The British Joint Area Combined Headquarters Scheme and the Command and Control of Maritime Air Power*

By Dr Richard Goette

The defeat of the German U-boat attack on Allied shipping during the Second World War required the close co-operation of the RN and RAF Coastal Command. However, constant debate over the command and control of maritime air resources overshadowed the operational relationship between the two British services and touched on some of the fundamentals of air power. The RN wanted to ensure that the RAF gave its trade protection role proper attention, and thus endeavoured to secure greater control over Coastal Command's operations. The RAF held true to the fundamental concept of the "indivisibility of air power," and was weary of losing command over its maritime air power forces. The key to the success of the joint trade defence task was operational effectiveness. Therefore, the RN and RAF developed a series of Area Combined Headquarters along Britain's coast in order to work together effectively in a joint construct and the RN was eventually granted operational control over Coastal Command. Though debates continued at higher levels, efficient command and control arrangements at the operational level meant that sailors and airmen in the joint headquarters were eventually able to work out their differences and foster a positive and effective working relationship to ensure the proper prosecution of the trade defence mission.

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Introduction

Winston Churchill declared after the Second World War, "the only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-Boat peril."[1] The defeat of this threat required the close co-operation of the Royal Navy (RN) and the Royal Air Force (RAF). As such, the RN and RAF Coastal Command worked hand-in-hand to protect Allied shipping from attacks by German U-boats. Nonetheless, the formalisation of this partnership into a joint headquarters (HQ) scheme was difficult, as there was an ongoing debate between the RAF and the RN regarding the fundamentals of air power and the command and control arrangements of military air resources. Since the inception of RAF Coastal Area in 1919 (succeeded in 1936 by Coastal Command), the Air Ministry and the Admiralty frequently debated who should command the maritime air organisation. Coastal Command was officially a part of the RAF and the Air Ministry was careful to safeguard its ownership of maritime air assets.[2] Fearing that the British Army and the RN were plotting to dismember the RAF during the inter-war period, the Air Ministry grasped upon the concept of the "indivisibility of air power." It stressed that all military air assets of a nation – including maritime air power – should be under a separate service, the air force, to ensure the proper concentration and specialized use of air power in the hands of those best trained for it, air force officers.[3]

However, the Admiralty also had a vested interest in Coastal Command. As a maritime air organisation, Coastal Command carried out responsibilities that were intimately connected to the war at sea, which was the primary responsibility of the Royal Navy. Maritime air operations, British senior naval officers argued, required a high degree of specialisation in areas such as torpedo bombing, air reconnaissance, trade protection, etc. Therefore, even though the British Government formally placed ship-borne aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm under the RN and flying boats and land-based maritime patrol aircraft under the RAF in 1937, the Admiralty continuously sought to extend greater control and influence over Coastal Command's trade defence role during the late 1930s and into the Second World War.[4] As Coastal Command's motto indicates, it thus became a "constant endeavour" to fulfill the RN expectations of adequate co-operation in joint trade defence efforts during the Second World War. The key to accomplishing this goal was the establishment of an effective joint Coastal Command-RN headquarters and command and control system for the protection of Allied shipping.

The Origins of the Area Combined Headquarters Scheme

It was Air Vice-Marshal Arthur M. Longmore, the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Coastal Area, who first articulated the need for a joint naval-air force headquarters scheme in 1935. Reporting on a joint fleet exercise with the RN, Longmore stated that one major difficulty experienced was the "problem of control of the separate air searching and striking forces in relation to the naval forces with which they were co-operating." Such operations, he argued, necessitated close liaison with naval command headquarters, which could best be achieved by a system of air operational headquarters with corresponding communications facilities. In addition, Longmore argued that on the coasts each Group AOC in the area would need a

local operational headquarters from which he could direct aircraft to the target and that such a headquarters needed to be sited geographically to enable the air commander to cooperate with the corresponding naval headquarters. As a result, the Air Ministry decided to create two Coastal Command Group Headquarters based on the navy's geographical area organisation. Thus, No. 15 Group HQ was located at Plymouth, while No. 16 Group HQ was established at Chatham.[5] The co-location of these headquarters marked a start at naval-air *coordination*, but it was a failed joint Coast Defence Exercise that turned the corner in the development of a *joint* Area Combined Headquarters (ACHQ) scheme.[6]

In 1937 the RN, RAF and British Army held a joint Coast Defence Exercise to practice their coastal attack and defence skills. The exercise planners hoped that the Commanders-in-Chief (CinCs) of all three services would come together to form a Directing Staff for the exercise, but the Naval CinC opposed the idea, desiring instead to command and control the operations of his defending forces himself in his own independent operations room. The result of the exercises was that all three services failed to appreciate the role and capabilities of the others. This led Air Marshal Phillip Joubert de la Ferté to write a letter, just before his replacement by Air Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill as the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOCinC) Coastal Command,[7] advocating the adoption of a joint system of coast defence command based on strategic considerations. The ideal situation, Joubert believed, would be to have the combined staffs of the three services work in a joint operations room. The problem, however, was that at the time the three British services organized and located their commands differently, which made the formation of joint operations rooms difficult: the naval commands were organized on a port basis, the air force on a functional basis, and the army on an area basis. Joubert instead offered that coast defence should be divided into three main areas, the English Channel, the North Sea and the Western Approaches, where operations would be commanded by a joint staff and headed by the senior commanders working on equal terms. Such a system, Joubert stressed, "would reduce the number of authorities responsible for coast defence and thereby simplify the establishment of combined [i.e., joint] operational headquarters."[8]

