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**The Second World War: Historical Reverberation, Fact Regurgitation,
or Fresh Interpretation? A Review Article.**

Taylor Downing, *Spies in the Sky: The Secret Battle for Aerial Intelligence during World War II*

(London: Little, Brown, 2011), ISBN: 9781408702802.

Robert S. Ehlers, Jr., *Targeting the Third Reich: Air Intelligence and the Allied Bombing Campaigns* (Kansas: University Press, 2009), ISBN: 9780700616824.

Benoît Lemay (translated by Pierce Heyward), *Erich von Manstein: Hitler's Master Strategist* (Newbury: Casemate, 2010), ISBN: 9781612000596.

Evan Mawdsley, *World War II: A New History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), ISBN: 9780521608435.

Niklas Zetterling and Michael Tamelander, *Bismarck: The Final Days of Germany's Greatest Battleship* (Newbury: Casemate, 2009), ISBN: 9781935149040.

Almost seven decades have passed since the Second World War. English-speaking 'westerners' are still obsessed by the cataclysmic total wars of the first half of the twentieth century. The seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Britain has recently passed with public fervour; the seventieth anniversary of the British victory at El Alamein is upon us, followed no doubt by glorious pomp and ceremony heralding the seventieth anniversary of the Normandy landings, and dwarfed in comparison to the hundredth anniversary of the First World War. Such historical milestones are held with much

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enthusiasm; infused as they are with precious notions of freedom and democracy. Hew Strachan recently commented that many booksellers ‘acknowledge two sorts of history: ‘history’ pure and simple and ‘military history’”, and of the latter the ‘Second World War is still the biggest driver in this burgeoning sector’.² Hardly a month goes by when there is not a new publication on a certain aspect of Second World War history. The *need* for such histories seems not to be an issue; rather we collectively *want* such histories; or perhaps we *want* to write them, and read them – the latter pastime of course commercially fuels the former. However, as the scholarly requirement for *breaking new ground* in the history of the Second World War becomes ever narrower, we must ask the fundamental question of whether we are endlessly repeating the same old histories, and subsequently regurgitating the same old primary source material. And if this is indeed the case then we must further ask ourselves if we really *need* fresh interpretations of the last world war; has *myth-busting* become a requisite responsibility for historians of the Second World War; and ultimately, is there anything factual that we do not already know about the tumultuous mid-twentieth-century War?

There appears to be an insatiable appetite for histories of the Second World War, and as the interminable world war anniversaries dictate, we naturally hanker for narratives of battlefield glory. For the British, one particular naval event of the Second World War, above all others, continues to fascinate. The relentless pursuit and eventual sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck* has been written about extensively, in many languages, both by academic historians and popular historians alike.³ Even the great naval novelist C.S.

² Hew Strachan, ‘Merging past with present: a history of the military historian’, *Despatches*, 2: 13 (Winter 2011), 26.

³ For the best of the English texts see Captain Russell Grenfell, *The Bismarck Episode* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948); Ludovic Kennedy, *Pursuit: The Sinking of Bismarck* (London: Collins, 1954); Brian Betham Schofield, *Loss of the Bismarck* (London: Ian Allen, 1971); Robert J. Winklareth, *The Bismarck Chase: New Light on a Famous Engagement* (London: Chatham Publishing, 1998); Graham Rhys-Jones, *The Loss of the Bismarck: An Avoidable Disaster* (London: Cassell & Co., 1999); David J. Bercuson and Holger H. Herwig, *The Destruction of the Bismarck* (New York: Overlook Press, 2001).

Forester (of Horatio Hornblower fame) wrote a fictional account of the gripping last few days of the two largest warships afloat at the time.⁴ Perhaps surprisingly, there has only been the one cinematic portrayal of the sinking of the *Bismarck*, which was more of the typical post-war propaganda of British loss and plucky dusting-down, and getting on with the job despite all adversity.⁵ With such a wealth of cultural media and scholarly material retelling the story for us, we must ask if we *need* a revision.

The recent publication entitled *Bismarck: The Final Days of Germany's Greatest Battleship* makes a satisfactory acknowledgement of the fact that we do. There is a twofold reason for this: firstly, the German authors Niklas Zetterling and Michael Tamelander present their interpretation of the sinking of the *Bismarck* within a much wider context of the German surface-raider warfare strategy – the so-called ‘commerce war’, or *Guerre de Course*. In doing so, the authors detail the 1940/41 successes of the pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer* and the heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper*, through to the early 1941 Operation Berlin when the two battleships (or battle-cruisers) *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, commanded by Admiral Günther Lütjens, rampaged across the North Atlantic seeking and sinking British merchant vessels.⁶ Following these successes Lütjen’s was rewarded with command of the new grand battleship *Bismarck*, and was ordered to lead a similar

⁴ Cecil Scott Forester, *Hunting the Bismarck* (St. Albans: Mayflower Books Ltd. 1974). Forester’s account was published in the USA under the title of *The Last Nine Days of the “Bismarck”* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1959). In a review in *Military Affairs*, Henry H. Adams commented that Forester’s ‘novelist’s technique’ would ‘help impress upon the public something of the role and importance of sea power in those dark days’; although Adams referred students to Captain Grenfell’s more knowledgeable account.

