The Battle of France, Bartholomew and Barratt: The Creation of Army Co-operation Command

By Matthew Powell

This article investigates the impact of the Battle of France, 1940 and the British Army's subsequent investigations into the fighting impacted on the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the development of tactical air power in Britain. The investigations by the British Army placed the RAF in a difficult position with regards the provision of air support in Britain. This investigation was severely flawed from the outset with its being chaired by a senior officer who was well known to have a hatred of the RAF and joint-service solutions and blamed the failure of the British Expeditionary Force on a lack of air support from the RAF. It fundamentally misread German tactical and operational doctrine, particularly the application of air power. It will highlight the position of the RAF after the Battle of France and the discussions between the Air Ministry and War Office over the creation of an Army Co-operation Command. Through analysing how Army Co-operation Command was created by the RAF, the RAF's attitude towards tactical air support will be made clear. Army Co-operation Command was created to appear to be a solution to the problem of RAF-Army relations on the surface but as the Army began to work with Army Co-operation Command they realised it had been created to achieve very little in practice.

Introduction

War Office investigations into the British Expeditionary Force's (BEF) catastrophic defeat in France began almost as soon as the last troops had been rescued from the beaches of Dunkirk in June 1940. Working forward from the assumption that the Army's doctrine, strategic planning, and execution of the battle were sound, many flawed conclusions were drawn, especially with regard to how aircraft were best be used to support troops in the field.[1] The Air Ministry also examined the recent campaign and concluded that their concepts regarding the employment of aircraft to support land forces were sound. Airmen, however, had not suffered either the ignominy of *Operation Dynamo* or the shock associated with the completeness of the defeat suffered at the hands of the *Wehrmacht*. The fundamental question that had to be answered in the light of the Battle of France was 'Who should control aircraft on the battlefield?'[2] Negative fallout from the Battle of France pushed the Air Ministry into a corner. The War Office blamed a lack of adequate air support, as viewed through War Office eyes, for the crushing defeat.

This article argues that the Air Ministry did not see Army co-operation as a priority after the Battle of France but had to placate the War Office's demands in order to continue its prosecution of the strategic air campaign against the German homeland. On 1 December 1940 the Air Ministry in co-operation with the War Office, established Army Co-operation Command. The new command, however, was organised to be as weak as the Air Ministry could get away with and, although the evidence does not allow the argument to be made that the Command was set up to fail, it would find any success difficult to achieve.[3] This critical interpretation is supported by an analysis of the investigations conducted by the War Office and the Air Ministry after The Battle of France, the process by which Army Co-operation Command was formed, and the Air Ministry's motivations in creating the Command. In order to appease the War Office, the Air Ministry had to appear to be at least doing something to improve the development of Army co-operation and repair the fraught relations that existed between the two services in the summer of 1940. Army co-operation was still not regarded as a proper method of employment of aircraft by the Royal Air Force (RAF). The RAF's focus on the strategic rather than tactical application of air power was partly for geo-political reasons and also for self-preservation purposes. Williamson Murray has argued that Britain's geographic position meant that it was able to sit on the strategic defensive whilst its economic power was fully harnessed and the effects of strategic bombing made themselves felt.[4] In terms of self-preservation, the RAF came under attack from the Army and Royal Navy almost as soon as the First World War had ended. The senior Services were profoundly unhappy that the defence budget was now being split three ways instead of the two that had been the case in 1914. The RAF emphasised the potential an independent air force had to fulfil a strategic role. This was essential to British security policy as, in the event of a major European conflict, an independent air force could conduct a far-reaching strategic role.[5]

The major reason for disagreement between the RAF and Army with regards tactical air power, was over the idea of aircraft being used as a protective umbrella in penny packets for land forces.

This contradicted the fundamental principles of air power garnered from experience in the First World War.[6] This was how 'air support' was seen by the Army, and also continues to be seen. As Sebastian Cox has noted '… the soldier's philosophical outlook is predicated on the need or desire to have organic air on call when and where he thinks he needs it'.[7] This view was reinforced through the Army's experiences in France in 1940, particularly in the aftermath of the operation on the beaches of Dunkirk. The forces on the ground in France did not see RAF aircraft patrolling the skies above them due to their conducting interdiction missions away from the front lines. This left the ground forces feeling extremely vulnerable to ground attack, a feeling that, the Army felt, could be dissipated through standing patrols above the troops. It was also, however, partly due to the strategic situation now facing Britain and the need to keep prosecuting the war against the Germans in order to continue to receive support from friendly nations such as the United States. The only way that this was possible was through a strategic air offensive against the German homeland. The RAF were also involved in the defence of the British Isles against the *Luftwaffe* in the summer of 1940. With these wider strategic concerns and the possibility of a return to the European continent looking increasingly unlikely, the RAF must be given credit for giving Army co-operation as much attention as they did at this time.[8]

