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*Harnessing the Airplane: American and British Responses to a New Technology, 1903-1939*

by Lori A. Henning, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019; pp. xi + 224).

The success of military aviation and the atrophy of horse cavalry to the point of ceremonial irrelevance, suggests Lori Henning, an Assistant Professor of History at St Bonaventure University, USA, has inclined us to assume that the cavalry's response to the airplane in the early years of the twentieth century can only be understood as an irrational rejection of technological inevitability. Henning's own portrait, however, recorded in this volume, of cavalry's interaction with military aviation in this period is a more sympathetic one, suggesting that where cavalrymen resisted aviation's encroachment on their roles and missions, this resistance was grounded in common sense given the limitations of aviation at the time, and one of the very great virtues of Henning's book is to demonstrate that cavalrymen in the interwar years were not, for the most part, Colonel Blimps.

Using a range of materials, particularly the professional journals of the British and American cavalry arms, Henning explores their interaction with the new military aviation technology. While it was the development of ground vehicles powered by internal combustion engines which was to sound the death knell of traditional cavalry, it was actually not mechanisation but the later development of heavier-than-air aviation technology that first threatened the existence of traditional horse cavalry, and in this volume Henning fills a gap in the literature

by looking at the less-studied relationship between military aviation and the cavalry from the first days of powered flight up to the onset of the Second World War.

Even before 1903, lighter-than-air aircraft had been employed for reconnaissance, and the Wright Brothers and their successors in the developing aircraft industry were not slow to promote their progeny as still better answers to the question of what lay on the other side of the hill. Given that reconnaissance and scouting were key cavalry missions it was inevitable, then, that the new technology would present a challenge to the cavalry and according to Henning's research, cavalrymen in both Britain and the United States responded to it by insisting that aircraft undergo a process of development and testing, not because they were fundamentally anti-airplane, but rather with a view to the possible incorporation of aircraft into cavalry units or cooperation between the cavalry and air arms. During the interwar years, cavalrymen developed doctrine for joint operations and tested it in exercises. Indeed, cavalrymen evinced a readiness, particularly in the British case, where the tradition of cavalry shock action was stronger, to abandon some roles and missions to aircraft in the hope that this might even strengthen the cavalry by allowing it to concentrate on what cavalrymen saw as their core missions. However, both the RAF and the Army Air Corps would abandon meaningful cooperation with their cavalry arms as a result of internal doctrinal considerations and economic parsimony. These effects were most marked in the British case.

While Henning shows that British and American cavalrymen's response to the airplane had many shared characteristics, the two country's cavalry arms had different traditions and were operating in different environments. A key distinction was the British requirement to police its empire, a responsibility which, with the exception of the Philippines, was absent

for the United States. Unlike the United States, where the cavalry and Air Corps were both members of the same service, the RAF was the world's first independent air force which, in the straightened circumstances of the interwar years, was fighting for its life. In response the RAF hit upon the idea of 'air control' by which it claimed that the RAF could conduct colonial policing operations more cheaply than ground forces, and the British government endorsed this approach as a cost-saving measure. In practice, as Henning appreciates from the balance of modern scholarship, the efficacy of air control was a myth, but it, along with the RAF's dedication to the primacy of strategic bombing, provided rationales for the service to downgrade cooperation with the army and to argue that if financial cuts must be made they should be made to the Army rather than the RAF. The Army Air Corps also became increasingly committed to strategic bombing with similar consequences for cooperation with the ground forces. The concentration of historians on this development of classical airpower theory as the driving force behind both British and American military airpower has obscured the connection between cavalry and aviation, and Henning restores this hidden history to full view.

She hopes also, that a subsidiary consequence of her work might be the establishment of 'insights into how organisations respond to novel technologies that threaten to alter or eliminate them'. (8) These insights are certainly present in this developed version of Henning's Texas A & M PhD dissertation. Not only will this book be of general interest to historians of airpower (and cavalry), but it is also an illuminating case study of the impact of new technology and it is a generic point worth making that no matter how successful a technology might eventually prove to be, it is rarely immediately so, and older technologies may continue to soldier on for years and even decades, as they did with the horse cavalry between the wars; and it is likely to continue to be worthwhile asking questions about what

advantages may accrue from the slavish adoption of a new technology in the short term, to the exclusion of all else, when despite the inflated claims of the new technology's adherents, the old technology may still be effective. As Henning notes in her conclusion: 'There is an irony in that much of the criticism of cavalymen ("the old") in the early twentieth century was originated by aviation advocates ("the new"), whose twenty-first century successors are facing a similar challenge of their own' (155) in the shape of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems.

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