⁵ John Brabourne’s production of *Sink of Bismarck!* Twentieth Century Fox, 1959.

⁶ Niklas Zetterling and Michael Tamelander, *Bismarck: The Final Days of Germany's Greatest Battleship* (Newbury: Casemate, 2009), pp. 41-82. Zetterling and Tamelander claim that the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* have often been referred inappropriately as battle-cruisers; these two ships were fast, but not at the expense of protection, p. 21. It is interesting to note that there has not been the same fascination for the eventual sinking of these vessels; the *Scharnhorst*, for example, was also hunted and sank by the Royal Navy but rarely is the matter discussed in comparison to the hunting and sinking of *Bismarck*. For two unusual British texts see John Winton, *Death of the Scharnhorst* (London: Cassell, 2001) and A.J. Watts, *The Loss of the Scharnhorst* (London: Ian Allen, 1970). For a rare contemporary German account see Fritz-Otto Busch, *The Drama of the Scharnhorst: A Factual Account from the German Viewpoint* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2001), translated by Eleanor Breckett and Anton Ehrenzweig, first published London: Robert Hale Limited, 1956.

operation to Berlin, proposed by the OKM (*Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine*), and named *Operation Rheinübung* ('Rhine Exercise'). Taking up almost one third of Zetterling's and Tamelander's entire narrative, this wider context of continual German surface-raider warfare (and its reasoning) forms part of the justification for the Germans' later rashness with *Bismarck*, their most powerful battleship, and for the British tenacity to sink her. Secondly, and much more importantly, Zetterling and Tamelander place a great deal of emphasis on much less discussed Intelligence-related matters; of the scarcity of Intelligence from *B-Dienst* provided to the *Kriegsmarine*, and the wealth of Intelligence from many varied sources made available to the Royal Navy. The Intelligence factor was crucial to the fate of the *Bismarck*, as much as her sinking was more crucial to British politics and geopolitics than many commentators allow; the reasons for which are worth exploring.

At the turn of May 1941, the British must have felt that they were losing the war. Despite fending off the *Luftwaffe* in the Battle of Britain, the United Kingdom had been subjected to persistent bombing; Erwin Rommel had pushed British forces to the Egyptian border, Winston Churchill's defence of Crete was proving to be a disaster; shipping was being lost at an alarming rate. In typical British understatement, John Colville recalled that the spring of 1941 was 'a low point' for the British in the war.⁷ To add to the woe, on 24 May HMS *Hood* was sunk with almost all hands by the German battleship *Bismarck*. Revenge and retaliation were desperately, morally, and politically required.

In his 'history' of the Second World War, Churchill first referred to *Bismarck* in a chapter entitled 'Battle of the Atlantic: American Intervention'. He joyously declared that on the

⁷ John Colville interviewed for *The World at War*, a 1974 television series produced by Jeremy Isaacs for Thames Television (re-issued on DVD by Freemantle Enterprises). This quote from Colville can be found in the episode entitled 'Alone: May 1940-May 1941', individually produced by David Elstein.

day the *Bismarck* went to the bottom of the ocean President Roosevelt declared that the European war had approached the 'brink of the western hemisphere itself'.⁸ For Churchill, this would have been the primary concern at the time of writing – how the German Atlantic raiding strategy and stalwart British defiance had dually encouraged the USA into war with Germany – that and, as David Reynolds commented, Churchill's arousal over battles to the death against great surface ships.⁹ But there was more at stake than is often considered. Moreover, the USA's interest in *Bismarck* has rarely been emphasised. A large percentage of the action took place within the newly designated US Security Zone, and neither the Royal Navy, nor the US Navy possessed a battleship to match: *Bismarck* was, as Corelli Barnett stated, 'as formidable a fighting ship as German technology could contrive'.¹⁰ In order to ensure command of the oceans, at least on the surface, *Bismarck* had to be immobilised at worst, and sunk at best. When the latter occurred President Roosevelt informed Churchill: 'All of us are very happy by the fine tracking down of the Bismarck and that she is literally gone for good'.¹¹

Churchill's account of the pursuit of the *Bismarck* is still a highly enthralling read. However, it raises more questions than answers, particularly with statements such as we 'became conscious' and 'we learned'.¹² The Admiralty learnt of course from Ultra, radar

⁸ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume Three: The Grand Alliance* (London: The Reprint Society, 1952), p. 121. This third volume was originally published in 1950.

⁹ David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 319. Churchill showed much the same enthusiasm over the Chasing and eventual scuttling of the *Graf Spee*, see Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume One: The Gathering Storm* (London: The Reprint Society, 1950), p. 423; and the *Bismarck*'s sister ship *Tirpitz*, see Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume Five: Closing the Ring* (London: The Reprint Society, 1954), pp. 212-223. For more on *Tirpitz*, and indeed on Churchill's obsessive determination to destroy all German battleships, see Patrick Bishop, *Target Tirpitz: X-Craft, Agents and Dambusters – The Epic Quest to Destroy Hitler's Mightiest Warship* (London: HarperPress, 2012).