In December 1937 the Deputy Chiefs of Staff reached an agreement in principle that Area Combined Headquarters (ACHQs) should be located at the major naval command ports of Rosyth, Chatham, Portsmouth, and Plymouth. By April 1938 they had submitted a report recommending that ACHQs should be established at these locations in order "to be used by the Naval and Air Force commanders controlling the units of those Services in the area concerned."[9] The Committee of Imperial Defence approved the scheme in May 1938 and it was put into effect starting at the end of June that year.[10]

The British put their new ACHQ system to the test in a joint coastal and trade defence exercise in summer 1938, which included a series of staged submarine attacks on merchant vessels.[11] Compared to the exercises in 1937, these operations were much more successful and this was largely due to closer cooperation between the services which was facilitated by the

ACHQ system. It was also clear, however, that it was most important that the air force and naval staffs work closely together in trade defence. Accordingly, in December 1938 the three services agreed at a joint conference that "the Navy and Air Force should be represented by officer[s] and operational staffs with full executive authority whereas the Army was only to be represented by liaison officers from Army Commands or Areas."[12] This scheme was implemented immediately and the Air Ministry also redrew the Coastal Command Air Group areas (see Figure 1) to correspond with the new naval Commands, with No. 18 Group supporting the Rosyth Naval Command (ACHQ at Rosyth), No. 16 Group supporting the Nore Naval Command (ACHQ at Chatham), and No. 15 Group (later No. 19 Group) supporting the Liverpool Naval Command (ACHQ at Plymouth).[13]

The ACHQ system became an effective naval-air force headquarters structure for conducting operations during the Battle of the Atlantic. The Group AOCs worked closely with the Admirals commanding the various naval commands in the individual joint headquarters to ensure adequate air coverage for Allied shipping. The structure and operation of the ACHQ was best described by Air Marshal Sir John "Jack" Slessor, the AOCinC Coastal Command during the climax of the Battle of the Atlantic:

> The inner core of the ACHQ was the operations room – usually underground – with its great wall chart showing all they day's activities and its displays of all the necessary current information, convoys and independents at sea, escorts, movements of aircraft, weather and all the rest of it. From here, the Admiral and Air Vice-Marshal and their staffs controlled, as a team, the operations of surface and air forces in the area.[14]

In the operations room an RAF Controller was also on duty, working alongside a RN Duty Commander. Each morning the Admiral commanding the port and the Group AOC visited the plot room together, where they allocated "priority for protection to be given any particular convoy, both surface craft and aircraft, having regard to the value and nature of shipping concerned."[15] The ACHQ system would provide the crucial ability for the RN and Coastal Command to command and control both air and sea resources to ensure the safe and timely arrival of shipping and ultimately defeat the U-boats during the Battle of the Atlantic. However, early in the war, as the U-boat campaign began to intensify, the ACHQ system and the degree of naval influence on maritime air operations came under sharp criticism from the RN.

Despite the development of the ACHQ system in the late 1930s, at the outbreak of the war Coastal Command was not ready for what would become its principal task: the defence of trade from German U-boat attacks. At the beginning of the war the primary role of Coastal Command was to be the "eyes of the Royal Navy"; that is, to provide aerial reconnaissance for the fleet over the North Sea looking for German warships seeking to escape into the Atlantic Ocean to attack shipping. Since it was the German navy's large surface warships, not the U-boats, that the British originally felt were the greatest threat to seaborne trade,

anti-submarine and convoy escort duties were relegated as secondary tasks.[16] By late 1939, however, losses to German U-boats became a serious problem. After conducting a thorough review, in November 1939 trade defence became Coastal Command's primary responsibility.[17]

Nonetheless, the RAF's inter-war focus on strategic bombing theory and Coastal Command's emphasis on flying boat reconnaissance resulted in a neglect of planning and training for maritime patrol operations which could not be remedied overnight.[18] Added to the fact that Coastal Command did not have sufficient resources in aircraft to perform its new role, the Admiralty became increasingly concerned about whether Coastal Command could meet its new responsibilities for trade defence.

The Intensification of the U-boat Assault on Allied Shipping

Following the fall of France in 1940 the Germans were able to base U-boats in French Atlantic ports, allowing easier access to the North Atlantic shipping lanes. In direct response to the growing U-boat menace, First Lord of the Admiralty A.V. Alexander demanded long term increases in the strength of Coastal Command. In early November the British War Cabinet took up the issue at one of its meetings but it quickly developed into claims to have Coastal Command transferred entirely from the RAF to the Admiralty.[19] Alexander noted that the Admiralty had "always been in favour of having full control [i.e., full command], not only of Coastal Command, but of all aircraft whose normal function is to fly over the sea" and argued that if the Cabinet were to carry out the proposed transfer "the Admiralty would be strongly in favour of this change."[20]

Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill was not so concerned about who had command over Coastal Command so long as it did its job efficiently. Therefore, since it seemed to him that Coastal Command was not performing its duties adequately, Churchill called for a full examination of the current system of RAF command over Coastal Command. Secretary of State for Air Sir Archibald Sinclair advised against the transfer of Coastal Command to the Admiralty, arguing that it would shrink the RAF's resources (i.e., a competition for men and machines) and lead to unavoidable overheads and overlapping of function. Furthermore, he pointed out that the timing of the issue was inappropriate because it would distract the RAF from its most immediate and pressing concern of the time, "winning the air war against Germany." Finally, Sinclair argued that even if there were to be a transfer "it would be impossible for the [proposed] Naval Air Command to be self-sufficient. It would still rely on Fighter Command for the defence of Fleet Bases and in-shore convoys, and upon the Metropolitan bomber force for a striking arm."[21] In addition, the transfer would also be a devastating blow to the morale of the personnel of Coastal Command, as it would appear that the change was being made because the navy did not consider that Coastal Command airmen were capable of performing their functions as part of the RAF.[22]

