including Trafalgar (1976), and the books of the TV series on Lord Mountbatten (1968) and The Mighty Continent (1974). Perhaps his most satisfying book is his study of the RAF in WW2, The Right of the Line. This book is regarded as a standard work, and gained Terraine something of a cult following among airmen. Solidly based on the RAF's in-house Staff Histories, which in turn were based on primary sources, this book is the work of man who deeply admired the RAF. However The Right of the Line lacked the emotional commitment of his work on the Western Front, and is better for it. Some saw this book as an attempt to carry on the debate on Haig and the Western Front by other means, and Terraine made telling comparisons between the two world wars. Surprisingly, Terraine was critical of the area bombing campaign, although Haig's strategy had a similar logic to Harris's.

For his last book, Terraine turned to a subject that underpinned Allied success in both world wars. Naval history is notoriously difficult for non-naval specialists to get right, yet Business in Great Waters, the U-Boat Wars 1916-45, was well received. [28]

Terraine's mastery of all three military environments is impressive. A leading naval historian, Andrew Lambert, praised the book, declared that it was *'the most effective study of the subject yet published…Terraine has provided an example of that is best in popular history, well written, well informed… [offering] an opening for further study'*. [29]

These remarks are applicable to Terraine's work as a whole. He was one of the finest popular military historians of the 20th century. It is a mark of Terraine's importance that the academic historians could not simply dismiss his *oeuvre,* but rather have engaged with it, and his work helped to shape a major historiographical debate. His legacy consists of 16 wonderfully readable books, including several standard works; a host of articles, reviews and lectures, and a leading role in the rehabilitation of reputations of Douglas Haig and the British Expeditionary Force. That is a substantial achievement by any standards. British military history is much the poorer for his passing.

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[27]For his Presidential addresses, see A. Clayton (ed). *1914-1918 Essays on Leadership & War by John Terraine…* (Reading, Western Front Association, 1998)
[28] For a dissenting voice, see *JRUSI* 135, (Mar 1990) p.80;
[29] A. Lambert, review of *Business in Great Waters: The U-Boat Wars 1916-1945* in *Journal of Strategic Studies,* 13, (1990) p.95.

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"The Right of the Line" and the Role of the RAF in WW2

An appreciation by Dr. John Peaty

I would like to dedicate this paper to the memory of John and of my father, who served in Coastal Command, 6 Group Bomber Command and the FAA during the war. They were members of a remarkable generation, a generation which is rapidly leaving us.

As is now widely accepted among military historians, when it comes to our understanding of the British Army in WW1, if you will forgive the pun, TERRAINE ALTERED THE LANDSCAPE.

For an historian of the British Army in WW1 to write a history of the RAF in WW2 might be considered brave or foolhardy. For an historian of the British Army in WW1 to write what was regarded at the time and still is regarded as THE history of the RAF in WW2 is a phenomenal achievement.

The book was published in 1985. It was widely praised by reviewers, who rightly termed it magisterial and monumental. It won the Yorkshire Post Book of the Year award. Twenty years on, it is still the best single volume history of the RAF in WW2 that we have.

I concur with Gary Sheffield's appreciation of the book in his tribute to John in the RUSIJ: *"Perhaps the most satisfying book is his study of the RAF in WW2, The Right of the Line. This book is regarded as the standard work, and gained something of a cult following among airmen. Solidly based on the RAF's in-house Staff Histories, which in turn were based on primary sources, this book is the work of a man who deeply admired the RAF. However, The Right of the Line lacked the emotional commitment of his work on the Western Front, and is better for it. Some saw this book as an attempt to carry on the debate on Haig and the Western Front by other means, and Terraine made telling comparisons between the two world wars. Surprisingly, Terraine was critical of the area bombing campaign, although Haig's strategy had a similar logic to Harris's"* (RUSIJ, April 2004, p74).