Reports received from the commander of British Air Forces in France (BAFF), Air Marshal Sir Arthur 'Ugly' Barratt, indicated that whilst the air support system had not functioned perfectly, the ideas on which it was based were sound and should be used as the basis for further development. The main problem was the Army, which in 1940 was neither configured nor trained to fight a modern war.[9] The most recent historiography that looks to explain the comprehensive and swift defeat of the Allied forces in France, makes it clear that the Air Ministry put forth a strong case.[10] Within the context of the summer of 1940, however, the Army looked to blamed its defeat on the failures of others, particularly the RAF, and found the perfect scapegoat in Army co-operation. This was an area of joint service co-operation that had been relatively neglected by both the Army and the RAF during the inter-war period. The debates about the correct use of aircraft in support of land forces had begun almost as soon as the First World War had ended and continued throughout the inter-war period. In order to prevent the possibility of the formation of an Army air arm, which was a solution proposed several times by the Army, the Air Staff were willing to compromise with the General Staff provided their requirements in air support could still be met. The Army felt that an Army air arm, similar to the Royal Flying Corps, was their best option to gain the correct form of air support in the field. The RAF felt that a separate Army air arm would lead to a reduction in the resources that would be available to prosecute a strategic air offensive and to the fundamental principles of air power that were codified at the end of the First World War not being applied correctly. These principles formed the fundamental basis of RAF doctrinal thinking throughout the inter-war period.[11]

Some good work, however, was done by the RAF during the inter-war period. Annual Army co-operation exercises were held between 1927 and 1934. During these exercises ideas such as the co-location of Army and RAF headquarters and the use of fighter aircraft in a

close support role were trialled. It would take the experiences of the Second World War for ideas such as the co-location of headquarters to become fully implemented and calls into question the extent to which the work done through inter-war exercises was transferred into learned and applied doctrine. There was also much co-operation between land and air forces in different parts of the Empire.[12] There is little evidence that the experience gained across the Empire was assimilated into the development of tactical air power thinking in Britain. This was due to how the experience across the Empire was interpreted. These experiences were seen as not being applicable to first-class modern warfare as ground attacks had been conducted against 'uncivilised peoples'. To stand up to the barrage that the Air Ministry took in the summer of 1940 would take an organisation with extreme self-confidence in its ideas and the ability to carry its argument forward in the face of prevailing opinion (such as the British Army's exaggerated praise of the *Stuka* dive-bomber).[13] During the difficult summer and autumn of 1940 the RAF had no confidence in its ability to achieve either. The Air Ministry, therefore was willing to concede a great deal of ground in order to appease the War Office. They agreed to the War Office's proposal to set up a new RAF command that would be responsible for the development of all Army co-operation ideas within Britain. W.A. Jacobs has argued that 'in truth the defeat of 1940 had contradictory effects. It greatly strengthened the Army's moral case; after all, they had fought and lost without adequate air support even if that difficulty did not explain the whole of their failure'.[14] The pressure faced by the Air Ministry forced them to at least be seen placing the development of Army co-operation as more of a priority and it was in this atmosphere that Army Co-operation Command was created. The fall of France radically altered the strategic situation faced by Britain.

> With the British armed forces no longer having bases on continental Europe from which to launch operations and a hostile enemy in control of the Channel ports and French Channel and Atlantic coasts, Britain faced a strategic dilemma. The political focus was now on continuing the fighting against Germany from bases in Britain and ensuring the whole nation was determined to withstand the onslaught that was coming. The only way in which this could be achieved was through the strategic use of air power against targets in the German homeland. There was very little, if any, thought given to [preparing for, or] conducting operations on the continent as the possibility of a return…in the short term seemed remote… There was also a belief that the economic warfare policies embarked upon by Britain at the start of the war would start to impact on…Germany.[15]

The Bartholomew Committee Report

The investigation into the debacle that the BEF had been involved in France began very shortly after the final troops had returned home from the continent.[16] The Army's major investigation was, however, preceded by the War Cabinet's decision to conduct an interview with the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the BEF, Lord Gort. In the words of David Ian Hall, Gort

> delivered a detailed narrative of events, one that emphasised the many military shortcomings of Britain's allies, namely the Belgians and the French, and the devastating

> effect of German dive-bombers and tanks had had on the course of the campaign as well as on the morale and fighting ability of all allied soldiers.[17]

At no point did Gort discuss the failures of the BEF, and it is from this that the Bartholomew Committee took its first major assumption. It is further interesting to note that the effects of close air support were really confined to one sector around Sedan but the fear of attack by this method spread very quickly.[18] Further to Gort's appearance in front of the War Cabinet, the question must be asked why Barratt, as commander of BAFF, was also not interviewed. There are two potential explanations for this omission: first, the War Cabinet took Gort's opinion of the air war to be the definitive account and there was no requirement to seek a potentially contradictory opinion on the matter. Second, as this was primarily a land battle with the BEF and their allies in the field bearing the brunt of the fighting, the role played by allied aircraft in the battle was deemed to be of secondary significance. The Army was willing to put forward a version of events that deflected as much of the blame for their defeat as possible from themselves.[19]

The officer chosen to head up the investigation was to assist them in furthering this aim. General William Bartholomew was an officer whose distaste for joint operations was widely known. This opinion of joint operations was, unsurprisingly, combined with a hatred of the RAF. He made no attempt to disguise this hatred and it had an impact upon Bartholomew's career within the Army.[20] Inter-service relations reached such a low ebb whilst he was Commandant of the Imperial Defence College between 1929 and 1931 that he was posted to India. Hall has further argued that his attitude towards the RAF was the major reason he did not become the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the mid-1930s.[21] With these attitudes to the RAF, it is unsurprising that Bartholomew was chosen to head up the War Office's investigation and continue to put out the Army's version of events to as wide an audience as possible.