The RN in fact was pleased with the cooperation that Coastal Command provided at the tactical level. Although the British naval leadership acknowledged that there were deficiencies

in RAF organisation itself, these were not grounds for the complete transfer of Coastal Command to the Admiralty. Instead, the naval brass believed that the main problem was the limited influence that the RN had on how Coastal Command carried out its operational responsibilities for trade defence. Two of the three primary Admiralty complaints were that the RN had "no voice in the design and equipment of aircraft of Coastal Command… [and] no voice in the operational training of the Command."[23] The problem for the Admiralty was that the Air Ministry was responsible for such matters, as they consisted of part of the full command that the RAF exercised over Coastal Command. Therefore, the only way for the Admiralty to have some say in the design and equipment of aircraft and over operational training was to have Coastal Command transferred entirely under RN command. The Admiralty's third complaint was that the RN had "no responsibility of the day-to-day operational control of Coastal Command aircraft which are carrying out what are essentially naval operations."[24] Coastal Command countered by arguing that the ACHQ system provided adequate naval influence over Coastal Command operations, as "the day-to-day control of operations in the defence of trade in Home Waters was the primary responsibility of the local Naval Commanders-in-chief, assisted and advised on air matters by the Air Officers Commanding of the respective general reconnaissance groups."[25] Nonetheless, the Admiralty was not satisfied with the arrangement, thereby necessitating that the Defence Committee (Operations) of the War Cabinet come up with some kind of compromise between the two services.

Following much discussion, the committee announced on 4 December 1940 that "Coastal Command should remain an integral part of the Royal Air Force, but that for all operational purposes it should come under the control of the Admiralty."[26] It did not, however, give a detailed description of the new arrangement, so a joint Naval and Air Staff Committee met in February 1941 to determine the Coastal Command's new command and control relationship with the RN. The resulting document, released on 19 March 1941, became known as the Coastal Command Charter. Some of the most important provisions of the Charter were:

i) Operational control of Coastal Command will be exercised by the Admiralty through the Air Officer, Commanding-in-Chief, Coastal Command.
ii) Subject to the over-riding operational authority of the Admiralty referred to above, the Air Officer, Commanding-in-Chief will normally delegate the day-to-day detailed conduct of the air operations to the Coastal Command Groups, who will be responsible to him for meeting the air requirements of the Naval Commander-in-Chief.
iii) In the event of any operational difficulty arising which cannot be resolved locally by Commanders-in-Chief, it will be referred to the Admiralty who will make a decision in consultation with the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Coastal Command.
iv) Coastal Command resources will not be diverted to other services without the express concurrence of the Admiralty, except as a result of a decision of the Defence Committee.
v) A Joint Admiralty-Coastal Command Committee will be set up to keep under review such matters as numbers; types and equipment of aircraft scales or reserves, formation

> of squadrons; types of weapons; numbers and training of aircrews; methods of patrol, escort and search; expansion of Coastal Command; proposed dispositions of newly formed squadrons; allocation of aircraft and aerodromes; methods of protection of trade from air or submarine attack; requirements for effective reconnaissance and methods of perfecting attacks on ships.[27]

The Admiralty and the Air Ministry soon approved the Charter and the change in the Coastal Command-Admiralty command and control relationship took place on 15 April 1941.

The Charter provided one major concession for the Admiralty in point iv). By giving the Admiralty the final say (except, of course, for a Defence Committee decision) regarding the diversion of Coastal Command resources, the Charter in effect granted a part of the RAF's operational command, which includes authority to deploy units and/or reassign forces, of Coastal Command to the RN. This was a very important concession for the Admiralty: it ensured the British naval service a say in the diversion of Coastal Command resources to non-maritime roles. Indeed, it was, after all, the apparent lack of maritime air power resources dedicated to the Battle of the Atlantic that brought forth the operational control issue in the first place.

Full command of Coastal Command, however, still remained with the Air Ministry, which was responsible for its training, administration and technical development.[28] Therefore, despite the transfer of operational control, "Coastal Command was still funded, organized and based on RAF lines and was, to all intents and purposes, a constituent part of the RAF."[29] The Charter's provision of a Coastal Command Committee with membership from both the Admiralty and Coastal Command Headquarters was also an important step, as it ensured closer consultation and greater understanding between the two services and it guaranteed that the Admiralty had a voice in the design and equipment of aircraft and in the training of crews.[30]

Although the Admiralty was satisfied with the new arrangement, the Air Staff did not really see how different it was from the previous one. Indeed, Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, who in February 1943 would become the AOCinC Coastal Command, argued that the "so-called operational control by the Admiralty" was a "polite myth" that "in effect left the real position just as it had been before all this fuss."[31] Although the charter emphasized the predominance of the naval element in the current operational partnership and strengthened the authority of the operational naval CinCs *vis à vis* the Group AOCs, "it *did not*, however, place the Coastal Command Groups under the operational control of the local Naval Commander[s]-in-Chief."[32] In fact, the operational control in the new arrangement consisted of the "day-to-day detailed conduct of the air operations" that the Group AOC exercised (delegated by the Coastal Command AOCinC) in point ii) of the Charter. Therefore, instead of having operational control, the local naval CinC only had the authority to state his requirements for air coverage to the air commander, who would then exercise operational control by assigning Coastal Command forces to accomplish the mission. It was Slessor who articulated the Coastal Command-RN

command and control relationship best: "the sailor tells us the effect he wants achieved and leaves it entirely to us how that result is achieved."[33]