The two main aims of the book are stated by John in his Foreword (pp xi-xii). First, to show that the RAF found itself without any option but to shoulder the burden of war when the Army was in eclipse and the RN strained to its limits: *"The place of honour and greatest danger…the vanguard, on the right of the line"*. Second, to place both the war and the RAF's part in it firmly in the perspectives to which they truly belong: WW2 being the last in a sequence of modern wars comprising the American Civil War (which prefigured 1942-3) and WW1 (so many of whose lessons had to be painfully relearned in WW2).

It is a weighty book in every sense. Its 841 pages are stuffed full of facts and figures. Consequently, though full of penetrating insights and superb prose, it is not as good a read as his previous books. But I consider it his finest book.

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The book could not be termed a work of startlingly original scholarship. It is however a remarkable work of synthesis. Unlike John's previous books, it is fully referenced: the references running to 88 pages.

It is heavily dependent on the Monographs and Narratives produced by the Air Historical Branch after the war. Even the title itself is taken, with acknowledgement, from JM Spaight's Monograph The Expansion of the RAF. John was privileged in that he was able to study these in the AHB and not have to trek to the PRO. In his Forward (p xiv) he acknowledges his debts to these documents and to the staff of the AHB whilst proclaiming his independence, a claim which he fully substantiates in the book.

I first met John on 16th March 1987 when he gave a lecture on the RAF in WW2 at only the second meeting of the RAF Historical Society. I am honoured that, like John, I was a founder member of the Society: my membership being the result of my father showing me the introductory letter in the Telegraph, in the days before I became – like John – a devoted reader.

That evening John was introduced by Air Marshal Sir Freddie Sowrey. I think Sir Freddie's introduction deserves quoting in full: *"an historian who is perhaps best known for his work on World War I and he needs little introduction to us. His volumes on that war stand four-square on their style and accuracy, and also on their judgement. His linking through to the last war, which I think appears between the lines of The Right of the Line, gives him a perspective on the use of airpower which is invaluable to us. John Terraine could also perhaps be credited as the fertile soil on which this Society grew, because it was after his lecture at the RUSI that a straw poll was held to see whether there was likely to be support for a Society such as ours, when we knew that there was incipient response but nothing had been put practically to the test. He speaks to us tonight, not only as a historian, but as a patron and a member"* (RAFHS Proceedings No. 2).

There are lots of things right with the book.

First and foremost, the detailed and sympathetic treatment of the Cinderella of the RAF during the war: Coastal Command. John mischievously titles one section "An Obstacle to Victory", which is how Harris described Coastal Command. He is clearly fascinated by the anti-U Boat war and the rediscovery of techniques used in WW1: so much so that he went on to write a book (which turned out to be his last) specifically on the subject.

John carefully examined Lack of Moral Fibre (pp520-37) and got it right, unlike Max Hastings's in his otherwise admirable *Bomber Command*. John had the advantage of using the Lawson Report held in AHB. In Bomber Command the LMF rate was less than 0.4% of aircrew and not the 10% of Hastings. Characteristically, John's discussion of LMF takes place with reference to British Military Discipline during WW1, specifically the British Army's treatment of cowardice.

The book is full of references to WW1. For example, John compares the Battle of Berlin with Passchendaele (p552). I find the frequent mention of WW1 both right and proper, believing with John that the First World War produced important lessons which were forgotten and had to be relearned the hard way in the 2nd. However, I also think that, to be frank, John was not

averse to dishing his critics by using what happened in the 2nd World War as *ex post facto* justification of what had happened in the 1st.

There are lots of things wrong with the book.

First and foremost, as John's often forgotten sub-title (The RAF in the European War) warns us, is the omission of the RAF's war in the Far East. Air Commodore Henry Probert, the head of the AHB who provided great assistance to John and became a friend, felt deeply strongly about this and rectified the omission with his own excellent book on the RAF's enormous and ground-breaking contribution to victory in the Far East.