The Bartholomew Committee only saw one air officer. This officer was the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C) of the RAF Component, Air Vice-Marshal C.H.R. Blount.[22] The report's conclusions were based on several false ideas. The first being in the first part of the report that looked at the differences between the *Wehrmacht* and British ideas of warfare including tactical methods, organisation and material.[23] Hall has described the first part of the Bartholomew report as 'particularly instructive for...the historian because of its failure to distinguish the seminal features of the Wehrmacht's new Blitzkrieg tactics.[24] The report stated that 'In spite of the enemy's superiority in materials, on no occasion were we forced to relinquish the main position by a frontal attack against the BEF...'[25] The report failed to show an understanding of the German tactics of bypassing enemy points of resistance to find gaps in the defensive system in order to attack the enemy's lines of communication and command and control system. Although this is discussed when the report considers the BEF's defensive tactics and highlights further how little was understood about the German methods. The report stated that

> The German method of preparation for attack consists of rapid reconnaissance, which taps along the front line until a weak spot or gap is found. As soon as such a spot is located, the crossing of the obstacle is affected and a small bridgehead made... Once such a crossing is made the bridgehead is widened to allow the passage of more troops.[26]

This analysis allowed the committee to reach the conclusion that British tactical ideas on land were sound.[27] This false conclusion enabled the committee to put forward further conclusions based upon British tactics. A false analysis of German methods is a constant theme throughout the period of the creation Army Co-operation Command as the Army continued to push for its own air arm. Further in the report, the committee claimed that if the British were to fight the Germans on their own terms they would be victorious.[28] That such an obvious statement could pass without any questioning calls into question many of the conclusions reached in the report. Any armed force fighting an enemy on its own terms should claim victory in the field.

Despite its many failings, which are noted above, the report did put forward certain ideas that reflected the experience of the soldiers on the ground. The report argued that the *Luftwaffe* had focused on the morale of troops rather than their destruction when conducting close air support missions. The extent to which close air support affected the battle as a whole, however, must be questioned, especially when the analysis by other commentators is considered. The report argues, based upon the reports received from the formations involved, that close support was more important than any other factor in a successful break-through against the French Army. This conclusion, however, uses the one example of this at Sedan and attempts to use this as a general lesson to be applied to the campaign as a whole. Whilst close support was a factor in the break-through at Sedan, the use of this isolated example as a general lesson ignores the other successes achieved by the *Wehrmacht* in France without close support from aircraft. The impact of aircraft on morale is further investigated, but from the BEF point of view and presents the RAF with a very difficult concept to defend. The report stated that

> The magnificent work done by the RAF in the face of German numerical superiority is appreciated by all. The committee would, however, like to point out that by the nature of things, *neither the actual bombing carried out by the RAF in support of the BEF nor its effect was seen by the man in the field*. All day he saw swarms of enemy bombers escorted by fighters and suffered from their attack. *Unlike the German soldier, he had never seen aircraft closely co-operating with him to defeat his own particularly enemy opposite to him. All this had a very definite effect on morale and gave the impression that the enemy superiority was complete and that our own air force hardly existed.* [Author's emphasis].[29]

Despite conducting interdiction missions with what few aircraft were available during the campaign in France, the soldier on the ground felt that they were being neglected and facing the full brunt of the German onslaught alone.[30] In a report on the air operations in support of the BEF it is noted that

> Most of the bomber attacks both by day and by night, were direct against German formations which were passing through the areas originally defended by the French 9th Army. In consequence, their action would be completely unknown to the troops of the BEF who would see nothing of them.[31]

Unable to see the effects of the RAF's interdiction missions, this feeling, whilst maybe not accurate, is understandable from the point of view of the soldier on the ground. In order to resolve this particular issue, the report recommends that in future operations, 'the RAF must "show the flag" to the troops in the forward areas – even at the expense of other tasks – by carrying out some bombing with existing machines in sight of our lines'.[32] As Alistair Byford has noted

> What delivered success for the Germans was primarily indirect air support – isolating the battlefield and cutting communications – following the achievement of air superiority, but both of these effects were invisible to the soldier on the battlefield and consequently, not well understood.[33]

The improvements to the Army recommended by the committee focused on areas such as mobility, the use of motorised transport and wireless communications. In its recommendations for air support, the committee showed a remarkable lack of understanding of basic terminology.[34] The need to gain air superiority over the battlefield was understood and that the *Luftwaffe* had been able to gain this was seen to be a factor in the German victory in France. The understanding of what air superiority entailed demonstrated the lack of understanding within the whole of the Army, as well as those responsible for compiling the Bartholomew report. For the Army, air superiority consisted of aircraft over the battlefield able to act in protective umbrellas for ground forces. When the German use of air support came under consideration, the committee again misread German actions.