Despite the provision in point i) of the Charter, control of the actual operations of Coastal Command forces remained with the Group AOCs, which meant that the Admiralty did not in fact exercise actual operational control over Coastal Command. In effect, Admiralty "operational control" meant "the power of [the Admiralty] issuing *general directives* as to the broad strategic [i.e., operational] objective to be pursued and did not include the power of issuing detailed commands for the employment of air units."[34] At the higher level, it was only *through* the AOCinC Coastal Command that the Admiralty "exercised merely a general control" over Coastal Command's operations. Therefore, the Charter's description of the relationship as "operational control" does not reflect current usage of the term as defined by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO): "the authority delegated to a commander to direct forces assigned so that the commander may accomplish specific missions or tasks."[35] Instead, the Coastal Command-Admiralty relationship emphasized issuing "general directives" rather than the planning and issuing of detailed instructions for the execution of operations. In today's parlance this would be described as "operational direction."[36]

Thus, according to the Air Ministry, actual operational control over the maritime air organisation remained with the Coastal Command AOCinC. He in turn delegated operational control to the Group AOC, who controlled the actual day-to-day operations in close association with local naval CinCs in the ACHQ and in consultation with the AOCinC Coastal Command.[37] The Admiralty's understanding of the system at the operational level was not much different:

> The working of the Area Combined Headquarters, in which the naval and air sides of every command were intimately integrated, remained unaffected. Under the new arrangement the naval Commander-in-Chief stated his requirements for protection, escorts or patrols and the Air Officer Commanding the Coastal Command Group then issued his orders to meet the Naval requirements.[38]

Although the command was centralized, the execution of control over air assets was decentralized; this arrangement was indeed not much different from the modern concepts of mission command and centralized command and decentralized execution.[39] Put simply, the relationship, according to Slessor, was that "Naval Commanders-in-Chief are certainly not in a position to order air operations, but they are in a position to say what effect they would like achieved by their associated Air Officer Commanding."[40] Therefore, Slessor was annoyed by the fact that even though the Admiralty went to all the trouble to gain "operational control" of Coastal Command, in the end it was the Group AOCs who in effect actually exercised operational control. Moreover, the new arrangement did not come without a price to the relationship between Coastal Command and the Admiralty. The RAF maritime air organisation did not appreciate the apparent lack of confidence by the Admiralty in Coastal Command's ability to do its job properly and the result, according to Slessor, was "a legacy of mistrust and

bad feeling on the part of the Royal Air Force which was not fully eradicated for more than two years."[41]

The new RN-Coastal Command arrangement was an especially important achievement given the restructuring of the trade defence organisation in Britain in early 1941. Because of the intensified U-boat assault on shipping following the German acquisition of naval bases on France's Atlantic coast, it was no longer safe to route shipping through the southwest approaches (i.e., south of Ireland) to British west coast ports. Instead, shipping had to be routed north of Ireland and after numerous discussions from the late summer until late autumn of 1940, the British established a new command at Liverpool: Western Approaches. At the head of this new command was Admiral Sir Percy Noble, RN, who worked in an ACHQ with Air Marshal Sir L.H. Slatter's No. 15 Group, RAF Coastal Command. The Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches, was responsible for all North Atlantic convoy routes and he, along with Slatter, also directed the aircraft tasked to protect the convoys. The command was established on 16 February 1941, and its authority spread across the Atlantic.[42] In addition to increased cooperation at the operational headquarters level, tactical cooperation also improved and as early as May 1941 exchange visits between RAF and RN officers engaged in trade defence work began. Officers from escort vessels flew on Coastal Command aircraft while aircraft captains went on trips in escort vessels. As a RN officer on the staff of Coastal Command noted, the result was an improvement of "the basis of all true co-operation – mutual understanding of each other's difficulties."[43]

Joubert's Concerns in 1942

With the command and control issue resolved and greater aircraft resources being dedicated to Coastal Command, the co-operation that the RAF provided to naval forces in the defence of shipping improved markedly throughout 1941 and 1942. With a stronger working relationship between naval and air forces at the operational and tactical levels, there was greater RN confidence in and satisfaction with Coastal Command. This should have allayed RAF concerns over the command and control issue – and the fear that it might lose its maritime air organization. Nonetheless, this new RN appreciation for Coastal Command had an entirely different effect on Air Marshal Sir Phillip Joubert de la Ferté, who grew increasingly concerned with RN intentions after beginning his second tour as AOCinC Coastal Command during the summer of 1941.