Denis Richards, doyen of RAF historians, is often quoted by John. However, Denis disagreed with John over his view of the Smuts Report (John believed the RAF was created primarily to bomb the enemy rather than defend the UK against attack directly – Denis believed that both were of equal importance in the creation of the RAF) and of the Bomber Offensive (John believed it was inevitable and bravely done but area attacks were bad – Denis believed that John had neglected the achievements of the 18 month long Combined Bomber Offensive, which were considerable – such as tying down German resources at home, denying fuel to the Luftwaffe thus hindering training - and made D-Day possible).

Inevitably, in a work of such size, there are factual errors. My favourite appears on page 310. John has the great airpower theorist Giulio Douhet instructing at the Italian Air Force War College on the outbreak of war with Italy in June 1940. A lovely thought but Douhet had been dead for 10 years! Perhaps John meant to say that Douhet's writings were being taught at the College? Anyhow, a palpable error missed by both John and AHB.

Many readers believe John's attitude to Harris and Bomber Command inconsistent with his attitude to Haig and the BEF. Many readers are surprised at John's criticism of the attritional strategy of Bomber Command, believing it to be a logical development of Haig's strategy. John did not care for attempts to compare Haig and his campaign with Harris and his campaign, as I can personally testify. After John's lecture to the RAFHS, I got to ask the last question. My question was provocative. John's reply was short and to the point. It was also very uncomplimentary about a famous historian. So much so that John's answer was edited for the published proceedings. My question was: *"Although he didn't mean it as a compliment, one historian who shall be nameless but whose initials are AJP, referred to Sir Arthur Harris as the Haig of WW2. Would you agree?"* John's published answer was: *"Well, no I wouldn't. It's not a sensible comparison... Sir Arthur Harris was engaged in a very long and very arduous and very important campaign but you could not say that he was engaging the main body of the Third Reich at any point, and Sir Douglas Haig was engaging the main body of the German Empire for 2 years between 1916 and 1918. It's a different ball game altogether"*. John was of course absolutely correct in what he said but I think he had deflected the thrust of my question.

Inevitably, after the passage of 20 years, the book has a somewhat dated feel.

While John addresses the D word (Dresden), he does not address the A word (Auschwitz). As we all know, sadly, for many people today - not all of them young - these two words just about sum up their knowledge of WW2.

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The AHB Monographs and Narratives – John's main sources - have dated: hardly surprising given the long passage of time since they were researched and written.

The book appeared before the Official Histories of Intelligence and of the War in the Mediterranean had been completed.

Ironically, given John's justified criticism of most books about the British Army in the 1st World War, the Germans while present do not figure prominently in the book. Moreover, we know a great deal more today about the Germans during the war than we knew 20 years ago.

Thanks to the work of the RAFHS he helped to found, not least the annual symposia held at the RAF Staff College at Bracknell, we now know a lot more about every aspect of the RAF during the war. For instance, the crucially important subject of training, which was neglected by John.

John was a great admirer of Tedder, writes of his "undoubted greatness" (p686) and accepts the Tedder version of Normandy. Personally, I have always thought Tedder the RAF's equivalent of Monty and Dickie.

John's account of Normandy is very anti-Monty and he blames Monty entirely for the breakdown in army/air relations. It is also heavily reliant on D'Este's book, which has been overtaken by recent scholarship.

John was not a fan of Portal: *"does not warm the heart"* (p684), a strange criticism coming from the great defender of a man not noted for his warmth. He was critical of Portal's opposition to long-range fighters and, when challenged on this point prior to publication, added an appendix detailing his criticisms.

Recent scholarship argues that the Bomber Offensive did more damage to the German war effort than was generally believed when John wrote.

John is very sympathetic to the problems faced by the RAF, very appreciative of its efforts and very praiseworthy of its achievements.

However, to his credit, John is at times very critical and does not pull his punches. For example, near the beginning of the book he declares: *"Logic was never a strong suit of the RAF"* (p4).