> There is little doubt that the policy of equipment, organization [sic] and training of the enemy has been directed to this end [close support]. Even in the case of "impromptu" attack it was seldom more than 25 [sic] minutes before the call was answered. This indicated not only good organization [sic] and communications for the purpose, but the siting of many of their landing grounds close up behind their own troops. Efforts should be made to simplify and improve our own intercommunications between ground and air for similar purposes... It is imperative to ensure forthwith that a system comparable to that of the Germans should be introduced into our Army and Air Force.[35]

The committee, and indeed the Army as a whole believed that the *Luftwaffe* was simply a close support force to be employed with the *Wehrmacht* in land operations. There was little discussion of the interdiction operations conducted by the *Luftwaffe* prior to the support given in the crossing of the Meuse. The *Luftwaffe*'s main operations concerned conducting attacks against airfields and isolating the battlefield.[36] The focus of the evidence

given and as a result the conclusions reached by the committee were only on the supposed impact of close support on the Allies. The status of the *Luftwaffe* in respect to the *Wehrmacht* was also subject to poor analysis.[37] It was believed that the *Luftwaffe* was subordinate to the *Wehrmacht* and this gave further impetus to the Army's demands for an air arm under their control.[38] With regards to the impact of air support, the report's conclusion that support that was given 'as supporting fire to cover the assault of armoured and, at times, infantry formations'.[39]

The Creation of Army Co-operation Command

With the findings of the Bartholomew committee, the Army went on to the offensive in attempting to gain their own Army air arm. The conclusions presented in the report forced to RAF to face a *fait accompli* concerning air support. The RAF was no longer in a position where it could ignore the requests for more development in close support, including aircraft, from the Army.[40] This was due to a combination of the work done by Group Captain A Wann and Lieutenant Colonel J D Woodall developing a basic communications system for forward formations to request ad hoc support and the damning conclusions of the Bartholomew committee. The detailed arguments for an Army air arm were laid out in a note written in the summer of 1940. The note argues that by raising their own air arm, including its 'own factories and the training of its own officers, crews and ground personnel' they would make 'no inroads on RAF resources'.[41] That this was the major focus of the Army demonstrates just how much of an impact the defeat in France had and the long-term strategic situation with regards the use of British land forces on the European continent. Despite attempting to gain their own Army air arm, the Army did not specify just how long it would take to establish such a force and gain the expertise required for it to function effectively. The Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, looked to the solution reached in the field of naval co-operation in the inter-war period to resolve the problems faced by the Army. He stated that 'The creation by the Air Ministry of an Army Co-operation Command comparable in status to the Coastal Command would, I believe, be the most effective step which could be taken to ensure the concentration of effort which is required'.[42] To ensure these requirements were met it was the Army Council that proposed the idea of an organisation that had the authority of an RAF command to oversee Army co-operation development in Britain.[43] This can be seen in the proposal noted below where the first question asked by the Air Staff is 'Do we agree with the concept of an Army Co-operation Command?'[44]

In a proposal regarding this matter written by the Air Staff the responsibilities of No.22 (Army Co-operation) Group were laid out. This Group had wide-ranging responsibilities and these included the following: the administration and training of tactical reconnaissance squadrons with Home Forces; the command of Nos.1 and 2 Army Co-operation Schools; the supervision of the Air Observation Post (Air OP) development and command of No.111 (Army Co-operation) Wing. Discussions within the Air Ministry took place regarding the organisation of the command itself, the major discussion was whether the Command should comprise of two or three groups. The three group proposal would consist of 'an operational group

comprising the Army co-operation squadrons, a training and development group and the proposed Photographic Reconnaissance Group. The two group proposal would not include the Photographic Reconnaissance Group.[45] The proposal laid down by Eden that the AOC-in-C should be the adviser on Army co-operation matters to both the Air and War Ministries was rejected by the Air Staff. They felt that the

> proper and logical procedure is for the Commander-in-Chief to advise their own Ministries and for the Ministries to advise each other. An AOC-in-C should not usurp the responsibility of the Air Ministry for advising the War Office on air matters. The established procedure is well-founded.[46]

This move by the Air Staff can be interpreted in several ways: The Air Staff could have been looking to prevent the General Staff from attempting to form an Army air arm out of a potential Army Co-operation Command after receiving advice from the new organisation. It is also possible that the Air Staff were looking to side line this potential Command from the outset by controlling what advice the War Office were to receive and preventing their direct access to it. In studying the creation of Army Co-operation Command, Byford has commented upon the possible motivations of the Air Staff at this time.

> Following the Bartholomew Report, the War Office proposed the creation of an Army Co-operation Command to facilitate air support. The Air Staff were concerned that this might be the first step towards the creation of an organic Army air force...although it did not support the concept, the Air Staff reluctantly concluded than an Army Co-operation Command – with a degree of separation from both the War Office and Air Ministry – might be a way of demonstrating the goodwill necessary to head off any further calls for a separate Army air arm.[47]

The Air Staff saw two potential organisations for this new Command. The first of these possibilities was 'That No.22 Group and the Air Staff at GHQ [General Headquarters], Home Forces, should be combined into one headquarters, the Air Officer Commanding being the air adviser to the C-in-C, Home Forces and under his control for operations'. The second was 'That there should be an Army Co-operation Command (independent of Home Forces) under an AOC-in-C, with two Army Co-operation Groups, one operational and one for training. The three headquarters thus formed would be established on orthodox lines, and should contain a proportion of Army Staff Officers. The operational group would be under the control of GHQ Home Forces for operations'. The advantages and disadvantages of both proposals were also discussed. The first proposal's advantage was that it would be economical in staff and involve little reorganisation, it would however place the AOC in a difficult position. He would be

> 'responsible in part to the C-in-C, Home Forces, (namely for Army Co-operation squadrons), and would therefore in a sense be subordinate to him; whereas a large

part of his duties (i.e. those in connection with the training units) would lie outside the responsibility of the C-in-C, Home Forces'.