In early June 1942, Joubert sent a letter to the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, regarding the current state of the Coastal Command-Admiralty command and control arrangement. Noting that naval officers had in the past three years of war grown to appreciate the value of aircraft in sea warfare, Joubert grew suspicious that the RN was anxious to obtain more aircraft for Coastal Command "with the obvious intention, when they do not possess them themselves," of securing command over them. Indeed, the Coastal Command chief believed that with the political power of the RN and the United States Navy there was a "real danger" that they would attempt to secure command over all maritime air forces of the two

nations. To counter this threat, Joubert advocated that the Air Ministry mount a press campaign to build up support for continued RAF command over Coastal Command in order to ensure that a transfer of the RAF's maritime air organisation to the Admiralty would never be possible.[44]

Joubert also suggested that the Air Ministry achieve the "long overdue" removal of Coastal Command from the "operational control" of the Admiralty. He gave several reasons for this conviction. Joubert was an advocate of the concept of "the indivisibility of air power," and thus felt that "it is a fact that the admiralty [sic] are incapable of exercising operational control because they have neither the knowledge nor the experience necessary for the handling of air forces."[45] In reality, Joubert stressed, the navy "leaned heavily" on his expertise as AOCinC Coastal Command, and it was thus he "who ha[d] to take all the important decisions and run all the operations." In short, Joubert did not feel that the Admiralty exercised any degree of actual control over Coastal Command operations, leaving the execution of operations to himself and the Group AOCs. In Joubert's opinion, therefore, "this operational control has made no contribution whatsoever to the war effort and in fact has proved a dead letter."[46]

In Joubert's opinion, since the "operational control" exercised by the Admiralty was a farce and since it did not reflect the actual operational situation, the Coastal Command Charter arrangement should be discontinued. Indeed, it appears that Joubert feared that the growing successes of Coastal Command's trade protection operations would lead the Admiralty to take the term "operational control" more literally by allowing naval commanders to plan and issue specific orders on how to employ the maritime air organisation's aircraft on operations. Not only would this lead to the RAF losing its grip on its maritime air organisation, but the RN's lack of experience and knowledge of handling maritime air operations, he felt, would also result in a drop in the effectiveness of Coastal Command.[47]

Portal felt that Joubert was being overly alarmist. In his response to the AOCinC Coastal Command, the CAS did admit knowing of a few RN officers who wanted to acquire shore-based aircraft, but he did not see how they could be successful in an effort to make Coastal Command a part of the RN unless the maritime air organisation was "insignificantly small." Given Coastal Command's large responsibilities for trade defence and its subsequent expansion, this was certainly not the case. Instead, Portal believed that the RN would most likely try to develop a parallel shore-based aircraft force like the USN had done. To emphasize his point, the CAS expressed his belief that the Admiralty was so set on obtaining command over shore-based aircraft that they would prefer to get ownership of one shore-based squadron rather than the addition of several squadrons for Coastal Command. However, understanding the unnecessary annoyances that a public debate over the issue would cause in wartime, Portal also felt that Joubert should let the matter rest and therefore instructed the Coastal Command chief not to initiate his proposed press campaign.[48]

Regarding Joubert's second concern, although Portal agreed that the exercise of operational control of Coastal Command by the Admiralty "is a rather meaningless formula and that, in fact,

you exercise operational control in their interests," he stressed that "the less they interfere the less reason there is for us to raise the matter."[49] Portal believed that Coastal Command would stay intact under the RAF so long as it "continues to be efficient; and if it is inefficient it will deserve whatever may happen to it."[50] The airmen need not have feared – Coastal Command continued to be an efficient organisation and played an important part in the joint effort with the RN in defeating the U-boats during the climax of the Battle of the Atlantic in mid-1943, and ensured that the U-boat never again became a serious threat to Allied shipping. Pleased with the performance of Coastal Command, the Admiralty did not revisit the issue of operational control. In fact, the issue only reappeared once more in early 1944 when it was raised by the RAF. Indeed, this discussion of RN-Coastal Command operational control arrangements clearly demonstrated how central the efficiency issue was to the command and control debate.

Coastal Command Operational Control and Operation "Overlord"

When he took over as AOCinC Coastal Command in January 1944, Air Chief Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas found none of the ill-feeling by Coastal Command towards the Admiralty that Sir John Slessor suggested had existed following the transfer of operational control in 1941. Instead, as Douglas recalled in his memoirs, with a decreased U-boat threat to shipping since mid-1943 – due in no small part to effective joint RN-Coastal Command trade protection operations – he was "enjoying my freedom from any harassment from the Admiralty."[51] However, when planning for Operation "Overlord," the Allied invasion of Normandy, in the spring of 1944, Douglas soon discovered that the operational control agreement between the Admiralty and Coastal Command was not operating the way it should be. Douglas and his staff at Coastal Command HQ had made all the arrangements for the dispositions of their squadrons, their patrol areas and their duties, and had already delivered these detailed instructions to the Group AOCs when the Coastal Command chief realized that he "had no formal or definite directive from the Admiralty about what was expected from us." "...Since we were nominally under the operational control of the Admiralty," Douglas recalled, "this seemed to be rather an odd state of affairs."[52]

Douglas queried the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff (DCNS), but "in the pleasantest fashion, the DCNS tried to assure me that there was nothing to worry about." Undaunted, the Coastal Command chief insisted upon having a proper directive. Although Douglas appreciated the confidence that the Admiralty put in him and his command to get the job done adequately, he feared that if something went wrong because Coastal Command did not have proper instructions from the Admiralty, he as the AOCinC, would be held responsible. Apparently, the DCNS did not see the seriousness of Douglas' concern, so it was with "an amused note in the voice of the DCNS" that he replied, "I see your point. You'll get your directive."[53] Still, when no such directive arrived from the Admiralty, a very annoyed Douglas went straight to the First Sea Lord himself, Admiral Sir Arthur Cunningham, only a scant ten days before the invasion to demand a directive. Cunningham also did not take the matter seriously, and, "laughing as he said it," he replied, "You know perfectly well what you've got to do, Sholto. Get on with it."

