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## Letters to the Editor

DUALISM IN THE  
AIR SERVICESLORD TRENCHARD'S  
VIEWS

## TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—I notice that the question of the Fleet Air Arm received considerable attention from several speakers in the recent defence debate in the House of Commons, and that it has also been prominent of late in several newspapers. The claim put forward on behalf of those who wish to re-open controversy on this matter is that the Admiralty should be given a free hand in all matters relating to air power over the sea, and that the

Navy should possess an air force second to none, not only to work with the Fleet, but in cooperation with ships which are employed for the protection of our trade routes in narrow seas, when approaching harbour. (Sir Roger Keyes: House of Commons Debate, November 10.)

The similar views expressed in the debate by Vice-Admiral Taylor show how far-reaching are the claims put forward by the partisans for revision or, rather, disruption of the present organization of the air power of this country. The Admiralty, we are told, must have "vested in them sole and undisputed control of the organization, training, and operation" not only of air forces embarked in ships, but also of any aircraft which may be required to cooperate with the ships of the Navy.

(1) As I am just going abroad for many weeks on business, may I be allowed to state briefly the reasons for my fervent hope that H.M. Government will stand fast to their previous decisions and will not allow the country to be committed to what would be, I most firmly believe, a disastrous dualism in the organization of our air resources:—

(a) "Technical development in the air is taking place very rapidly in respect, for example, of such matters as speed, height, endurance, carrying capacity, and potentialities for destruction. The range of territory on the Continent of Europe from which air attack could be launched against this country is constantly extending and will continue to extend."

These words are taken from the Government's White Paper relating to Defence as presented to Parliament in March, 1935 (Cmd. 4827). To safeguard this country against the dangers which are latent in these developments of air power and in the rapid growth of air armaments in other countries, H.M. Government are now engaged in a very large increase of the Royal Air Force. It is impossible to be certain even that the present large programme will be adequate if the Government are to abide by their pledge that they "would in no conditions accept any position of inferiority in regard to what air force may be raised in Germany in the future."

In this situation it is essential for the Government to preserve the unity of organization as regards training, equipment, and strategic doctrine of our air forces, and to refuse to commit the country to division of them between two separate and independent air services. The resources of the country in men, personnel, material, and money are not inexhaustible, and there is no chance of our being able to maintain two wholly separate air organizations on a scale adequate, one to ensure defence against air attack on this country, the other to provide for all possible needs of air cooperation with the Navy. The air organization of the United States, which is often cited by critics of our own unified Air Service, presents no analogy to our own situation. The United States has no problem of defence against air attack from any land Power.

(b) For this reason, apart from any others, policy of a separate Air Service for the Navy would not be in the true interests of the country. The views put forward by Naval partisans obstinately ignore the inescapable consequences of the fact that the operations of aircraft know no frontier between the air over the sea and the air over the land. The Government would be pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp if it attempted to meet the claim that the Navy should be isolated and self-contained, in respect of the organization and provision of all air forces which might be required under various conditions to operate with the Navy itself or for the protection of our merchant shipping and of the freedom of the sea communications of this country. A distinguished admiral (in the most recent of his numerous newspaper articles) has complained of the inability of the Admiralty "to organize the Navy and its air services in the way best calculated to give efficiency, as our potential enemies are free to do." Does he, can he, realize that in war our ports and harbours, the Navy itself and the sea communications which the Navy exists to protect, could be attacked not merely by any specialized Naval air forces which a potential enemy might possess, but by a concentration of air power in which could be employed the full strength of air resources predominantly consisting of landbased aircraft starting from bases long distances inland? The latest types of landbased aircraft possess an operational radius of action of not less than 750 miles, and this figure is certain largely to increase within the next few years.

(c) From the operational aspect it would be dangerous to have two air services each working from its own set of aerodromes, one set under the Air Ministry and the other under the "sole and undisputed control" of the Admiralty. Under war conditions there would be a real risk of their mistaking each other for enemy aircraft.

(d) If the claims put forward for a "free hand" for the Admiralty are allowed, a duplication would be involved not only of aerodromes and establishments at home but also of those abroad. The logic of the "free hand" would lead to the establishment by the Navy of separate aerodromes and separate air organizations at Singapore, Hong-kong, and Aden, and other overseas bases where air establishments already exist.

(e) Under the present system any differences between the two Services have to be settled at one point of contact, that between the Admiralty and Air Ministry. If the Admiralty starts a separate air service free from contact within the Air Ministry, we only substitute for the present single point of contact a large number of new points of contact and of possible dispute, both at home and overseas, as to their respective spheres of responsibility between units of two air services responsible, as they would be, to two different Departments of State. There would be constant bickering and controversy.

(2) The crux of the matter is that the school of thought still dominant among senior officers and ex-officers in the Navy has not yet faced the fact that it is no longer possible for the Naval service "to run its own show" without regard to the necessity of cooperation with other Services. The emergence of air power ranging over sea and land means that all three Services must act as "members of one another" in a much more constant and practical sense than in the pre-aviation days of only two Services, with the old high watermark frontier between the responsibilities of the Navy and the Army.

(3) The system of provision for Naval air requirements, which has prevailed for the last 18 years, and which replaced a system that failed to stand the test of war conditions, is, I believe, inherently sound. It rightly vests in the Navy (on this point there is a great deal of misrepresentation) full operational control of all air units when working with the Fleet. As regards training and manning it rests, so to speak, on a partnership between the Navy and Air Force, and to attain the best results of which it is capable, it requires a genuine determination on both sides to produce them. So far that determination, I cannot help feeling, has been lacking in higher quarters on the Naval side. But I am convinced, having in mind what the ever-increasing factor of air power means to this country, that it would be a mistake fraught with confusion and the risk of disaster to make concession to the disruptive agitation which has lately become so vocal. So far from settling the differences between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry it would create for the Government a peck of new and worse difficulties.

Yours faithfully,  
TRENCHARD.

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