Under the first proposal, the AOC-in-C would find locating his headquarters difficult. It would be impracticable to have his headquarters close or within GHQ. Part of his staff would have to be attached to GHQ and, as a result, he would have to divide his time equally between effectively two headquarters.[48]

The advantages in the second proposal are that it fulfilled the requirement put forward by the Army that the commander should have the independent powers of a Commander. This organisation would also fit in well with the current RAF organisational structure. This structure was a mono-role command structure where each individual Command was responsible for an individual aspect of fighting.[49] The AOC-in-C would have free reign over the whole administration of Army co-operation interests and would be tasked with the primary role of the 'development of tactics and techniques of air co-operation and support of the Army'. A Command of this nature would provide a 'solid frame-work capable of expanding to meet any further Army Co-operation requirements'. The most pressing drawback to this proposal would be the expansion in staff officers, including Army officers, required for the Command to function efficiently.[50] The Air Staff had refined their ideas regarding this new Command. This proposed organisation would severely restrict the role of any prospective Commander-in-Chief. An Army co-operation operational group would be placed under GHQ, Home Forces, and a training group consisting of the Army Co-operation Schools, the Central Landing Establishment (CLE) and the Anti-aircraft and Searchlight Co-operation units would form a training group. Under these proposals the only complete control exercised by the new Command would be in respect of the Army Co-operation Schools of the Training Group. The new Command in fact would be mainly administrative and advisory in function. These proposals would restrict the powers of the prospective AOC-in-C and lend further weight to the argument that the Air Staff's overriding aim in setting up this new Command was to sideline it as much as possible. The C-in-C of Bomber Command, Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, also raised concerns regarding the new Command. He pointed out 'that one of the tasks of the new Command would be to advise on types. If this led to the arming of certain units under Bomber Command aircraft not suitable for bombing operations against Germany, then he would deplore the arrangement'.[51]

The Air Staff countered the proposal noted above regarding the status of any potential new Command with regards to that of Coastal Command. Coastal Command was a fully operational Command. The AOC-in-C was responsible for conducting operations in the Atlantic Ocean against attacks by the German Navy against Allied merchant shipping. The Air Staff argued that no such operational role existed for an Army Co-operation Command. This would still be the case if the Germans had been able to make a successful invasion of Britain due to Army co-operation being provided by Army co-operation squadrons already attached to the Army. If further support was required in the event of invasion, it would be

provided by Bomber, Fighter and Coastal Commands, and not Army Co-operation Command.[52] These Commands were the operational heart of the RAF and had experience of conducting operations. Bomber Command was responsible for conducting the strategic air offensive over Germany; Fighter Command had just won the battle for air superiority over the skies of south-east England in the Battle of Britain; and Coastal Command was involved in protecting Allied shipping in the Atlantic. If, however, an invasion attempt against Britain was launched, the operational priority for the RAF would be in the support of land forces to repel this. Army Co-operation Command would not form part of this as, when it was created, it was not, and was never intended to be, an operational force.[53]

The head of this new Command 'would be responsible for implementing the policy decided upon by the Air Ministry and the War Office for the development of all forms of air support for the Army'. The General Staff believed that air support fell into two distinct categories: reconnaissance and close support bombing. They felt that with the proposed organisation reconnaissance development would 'be well catered for'. Despite the ideas in this area being developed, it was felt that the 'tactical reconnaissance group and schools which will be under the command of the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief will do all that is required'.[54] The same was not felt with regards to close support bombing development.

The General Staff believed that this was the *raison d'etre* of the new organisation and that if it was not given the powers and the necessary organisation, there was a very real chance that it would fail in its endeavours. It was conceded, however, that any such long-term training would not be at the expense of ongoing RAF operations. In order to give the new Command the powers, the General Staff felt was required for it, it was proposed to either make the AOC-in-C responsible for 'training medium bomber squadrons on close support duties or to incorporate a small bomber formation into the new Command'. If the AOC-in-C was given responsibility for training medium bomber squadrons, he would have direct access to the AOC-in-C, Bomber Command and AOC, Northern Ireland to arrange for training to be carried out, and was seen to be the better system for squadrons stationed in England and Scotland. If an operational bomber force was to be formed in Army Co-operation Command, it was argued that it 'would give the necessary weight to the close support side of the proposed organisation. The Command would be in the fullest sense an Army Co-operation Command'.[55]

By the end of October 1940, after much fruitful discussion and with the Battle of Britain drawing to a close, both the Air and General Staffs were in a position to finalise the organisation and responsibilities of a new Army Co-operation Command. The creation of Army Co-operation Command was a matter for the Air and General Staffs, and due to the discussions regarding this matter proceeding with relative ease, the matter was never referred to the War Cabinet to be resolved.[56] This demonstrates how much the defeat in France had affected the RAF, and to a greater extent the Army. This new Command was to be organised along the lines detailed above where an operational Group would be placed under the

control of GHQ, Home Forces and Army Co-operation Command would have control over the training group.[57] This newly established organisation was more in line with the Air Staff's view than the General Staff's and would place Army Co-operation Command at a severe disadvantage throughout its existence. With the emphasis being placed upon developing Army co-operation by the Army Council, the Air Staff's motivations in establishing a non-operational Command with responsibility for experiments and training must be called into question. The commander of this new organisation would find himself disadvantaged in calls for resources against more established, operational Commands conducting operational roles against Germany.