This did not sway the RAF officer, and he insisted on a directive from the Admiralty "for what is going to be our part in the greatest operation in history." Although he was still not convinced, Cunningham, perhaps simply to calm Douglas, assured the Coastal Command chief that he would receive a directive.

However, when the directive arrived, it only "consisted of about six lines of generalisations, and in effect it left everything to me." It not only confirmed the Admiralty's faith in the ability of Coastal Command to complete its tasks efficiently, but, more importantly, it demonstrated what the issue over operational control had come to after so many years:

> It was then that I came to feel that, after all the arguments and quarrels about the operational control of Coastal Command, the question had turned out, in the face of the final and crucial test, to be largely an academic one.[55]

To put it in simpler terms, the main concern of the Admiralty in regard to Coastal Command was that the RAF, in RN official historian Stephen Roskill's words, gave "proper priority for the allocation of aircraft and trained crews to the maritime war."[56] As Portal mentioned above, so long as Coastal Command did its job efficiently, "operational control" was not an issue. It was only when it appeared that the Air Ministry was not dedicating sufficient resources towards Coastal Command for the joint defence of trade that it made an issue of the operational control of the RAF maritime air organisation.

Conclusion

In the end, the operational control arrangement agreed to between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry had little influence on the actual prosecution of Coastal Command operations, which remained securely in the hands of the local Group AOCs. Admiralty operational control over Coastal Command, in essence, was simply a reassurance to the RN that the trade defence war would receive proper and adequate attention from the RAF. As Air Chief Marshal Sholto Douglas' experiences have demonstrated, once Coastal Command began to do an exemplary job protecting trade and sinking U-boats, the operational control issue simply became academic. Earlier in the war, however, when it appeared that Coastal Command was not performing its tasks properly in the trade defence war and insufficient resources were being allocated to it, the operational control issue was not academic but a very serious concern for the Admiralty. Despite all the controversy surrounding the operational control of Coastal Command, as Slessor points out, in the end it must be remembered that the "…disagreements in high places must be put in their proper perspective and it should not be imagined that they diverted more than a small percentage of our energies from the real business of fighting the war at sea."[57]

Even though the RN-Coastal Command ACHQ operational control arrangement had become academic in the eyes of the Admiralty by D-Day, it did set an important precedent for joint command and control arrangements. Indeed, after experiencing difficulties dealing with