Some of his most trenchant criticisms are directed at the Bomber Offensive. He regards the attacks on German cities to destroy civilian morale and munitions production as misconceived and ineffective. As for the morality of such attacks, his position is not so clear-cut. He entitled a section on Portal's plan to escalate the offensive in autumn 1942 "Prescription for Massacre" (pp503-11). He wrote: *"…what can one say of Portal's statement of future intent? What is one to think of the calm proposal, set down in a quiet office, to kill 900,000 civilians, and seriously injure million more? One thing emerges with absolute clarity: this was a prescription for massacre, nothing more nor less. Here is the proof that the attack on morale did, indeed, spell the threat or the reality of blowing men, women and children to bits"*

(p507). He called area bombing *"a most displeasing spectacle"* (p683). Yet John twice quoted with approval Noble Frankland's robust defence of the morality of bombing in 1940-1 expressed in his 1961 RUSI lecture. Was John being consistent? Frankland did not think so. After the book was published, they engaged in a debate in the letters page of the TLS.

Although it has not (so far as I am aware) been commented on by any reviewer, a close reading of the text reveals that threaded throughout the book is a damning critique of the quantity and quality of manpower devoted to the air effort during the war, at the expense of the ground effort. I think John is so critical because of the 1st World War perspective that he brings to the subject. Anyhow, I think it might be of interest and value to examine and explore John's critique.

John sets out as he means to go on in his Foreword. After discussing the 1st World War, he writes: *"…having raised and maintained a mass army for the first time in their history by splendid and heroic efforts, the British then recoiled from the whole feat with disastrous results when war loomed again. The RAF profited from this recoil by presenting itself as an alternative to mass warfare. How amazed its founders and its champions must have been when they saw the mass air force of nearly one and a quarter million men and women which the war brought forth! 1939-45 was the time of vast air fleets, the big aircraft with large specialised crews, and the host of people on the ground required to direct and service them. The 1939-45 RAF was not, in other words, by any means the air force that it had expected to be"* (p xii).

During the war Army/RAF relations were considerably damaged by the increasing dependence of the Army on air support. John quotes the critical comments of Tedder (p645). This dependence reflected *"the growing reluctance of British infantry to accept casualties"* (p592), which in turn reflected *"a progressive dilution of the Army's front-line elements, arising out of a widespread misinterpretation of the nature of the war, and a consequently flawed manpower policy"* (p578). The reluctance to accept casualties was vividly demonstrated at Cassino and in Normandy. With regard to Cassino, John quotes the critical comments of Slessor and Bidwell (pp592-3). With regard to Normandy, John quotes the critical comments of among others Horrocks, Essame and Montgomery and concludes that the infantry was deficient in both offensive spirit and morale (pp640-1). John believes that the situation was in part caused and in part compounded by a lack of good quality personnel.

The infantry was at the *"bottom"* of a long list of priorities for manpower. The RAF was *"top…without doubt"*. *"Not only did it hive off the equivalent of two divisions against its future needs…but the general quality of its intake, skilled, educated and self-reliant, was precisely what was now lacking in the infantry"* (p641). Not only was the quality of the RAF's aircrew high but so also was the quality of its ground-crew. *"The technical character of the service…meant that for most of its ground-crew duties it had to seek and select men of a different type from those suitable for the needs of the Navy or the Army at that time – a type implicit in the very use of the words "trades" and "tradesmen". These were men with skills, and implicit in that was a generally higher level of education than one would normally expect to find in the mass of sailors and soldiers"* (p5).

Among Britain's leaders there was a reluctance – even refusal – to acknowledge the need for a mass army and to concentrate manpower where it was most needed: the Army. John quotes

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some of Churchill's private remarks and public speeches dismissing the need for a mass army, including the broadcast of 9th February 1941 in which Churchill said that *"this is not a war of vast armies"* (p604). Huge manpower resources were devoted to the RAF instead. Subsequent transfers from the RAF to the Army were both belated and insufficient (pp603-5).