In a directive to the AOC-in-C it was laid out that his Command would 'comprise all RAF units specifically engaged in Army Co-operation duties in Great Britain'. His main responsibility was to 'implement the policy decided upon by the Air Ministry for the development of all forms of air support for the Army'. In order to further the implementation of this policy the commander was to 'liaise with [the] Commander-in-Chief and Commanders of other RAF Commanders, and Commanders-in-Chief, Home Forces and Northern Ireland...'[58] The Commander was to act as adviser to the Air Ministry only as had originally been laid out in the proposals put forward.[59] The potential problems associated with this idea has already been detailed above, and was to cause much friction between Army Co-operation Command, the Air Ministry and the War Office. The new Command was to be officially formed on 1 December 1940, and the AOC-in-C was to be the former head of BAFF, Barratt.[60] The headquarters of this Command was at Bracknell and the staff that made up the Command was, in the words of Carrington '"integrated" – a new vogue word – with a mixture of Army and RAF staff officers'.[61] Initially the main function of the Command was the administration of a dozen Lysander reconnaissance squadrons that the Battle of France had shown to be obsolete.[62]

One of the first actions conducted by Barratt was to establish his views on the work that had already been conducted in close support development prior to the establishment of his Command. Barratt authorised the distribution of the Wann-Woodall report to all squadrons within the Command.[63] The report produced from the experiments conducted in Northern Ireland had now become codified as basic doctrine, and due to the joint nature of the trials, it could be considered as the first piece of joint doctrine produced by the RAF and Army. The RAF's institutional distrust of theoretical solutions to problems, combined with the threat of invasion waning, meant, however, that the Wann-Woodall report was never accepted as official doctrine to be passed on to other Commands in overseas theatres despite the feelings of Barratt at Army Co-operation Command.[64] The further trials that were to be conducted could only improve upon the start that had been made.

Alongside the creation of Army Co-operation Command, the Air Staff established a Directorate of Military Co-operation (DMC), under Air Commodore Victor Goddard. This was to allow Army co-operation 'to have strong representation in the Air Ministry'.[65] This directorate was directly responsible to the Chief of the Air Staff, and would work in conjunction with other directorates

of the Air Ministry. Its establishment was to work primarily with the WO to frame the policy for the development of Army co-operation. Its duties would cover the following: 'provision for Army air requirements; co-operation with the Army at home and abroad and preparations of plans for the formation of air components for field forces as requisite Air Staff/Army matters affecting the Directorate of Combined Operations'. The DMC would be responsible for some parts of operational planning and would have no executive function in relation to operational Commands.[66]

Conclusion

The way in which Army Co-operation Command was created hampered its abilities to a great extent in its role to develop Army co-operation in Britain between 1940 and 1943. The RAF made it as toothless as possible. This was a deliberate move on the part of the Air Staff in order to give the War Office the impression that the development of Army co-operation in Britain was being given a greater priority with the creation of a Command that specialised in this area. The War Office's expectations of this new Command were for an organisation that would not only be able to develop and enhance the development of Army co-operation in Britain, but would also be able to implement these developments in the field. In this they were disappointed as Army Co-operation Command would never be more than an experimental Command. This further hampered the development of good relations between the two Services, which was one of the responsibilities of Barratt and Army Co-operation Command. The continuation of bad relations between the Services can be directly traced to the War Office's actions in the wake of the Battle of France. The sustained political pressure placed upon the RAF through the Bartholomew Report forced the Air Ministry to act in a way that was not, in the long term, beneficial to either Service. The RAF in Britain, as a whole, showed little enthusiasm for Army co-operation ideas until the successful operations in the Middle East were conducted in 1942 and 1943.[67]

Army Co-operation Command found itself starved of resources throughout its existence due to its non-operational status. This was a direct impact of the RAF being forced to create Army Co-operation Command. This made the role given to Barratt and his command even more difficult to fulfil. It was, however, able to further develop the theoretical ideas put forward as a result of the Wann-Woodall experiments. That it was able to take the ideas that emerged from the Wann-Woodall experiments and codify them into a basic doctrinal publication that was agreeable to both the War Office and the Air Ministry is testament to the potential ability within Army Co-operation Command. That this potential ability was not harnessed to a greater extent is due to the difficult position it was placed in due to its creation. It was viewed by the Air Ministry as a necessary evil that had to be created in 1940 in order to relieve some of the political pressure that they were under after the disastrous showing during the Battle of France. Army Co-operation Command could only develop its ideas in theory as it had no operational aspect and also due to the fact that land operations were not conducted from Britain until 1944. This made Army Co-operation Command's role that more difficult to achieve. As a result of this, Army Co-operation Command was able to develop basic theoretical doctrine but

was unable to refine these ideas in operations against the enemy. The testing of theoretical doctrine is essential in order to iron out the many teething problems that could not have been identified during exercises that will serve to enhance the ideas.