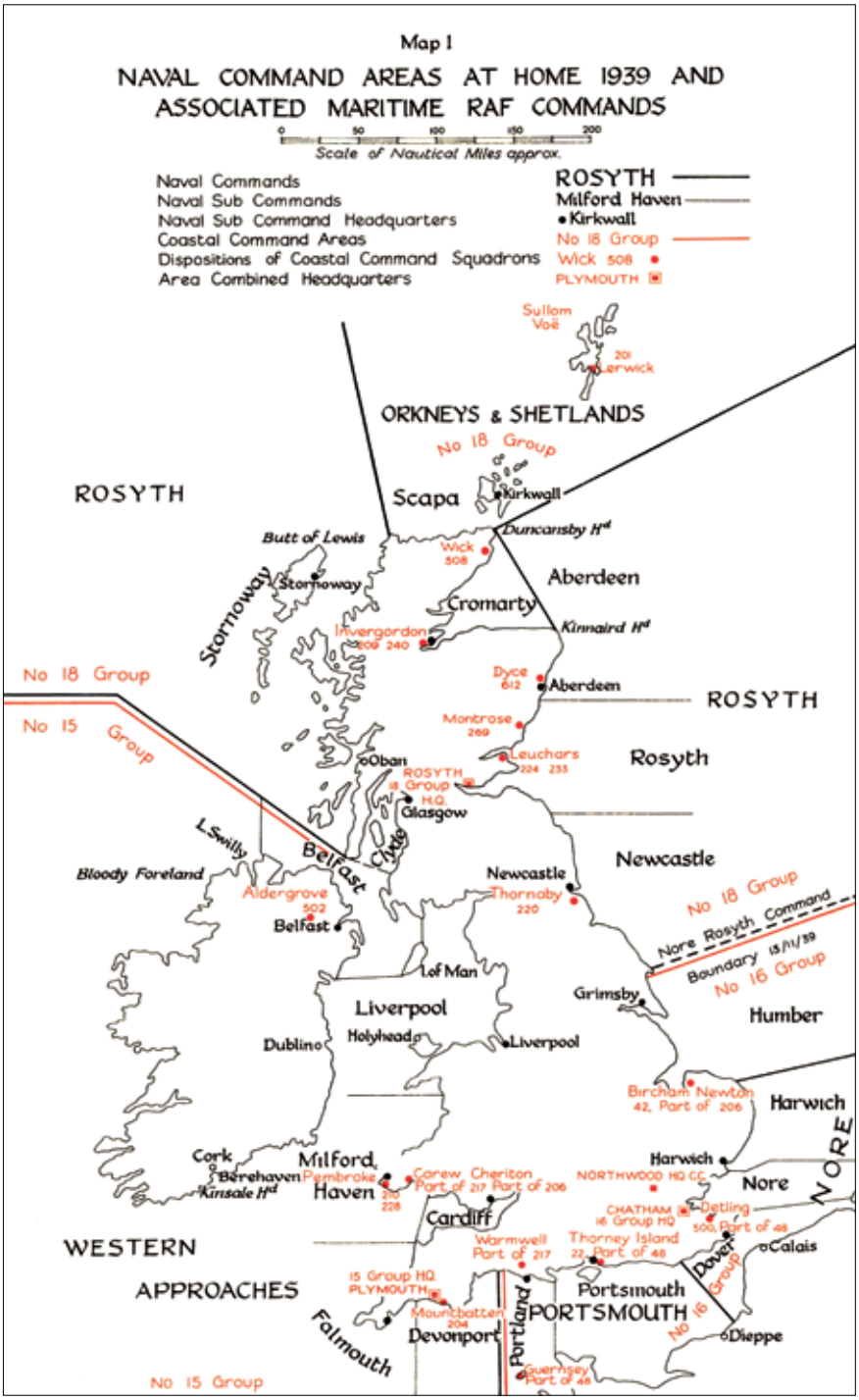

Figure 1: RN-RAF Coastal Command Commands and ACHQs, 1939

U-boat attacks in the Western Atlantic and following subsequent visits by experienced RN and Coastal Command officers to North America in 1942 to address the command and control situation there, both Canadian and American naval and maritime air forces eventually adopted the joint ACHQ system by the spring of 1943.[58] Moreover, requests to the British by the Americans to clarify the operational control arrangement further led to the establishment in early 1944 of a formal definition of operational control:

> Operational Control comprises those functions of Command involving composition of Task Forces or Groups or Units, assignment of Tasks, disignation [sic] of objectives and co-ordination necessary to accomplish the Mission. It shall always be exercised where possible by making use of normal organisation Units assigned, through the responsible Commanders. It does not include such matters as Administration, discipline, Internal Organisation and training of Units… It is recognised that the Operational Authority may in emergency or unusual situations employ assigned Units on any task that he considers essential to effective execution of his operational responsibility.[59]

Significantly, not only does this definition of operational control conform to current usage of the term,[60] but operational control also became one of the cornerstone command and control principles for joint, bilateral, and combined commands during the Cold War, including (most notably), NATO and the North American Air Defence Command (NORAD).

It is clear from operational experience that the detailed employment of forces to accomplish a given task remained the prerogative of the service/component commander from which the forces were derived. Slessor's simple description of "the sailor tells us the effect he wants achieved and leaves it entirely to us how that result is achieved," and the more formal definition above show the practical employment of the joint ACHQ system operational control arrangement. The key to joint RN-RAF operations in the defence of trade was therefore not about who ultimately controlled the assets, but rather ensuring that both airmen and sailors had an understanding of – and appreciation for – each other's problems and advantages. Such a positive working relationship, in addition to an effective command and control arrangement, was crucial for winning the Battle of the Atlantic and provides an important empirical example of successful jointness from which modern military forces can learn.

Notes

[1] Sir Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Volume II (New York: Time, Inc., 1959), 598.
[2] The best account of the history of RAF Coastal Command during the inter-war period and Second World War is John Buckley, *The RAF and Trade Defence, 1919-1945: Constant Endeavour*, (Keele, U.K.: Ryburn Publishing, Keele University Press, 1995).
[3] Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Volume II: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament, 1930-1939* (London: Collins, 1976), 401; Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sholto Douglas with Robert Writht, *Years of Command: The Second Volume of the Autobiography of Sholto Douglas*,

(London: Collins, 1966), 246. See also James A. Winnefeld and Dana J. Johnson, *Joint Air Operations: Pursuit of Unity in Command and Control, 1942-1991* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 7.

[4] The UK National Archives [TNA], Air Ministry [AIR] file 41/47, Captain D.V. Peyton-Ward, *The RAF in the Maritime War, Vol. I: The Atlantic and Home Waters: The Prelude, April 1918-1939*, RAF Air Historical Branch (AHB) Narrative, 1947, 140, 148-150. Copy available at Canada, Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage [DHH], Ottawa, file 79/599.

[5] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, I, 212. Britain's coast was divided into a number of naval commands with headquarters at Rosyth, Chatham, Portsmouth, and Plymouth.

[6] For the sake of clarity and consistency, modern military terminology will be used throughout this article. For example, joint refers to two or more services whereas combined refers to the military forces of two or more countries working together. For quotations, modern terminology will be included in [square brackets] next to contemporary terms – i.e., "full control [i.e., full command]."

[7] Coastal Area was elevated to a Command on 14 July 1936 and the Air Officer Commanding Coastal Area became the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Coastal Command. Chaz Bowyer, *Coastal Command at War* (London: Ian Allan, Ltd., 1979), Appendix I, 157.

[8] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War I*, AHB, 213-214; Buckley, *Constant Endeavour*, 86-88.

[9] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War I*, AHB, 215-216.

[10] Ibid., 217.

[11] "General Service Notes: The Coast Defence Exercise of July, 1938," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, Vol. LXXXIII, (November 1938), 859.

[12] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War I*, AHB, 89 and 233.

[13] Ibid., 234; S.W. Roskill, *The War At Sea, 1939-1945: Volume 1: The Defensive* (London: HMSO, 1954), 36. Another ACHQ was established at Liverpool later on in the war (see below).

[14] Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections* (London: Cassel and Company Limited, 1956), 487.