There is no doubt that huge manpower resources were devoted to the RAF. The inter-war theorists of airpower (including Trenchard in Britain)) had made much of its economical attributes. Yet John calculates that the RAF and Ministry of Aircraft Production absorbed over 37% of fixed capital expenditure (i.e. government expenditure on installations, accommodation, production plant etc.) during the rearmament and wartime periods i.e. the third service consumed over a third of resources: *"no economy there"* John rightly says (p602). At the end of 1942, even after a substantial cut in their demands had been made, the RAF and MAP were still allotted half of the manpower allocated to the Forces and Munitions. John quotes (p603) the Official Historian, Postan, who writes: *"the combined allocation of MAP and the RAF, at 750,000, was still as great as that of the Navy, the ship-building industry, the Army and the Ministry of Supply put together, while the allocation of MAP, at 503,000, was nearly 75% of the combined quotas of the Ministry of Supply and the Admiralty".*

John devotes an appendix (A Mass Air Force) to the enormous growth in RAF personnel during the war. Starting with a strength of 175,692, the RAF grew almost seven-fold to reach a peak strength of 1,185,833 on 1st July 1944. It is pertinent to note – and an indictment of British manpower planning – that the RAF reached its greatest strength three and a half weeks after D-Day, when the Army was starting to suffer heavy infantry casualties and beginning to run short of infantry reinforcements.

There is no doubt that during the war, and especially during the second half, the British Army exhibited a growing reluctance to continue attacks and incur heavy casualties: a reluctance commented on unfavourably by airmen at the time. One thinks particularly of the reluctance of Freyberg at Cassino and Montgomery at Caen and the criticisms of Slessor and Tedder respectively. One of the reasons for the growing reluctance, a more pressing reason than the shadow of the Somme and Passchendaele (although, as John shows, the shadow certainly existed), was an awareness of *"a mounting difficulty in obtaining adequate replacements and reinforcements"* (p603). One of the main reasons for the mounting difficulty was the quantity and quality of manpower devoted to the RAF instead of to the Army. Put simply, the RAF criticised the Army for its shortcomings, yet those shortcomings were in large part caused by the RAF.

As John rightly says, the impressive RAF manpower figures reflected *"a fault in British manpower policy, reflecting a fault in the national war-making disposition"* (p603). Too many manpower resources had been put into the RAF at the expense of the Army. Britain's leaders – Churchill above all – mistakenly thought that airpower provided a short-cut to victory: a means of avoiding having to raise a mass army, engaging in continental land operations and incurring massive casualties. John believes that *"…a persisting inclination to deploy men anywhere but in the arm which always bore the brunt of casualties – the infantry – ensured that the Army's strength on the battlefield remained low, though its total numbers were high. By 1943, it was becoming clear that though the level of British mobilisation for war was unmatched and unprecedented, it was by no means discreet. Production targets –*

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above all, aircraft production – had been set for which Britain's population was simply unable to provide a sufficient workforce, and actually ***fight*** *the war at the same time. There was, in other words, an acute manpower crisis"* (p604).

John is correct. By the autumn of 1943 Britain's manpower had been fully mobilised for the war effort: it was not capable of further expansion, only of redistribution. As the events of 1944-5 were to prove, too much manpower had been devoted to Munitions – especially MAP – and not enough to the Armed Forces; and within the Armed Forces, too much manpower had been devoted to the RAF and not enough to the Army. John is also correct that within the Army too much manpower had been devoted to the supporting corps and special forces and not enough to the infantry (pp641-2). John's singling out of Churchill is also correct. It is clear that Churchill must bear the primary responsibility for the Army's manpower crisis. He was opposed to the creation of a mass army and to continental land operations. He was the leading advocate of the Bomber Offensive. He was the leading advocate of special forces, which seriously diluted the infantry. Yet at the same time he was vigorously opposed to the expansion of the supporting corps at the expense of the infantry. However, given the low manpower priority awarded to the Army by Churchill for much of the war, considerable dilution of the infantry was inevitable. Being an infantryman is an extremely demanding job and only a relatively small proportion of men are equal to its physical and mental demands.