It was also heavily involved in the development of the Air Observation Post, which transformed the use of artillery in operations in the Middle East and Europe after 1943.[68] Despite this, Army Co-operation Command would be disbanded in July 1943; in reality, however, it was re-formed into an operational tactical air force in preparation for the return of Allied forces to the European continent in 1944. The make-up of this new tactical air support formation caused one of the largest arguments over the practicalities of providing British ground forces with air support during the Second World War.

Notes

[1] David Ian Hall, *Strategy for Victory: The Development of British Tactical Air Power*, 1919-1943 (Westport, Connecticut and London, Praeger Security International, 2008), 57.
[2] David Hall, Lessons not Learned: The Struggle between the Royal Air Force and Army for the Tactical Control of Aircraft, and the Post-mortem on the Defeat of the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1940, in Gary Sheffield and Geoffrey Till (Eds.), *The Challenges of High Command: The British Experience* (Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 113.
[3] Charles Carrington, *Soldier at Bomber Command* (London, Leo Cooper, 1987), 26.
[4] Williamson Murray, British and German Air Doctrine between the Wars, *Air University Review*, Vol. 30, No.3. (March/April, 1980). Available at **http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1908/mar-apr/murray.html**. Accessed 18 May 2009.
[5] Matthew Powell, *Army Co-operation Command and Tactical Air Power Development in Britain, 1940-1943: The Role of Army Co-operation Command in Army Air Support* (PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2013), 50-1.
[6] The Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon (RAF Hendon) Trenchard Papers, MFC 76/1/357 – Lecture VII Air Strategy. Lecture VIII – Principles of War. Lecture XII – The Value of a Centralised Air Force.
[7] Sebastian Cox, The Air/Land Relationship – an historical perspective 1918-1991, *Air Power Review*, Vol.11, No.2 (Summer, 2000), p.1.
[8] That this was happening lends further weight to the line of argument put forward by David Edgerton regarding just how Britain's political and armed forces leaders saw the long-term strategic situation after defeat in France and the likelihood of a return to the European continent. See *Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources and Experts in the Second World War* (London, Penguin Books, 2012).
[9] John Terrraine, *The Right of the Line: The Royal Air Force in the European War 1939-1945* (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978).
[10] Alistair Byford, Fair Stood the Wind for France? The Royal Air Force's experience in 1940 as a case study of the relationship between policy, strategy and doctrine, *Air Power Review*, Vol.14, No.3 (Autumn/Winter, 2011). Alistair Byford, The Battle of France, May 1940: enduring, combined and joint lessons, *Air Power Review*, Vol. 11, No.2 (Summer, 2008). John Buckley,

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[11] RAF Hendon Trenchard Papers, MFC 76/1/357 – Lecture VII Air Strategy. Lecture VIII – Principles of War. Lecture XII – The Value of a Centralised Air Force. Hugh Trenchard, 'Aspects of Service Aviation', *The Army Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (April, 1921), 10-21.

[12] Powell, *Army Co-operation Command*, 42-5, 58-66.

[13] An excellent summary of the myths that have surrounded the Stuka and the effects of German air support during this operation can be found in John Buckley, The Air War in France, in Brian Bond and Michael D. Taylor (Eds.), *The Battle for France and Flanders 1940: Sixty Years On* (Barnsley, Leo Cooper, 2001), 114-5. A detailed historical investigation of the Stuka has been written by Alfred Price and can be found at, Rise and Demise of the Stuka, *Air Power Review*, Vol. 3: No. 4 (Winter, 2000), 39-54.

[14] W.A. Jacobs, Air Support for the British Army, 1939-1943, *Military Affairs*, Vol. 46, No.4 (December, 1982), 175-6.

[15] Powell, *Army Co-operation Command*, 133-4.

[16] With the exception of certain formations such as the 51st Division which had surrendered in France as the *Wehrmacht* consolidated their original gains made by advancing through central France.

[17] Hall, *Strategy for*, 55.

[18] Buckley, The Air War, 111-2.

[19] Byford, The Battle of, 68.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Hall, *Strategy for*, 56.

[22] The UK National Archive [TNA], CAB 106/220, The Bartholomew Committee Final Report, 1940.

[23] A study of how the British saw German Army tactics can be found at: T. Harrison Place, British Perceptions of the Tactics of the German Army, 1938-40, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 9: No. 3 (July, 1994), 495-519.

[24] Hall, *Strategy for*, 57.

[25] TNA CAB 106/220, Bartholomew Committee Final Report, 1940.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Hall, *Strategy for*, 57.

[28] TNA CAB 106/220, Bartholomew Committee Final Report, 1940.

[29] Ibid.

