

Letters . . .

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

To the Editor—Richard Hallion argued in his letter to the editor (see *JFQ*, Spring 98) that problems faced by the fleet air arm of the Royal Navy in 1939–40 were not the fault of the Royal Air Force. While I believe he is wrong, I won't debate the historical particulars here. But I would raise one point on this debate that has import for both the present and future of aviation.

Did the RAF provide effective close air support to British forces on the ground in France in 1940? *No*. Did the RAF defend the skies over England during the German attacks in 1940? *Yes*. Did it provide enough pilots to carriers before their transfer to the Royal Navy in 1938? *No*. Did RAF Coastal Command defeat the German submarine blockade of 1939–40? *No*. Did RAF heavy bombers force Germany to surrender? *No*. Did the RAF effectively defend Singapore and Burma against Japanese attacks in 1942? *No*. Did it develop jet turbine technology and field it before the war ended? *Yes*. Did RAF heavy bombers attack Germany throughout the war? *Yes*.

That is a mixed record. But given resource constraints in the decade prior to World War II it is not bad. In fact, as Hallion pointed out, the RAF cultivated one of the finest aircraft industries in the world even with the tight budgets of the 1930s. But that isn't the point. What matters is not what the RAF did but what its leaders said it would do. Its champions had claimed before the war that the heavy bomber would be the war-winning weapon. RAF squadrons would make great land and sea campaigns unnecessary. Like Hallion, the RAF leadership alleged that ground and naval forces were backward, which kept them from appreciating the potential of massed air forces.

Yet what did RAF officers who visited the United States in 1940 on a secret mission want? They asked for the Norden bombsight so that their high altitude bombers could hit what they were already supposed to be able to hit. Here was a service claiming it had the key to winning the war but couldn't accurately hit targets with its high altitude bombers. The RAF was simply not telling the truth about its capabilities. It was deceiving itself and its sister services.

There's a lesson here: don't lie to yourself. Don't huff and puff about how your service or specialty can win wars by itself. Once you start down that road you will never admit that you have made—or could make—a mistake. If your inflated

promises don't come true you will blame some other service. Listen to yourself talk then. You'll hear "The other guys had the wrong culture." Just like the RAF said before World War II. Just like Richard Hallion said in his letter.

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JT&E RESULTS

To the Editor—Your recent article on "Joint Combat Search and Rescue—Operational Necessity or Afterthought" (*JFQ*, Spring 1998) accurately depicts the increasing interest in and emphasis on JCSAR and the area of personnel recovery at the highest levels within DOD. In December 1995, the Office of the Secretary of Defense launched a three-year effort to assess JCSAR capabilities and identify and test proposed enhancements. JCSAR JT&E documentation is available by contacting the program management office: JT&E Library, ATTN: Ms. Hegel-Huhn, 2001 North Beauregard Street (Suite 800), Alexandria, Virginia 22311, or via e-mail at hegel@acq.osd.mil, or by calling (703) 578-6567.

—Colonel Kenneth C. Stanley, Jr., USAF
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