John correctly believes that the manpower crisis was exacerbated by the RAF's hoarding of manpower. Such a criticism was made in spring 1944 by Sinclair, the Secretary of State for Air, no less. John quotes (p604) Sinclair's letter in which he criticises the fact that there were 2,000 aircrew unemployed (a figure that was increasing by 200 a month) and the fact that there were the equivalent of two divisions on the deferred list (i.e. awaiting training as aircrew). As John pertinently notes, within six months of D-Day the Army had to disband two divisions in NW Europe through the lack of reinforcements. Because of the demands of the NW Europe campaign, RAF manpower was cut back in the period 1944-5. In May 1944 2,000 men were transferred to the Army (1,500 RAF Regiment and 500 tradesmen). These went to the Guards. Only a third were volunteers; the majority had to be compelled. In July the RAF was ordered to transfer another 20,000 (of whom only half were actually transferred by June 1945). Officially, the reluctance to volunteer was because of: an unwillingness to leave the chosen service; dismay at the prospect of retraining; loss of opportunity to use trade experience; anxiety regarding relative rates of release. John perceptively adds another reason: fear of going to the infantry where the chance of becoming a casualty was greatest. Transfers of men from the RAF to the Army were fine in theory. But in practice fewer men were transferred than promised, of lower quality than promised and more slowly than promised. As John rightly says: *"Incorrect long-term policies are not cured by last-minute patch-work"* (p605).

Harris claimed that bombing *"saved the flower of the youth of this country and of our allies from being mown down by the military in the field, as it was in Flanders in the war of 1914-1918 "*. John calls this argument *"specious"*, making the point that the British Army did very little heavy fighting in the middle of the Second War, unlike the First. He continues: *"In no way did bombing save the flower of youth; on the contrary, it only ensured that the concentration of casualties would be in that section of the population – usually referred to as the "natural leaders" – which could least be spared. The truth is that in every war somebody has to deal with the enemy's main body; in WW2 it was the Russians"* (pp548-9).

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In his Conclusion John deals with the melancholy subject of casualties. The majority of the RAF's losses comprised the 55,573 aircrew lost by Bomber Command. For John this figure *"has special significance; in WW1 the officer losses of the British Empire included 38,834 killed, and this slaughter of the nation's elite was widely regarded as the most tragic and damaging aspect of that war. It was to avoid such a thing ever happening again that Britain turned her back on a Continental policy, and looked to the Air Force rather than the Army for salvation. Yet, as stated earlier, by and large RAF aircrew were exactly the same type of men as the officers of 1914-18; it is salutary to see how the pursuit of a "cheaper" policy brought in its train only a much higher cost"* (p682).

To conclude this piece I can do no better than to quote and endorse John's eloquent and moving tribute at the end of his book: *"And what of the aircrew, the flyers, the ones who left their burnt bones scattered over all of Europe? In those young men we may discern the many faces of courage, the constitution of heroes: in lonely cockpits at dizzy altitudes, quartering the treacherous and limitless sea, searching the Desert's hostile glare, brushing the peaks of high mountains, in the ferocity of low-level attack or the long, tense haul of a bombing mission, in fog, in deadly cold, in storm…on fire…in a prison camp…in a skin-grafting hospital…My title shows what I think of them: there is no prouder place, none deserving more honour, than the right of the line"* (p686).

The Right of the Line – Question and Answer Session

Report by Andy Grainger

Both Correlli Barnett and Gary Sheffield had paid high tribute to The Right of the Line, John Terraine's history of the RAF in WW2. It was suggested that it was one of John's best books, if not the very best. For those of us who have not read it John Peaty's paper seemed to suggest, indirectly, that it contained some significant flaws. Consequently there was a particularly lively debate after his paper.

I will seek to highlight the elements of this discussion but as my recollections are almost entirely from memory I apologise in advance to John Peaty and conference attendees if I have misrepresented them.