[30] David Syrett, The Tunisian Campaign, in Benjamin Frankiln Cooling (Ed.), *Case Studies in the*

Development of Close Air Support (Washington, D.C., Office of Air Force History, U.S. Air Force 1990), 158.
[31] TNA AIR 20/4447, Note on Air Operations in Support of the BEF in France during the Period 10th-31st May, Phase II, c. June 1940.
[32] TNA CAB 106/220, Bartholomew Committee Final Report, 1940.
[33] Byford, The Battle of France, 68.
[34] Hall, *Strategy for,* 58.
[35] TNA CAB 106/220, Bartholomew Committee Final Report, 1940.
[36] Hall, *Strategy for*, 59.
[37] The War Office department that was established to study Army co-operation (MO7) was aware that the *Luftwaffe* was an independent force in a note dated 22 July1940. They were, however, unable to counter the prevailing opinion on this within the War Office.
[38] TNA WO 106/5167, Note on the War Office point of view regarding Close Support by MO7, 22 July 1940. Ian Gooderson, Doctrine from the Crucible: The British air-land experience in the Second World War, *Air Power Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Autumn, 2006), 4.
[39] TNA CAB 106/220, Bartholomew Committee Final Report, 1940.
[40] TNA AIR 2/7336, Letter from Anthony Eden to the Archibald Sinclair, August 1940. The report from the experiments conducted by Wann and Woodall can be found at TNA AIR 39/142, Report on Experimental Training in Close Support Bombing, 5 December 1940 and TNA WO 106/5162, Report on Close Support Bombing Trials, Experimental Training in Close Support Bombing, 5 December 1940.
[41] TNA AIR 20/3706, Note on the Army Air Arm, c. June/July 1940.
[42] TNA AIR 20/2811, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War – Air Support for the Army, 23 September 1940. Coastal Command has been the subject of several studies that most prominent of which are Christina Goulter, *A Forgotten Offensive: Royal Air Force Coastal Command's Anti-Shipping Campaign, 1940-1945* (London and Portland, Oregon, Frank Cass, 1995) and Andrew W.A. Hendrie, *The Cinderella Service: Coastal Command 1939-1945* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2006).
[43] TNA AIR 2/5224, General Staff note on Training in Close Support in the proposed Army Co-operation Command, 2 October 1940.
[44] TNA AIR 20/2811, Proposal to form a new RAF Command at Home for Army Co-operation, 3 October 1940.
[45] Ibid.
[46] TNA AIR 20/4301, Proposals for an Army Co-operation Command, c. October 1940.
[47] Byford, Fair Stood, 51.
[48] TNA AIR 20/4301, Proposals for an Army Co-operation Command, c. October 1940.
[49] Cf. Byford, Fair Stood, 35-60.
[50] TNA AIR 20/4301, Proposals for an Army Co-operation Command, c. October 1940.
[51] TNA AIR 20/2811, Proposal to form a new RAF Command at Home for Army Co-operation – Notes of a meeting, 3 October 1940.
[52] TNA AIR 20/2811, Proposals for an Army Co-operation Command, 9 October 1940.
[53] Powell, *Army Co-operation Command*, 133.

[54] TNA AIR 2/5224, General Staff note in Training in close support in the proposed Army Co-operation Command, 2 Oct 1940.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Powell, *Army Co-operation Command*, 131-2.
[57] TNA AIR 20/2811, Agenda for discussion in the Formation of an Army Co-operation Command, 20 October 1940.
[58] TNA AIR 20/2811, Directive to AOC-in-C, Army Co-operation Command, c. October 1940.
[59] TNA AIR 20/2811, Formation of Army Co-operation Command – Notes of a meeting held 22 October 1940.
[60] The decision to form Army Co-operation Command was made in November 1940. Richard P. Hallion, *Strike from the Sky: The History of Battlefield Air Attack, 1911-1945* (Smithsonian Institute Press: Washington, D.C. and London, 1989), 152. Henry A. Probert, The Determination of RAF Policy in the Second World War, in Horst Boog (Ed.), *The Conduct of the Air War in the Second World War: An International Comparison* (New York and Oxford, Berg Publishers, 1992), 684.
[61] Carrington, *Soldier at*, 26.
[62] Imperial War Museum, Carrington Papers 8/11/4. TNA PREM 4/14/9, Proposal for the Re-organisation of Army Co-operation with the RAF, c. November 1940.
[63] TNA AIR 39/139, Letter from Barratt, to Air Commodore Victor Goddard, 1 December 1940.
[64] Byford, Fair Stood, 52. Byford, The Battle of France, 69.
[65] TNA AIR 20/4301, Proposals for an Army Co-operation Command – Responsibilities of Directorate of Military Co-operation, c. October 1940.
[66] TNA AIR 20/4301, Proposals for an Army Co-operation Command, October, 1940.
[67] For more details of these operations see Hall, *Strategy for*, 128-145 and Brad William Gladman, *Intelligence and Anglo-American Air Support in World War Two: The Western Desert and Tunisia, 1940-43* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2009).
[68] For more details of the development of the Air Observation Post see H.J. Parham and E.M.G. Belfield, *Unarmed Into Battle: The Story of the Air Observation Post* (2nd Edition) (Picton Publishing, Chippenham, Wiltshire, 1986[The Wykeham Press, London, 1953]). Matthew Powell, 'A Forgotten Revolution?: Army Co-operation Command and Artillery Co-operation, 1940-42, *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 23, No.1 (Winter 2014), 71-88.