[15] Minutes of the 105th Meeting of the Naval Board of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), 18 March 1943, RCN Naval Board Minutes, DHH. The arrangement was complemented by a monthly meeting of Trade Division Representatives at Admiralty, attended by the Commander-in-Chief Western Approaches or his Chief of Staff, where "suggestions were made by interested authorities and troubles aired, as a result of which more complete cooperation resulted."

[16] Buckley, *Constant Endeavour*, 117; Roskill, *The War At Sea*, I, 35 and 107; TNA AIR 41/47, Captain D.V. Peyton-Ward, *The RAF in the Maritime War, Volume II: The Atlantic and Home Waters: September 1939-June 1940*, RAF AHB Narrative, 1947, 2.

[17] Buckley, *Constant Endeavour*, 118; Alfred Price, *Aircraft Versus Submarine: The evolution of the anti-submarine aircraft, 1912 to 1972* (London: William Kimber and Co. Ltd., 1973), 46.

[18] Price, *Aircraft vs Submarine*, 38-44. The only joint aircraft-surface vessel exercises conducted in the months before the war was an exercise between 15 and 21 August 1939 which was "designed to deal with surface raiders breaking out from the North Sea." Roskill, *The War At Sea*, I, 38.

[19] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 274-278. The person who first suggested this brash move was the expatriate Canadian, Lord Beaverbrook, who was the British Minister of Aircraft Production. TNA, Cabinet file [CAB] 66/13, Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty, 4 November 1940 and Memorandum by Minister of Aircraft Production, 11 November 1940.
[20] TNA CAB 66/13, Coastal Command Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty, 20 November 1940.
[21] TNA CAB 66/13,Coastal Command – Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air, 21 November 1940 and Coastal Command – Note by the Secretary of the War Cabinet, 23 November 1940.
[22] Ibid.; TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 280.
[23] TNA CAB 66/13,Coastal Command – Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty, 22 November 1940.
[24] Ibid.; TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 280.
[25] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 280. General reconnaissance was the term used by Coastal Command for what today are known as maritime patrol aircraft.
[26] Ibid., 280 and 285. Churchill noted further that "while it might have been desirable, if they had been stating afresh in peace time, to make the great change which had been proposed, it would be disastrous, at that stage of the war, to tear a large fragment from the Royal Air Force." Ibid., 283-284.
[27] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, Appendix VII, 394.
[28] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 286. It by no means ended the Admiralty's long-standing desire to have control over shore-based aircraft, however.
[29] Buckley, *Constant Endeavour*, 123. The arrangement also avoided the overheads and duplication that would have resulted with two maritime air organisations, which were the main reason for combining the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service together into the RAF in 1918.
[30] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, Appendix VII, 394.
[31] Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 482; TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 28.
[32] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 286. Emphasis added.
[33] Air Marshal Sir John C. Slessor, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief RAF Coastal Command, to Air Vice-Marshal N.R. Anderson, RCAF Air Member for Air Staff, 24 June 1943, DHH 181.009 (D6734).
[34] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 275. Emphasis added.
[35] NATO, *Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations*, AJP-3(B), March 2011, Chapter 1, Section 0194c., 1-27.
[36] See the following for a brief discussion of operational direction: Allan English, *Command and Control of Canadian Aerospace Forces: Conceptual Foundations* (Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2008), 5-6; Richard Evan Goette, *The Struggle for a Joint Command and Control System in the Northwest Atlantic Theatre of Operations: A Study of the RCAF and RCN Trade Defence Efforts During the Battle of the Atlantic* (MA Thesis, Queen's University, 2002), 47, 88-97.

[37] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 286-287.
[38] Roskill, I, 361.
[39] NATO, *Allied Joint Doctrine*, AJP-01(D), December 2010, Chapter 6, Section I – Command Philosophy, 0612, 6-3. For a discussion of the principle of centralized command and decentralized execution, see: Allan English, "Rethinking 'Centralized Command and Decentralized Execution,'" in Douglas L. Erlandson and Allan English, eds. *Air Force Command and Control* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2002), 71-82.
[40] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 287.
[41] Ibid., 286.
[42] Ibid., 294; William Chalmers, *Max Horton and the Western Approaches: a Biography of Admiral Sir Max Horton* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954), 152; Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 487.
[43] TNA AIR 41/47, Peyton-Ward, *RAF in the Maritime War II*, AHB, 307.
[44] Joubert to Portal, 2 June 1942, Christ Church [CC], Oxford, Papers of Marshal of the RAF Lord Portal, Folder 8A, copy held at DHH, file 87/89. At the time, the USN and United States Army Air Forces each had their own separate maritime patrol force.
[45] CC, Portal Papers, Joubert to Portal, 2 June 1942.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] CC, Portal Papers, Portal to Joubert, 11 June 1942.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Douglas, *Years of Command*, 246-247, 263. Quote from page 263.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 263-264.
[54] Ibid., 264.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Roskill, *The War At Sea*, I, 361.
[57] Douglas, *Years of Command*, 249.
[58] Report by Commander P.B. Martineau, RN, on Visit to Eastern Air Command, 31 October 1942, Air 15/217; Canning to Slessor, 27 May 1943, Air 2/8400; W/C S.R. Gibbs, RAF, "Report on Visit of EAC Halifax and RCAF Station, Dartmouth, NS," n.d. [July 1942], Air 15/217; W.A.B. Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force Volume II* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and the Department of National Defence, 1986), 523.
[59] COMINCH to USN Commands, Admiralty, Air Ministry and COS Army, 11 February 1944, Air 15/339.
[60] NATO, *Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations*, 1-27.