John Peaty outlined the main theses of the book which was highly regarded, particularly in the RAF and air historical circles generally. Terraine's coverage of Coastal Command in a chapter entitled "An Obstacle to Victory" after a quote from Bomber Harris had surveyed that Command's operations in the Battle of the Atlantic with great skill. On the other hand he was critical of the RAF's manpower policy and the area bombing campaign which continued virtually until the war's end. After the book was published the author did admit that he was concerned that he had not given sufficient time to the aspect of Training, a very significant issue in such a technical service.

In the book it appears that Terraine criticises the RAF's manpower policy on the grounds that, far from offering a manpower-lite, hi-tech contribution to the war against Germany its enormous expansion actually resulted in the manpower starvation of the Army. Consequently,

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as early as 1943, the arm that would actually have to get its feet wet crossing the Rhine and plant the Union Jack on the Reichstag was actually declining in combat strength. In the discussion that followed John Peaty's paper it was suggested that:

- Manpower planning was ultimately decided by the Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff; it seemed not entirely appropriate to criticise the RAF leadership for the levels of manpower allocated to it,
- After Dunkirk it was clear that the only way that significant offensive operations could be mounted against Germany was by air. The urgency behind these operations became much greater after the launch of Operation Barbarossa in June 1941. A massive expansion of Bomber Command was inevitable and, to a great extent, set out in pre-war planning,
- The Empire Training Scheme had been planned pre-war to allow for the training of aircrew in the Dominions away from enemy action and to take advantage of better flying weather. The disadvantage, as Seb Cox eloquently explained, was that there were significant delays in shipping both trainers and students around the globe. This was not the fault of the RAF leaders, however; the scheme had been planned pre-war and always enjoyed the support of the War Cabinet,
- Finally, the length of training meant that it was very difficult to reallocate manpower at short notice although John Peaty explained that transfers of surplus ground staff and RAF Regiment personnel to the Army in 1944/45 seemed to be put in place very reluctantly.

A second area in which the author was seriously critical of the RAF was the area bombing campaign. Given his background as the biographer of Field-Marshal Haig in the Great War it had been suggested that Terraine would support, or at least understand the need for, the attritional struggle that Bomber Command waged in the skies over Germany. It was, for three years, the only way in which Britain could bring the war to the enemy. This was not so, however. In discussing the genesis of the area bombing campaign Terraine reveals a distaste for the officers, such as Portal, who appeared to be planning a campaign that might result in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians with equanimity, if they considered that factor at all. Again, during questions, it was suggested that the book did not give sufficient weight to:

- the political and strategic imperatives leading to the bombing campaign,
- the technical limitations within Bomber Command that led to the adoption of area bombing,
- contemporary opinion which would have been less conscious of avoiding civilian casualties following the Blitz and German air operations in other countries.

Personally, I also sensed that the Conference was slightly puzzled that the author could understand the acceptance of heavy casualties in the attritional battles in the Great War but balked at the implications of similar policies by a Commander in WW2.

I emphasise that I have not read the book and so the above report is in no way a review of it. I have merely sought to highlight the discussion that took place. If one of the intentions of the Conference was to stimulate interest in the works of both David Chandler and John Terraine then I suspect that John Peaty's paper may have been the most successful of all!

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Panel Discussion

All the speakers joined together at the end of the Conference in a Panel discussion chaired by Brian Bond. Again, I will try briefly to summarise the main threads.

Recent military history on World War 1 has concentrated on overturning the erroneous "Lions Led by Donkeys" myths established primarily in the 1960's. It was suggested that in the not too far distant future it might be necessary for historians to explain that Britain had not gone to war in 1939 to liberate Auschwitz. A number of speakers explained that the study of military history in an academic context was to try and show how individuals had perceived and dealt with problems in the past. Another explained that he found it necessary to respond quickly to questions posed by students about the background to current events. At present these related to Iraq, contemporary strategic issues and issues about future wars, terrorism, stateless conflicts and so on.