¹⁰ Corelli Barnett, *Engage the Enemy more Closely: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 281. Barnett's tenth chapter entitled '*The Bismarck Must Be Sunk At All Costs*' is one of the finest succinct accounts of the *Bismarck* episode available.

¹¹ John Terraine, *Business in Great Waters: The U-Boat Wars, 1916-1945* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999), p. 343.

¹² Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, p. 245; see also Reynolds, *In Command of History*, especially pp. 161-3; David Reynolds, 'How Churchill and the cabinet office wrote *The Second World War*', *Historical Research*, 78: 201

and aerial reconnaissance; and these are three key elements of the history of the Second World War we are now fully conscious of historically. Placing these in the correct context relative to the pursuit and sinking of the *Bismarck* has rarely been achieved satisfactorily by historians. Churchill instead was keen to exaggerate the importance of the ‘battleship and the gun’; believing the first blow to the *Bismarck* by HMS *Prince of Wales* to be the critical thorn in the side which further injuries compounded.¹³ The critical factor in *Bismarck*’s fate has often been revised since of course; one historian, for example, placed much greater emphasis on the torpedo-carrying Swordfish aircraft flying from HMS *Ark Royal* and the torpedo-carrying Royal Navy destroyers which arrived in numbers for the ‘kill’; another commentator, television journalist Ludovic Kennedy preferred more opaque reasoning, such as that *Bismarck*’s mission ‘came too late’, that she lacked oil, and that the hit on the *Bismarck*’s rudder from *Ark Royal*’s swordfish was, as the Germans said ‘one in a hundred thousand’.¹⁴ Zetterling and Tamelander place more emphasis on three other factors: on British radar developments which enabled the British to persistently relocate the *Bismarck* at crucial moments; the British capacity to read Naval Enigma (of the Hydra variety) which enabled them to seek and destroy German oil tankers and supply ships, the lack of which ultimately forced Lütjens to fatefully head for Brest; but also luck – for fortune first favoured the Germans in the *Bismarck* affair, and then later the British.¹⁵

(August 2005), 413-415; and David Reynolds, ‘The Ultra Secret and Churchill’s War Memoirs’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 20: 2 (June 2005), 209-224

¹³ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, p. 259.

¹⁴ See Schofield, *Loss of the Bismarck*, pp. 67-68; Kennedy, *Pursuit*, p. 213. It is interesting to note that Ludovic Kennedy’s father had served (and died) on the British armed merchant ship *Kawalpindi* which was sunk by the *Scharnhorst*. Ludovic Kennedy himself served as Lieutenant on board the destroyer HMS *Tartar*, which was involved in the pursuit and sinking of the *Bismarck*. He also wrote a fascinating account of the *Tirpitz*, in *Menace: The Life and Death of the Tirpitz* (London: BCA, 1979).

¹⁵ Zetterling and Tamelander, *Bismarck*, pp. 289 and 293-4. The authors also agree with Kennedy’s point, that had the *Kriegsmarine* saved *Bismarck* until her sister ship *Tirpitz* was ready, and then sent a combined force consisting of *Bismarck*, *Tirpitz*, *Scharnhorst*, and *Gneisenau*, then the Royal Navy would have been in a very difficult position, p. 292.

In their interpretation Zetterling and Tamelander have placed heavy reliance on the memoirs of two survivors of the actual event; Lieutenant Burkhardt von Müllenheim-Rechberg who had the fortune (or misfortune) to be the senior surviving officer from the *Bismarck*, and signalman Ted Briggs, who served aboard *Hood*. But is this sufficient source application to justify a new history of these events? Perhaps not; particularly as Müllenheim-Rechberg's memoirs were published as early as 1960, and translated into English in 1980.¹⁶ Ted Briggs's harrowing account of his experience on the ill-fated HMS *Hood*, and subsequent rescue from the icy waters of the North Atlantic, can be accessed online!¹⁷ Further primary source application is sparse; there is some reference to contemporary documentation, from the Bundesarchive-Militärarchiv in Freiberg, and the National Archives in Kew, but it is limited. The bulk of Zetterling's and Tamelander's interpretation therefore is based heavily on secondary sources. Moreover, there are slight syntax errors in the text (approximately ten mistakes throughout), which are perhaps owing to translation.

Nevertheless, Zetterling and Tamelander have produced a fast-flowing, lucid account of German surface-raider warfare and the British response. Their narrative is supported by superb maps detailing the daily events as they occurred simultaneously. These aid the reader significantly, for each map shows the positions of all 56 Royal Navy (excluding the eight British submarines) and 13 *Kriegsmarine* ships (excluding U-boats) as they were involved, directly or indirectly, during the five dramatic days of *Bismarck*'s voyage in May

¹⁶ Jochen Brennecke, *Schlachtschiff Bismarck* (Munich: Kohlers, 1960); Baron Burkhard von Mullenheim-Rechberg (translated by Jack Sweetman), *Battleship Bismarck: A Survivor's Story* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1980). It is interesting to note that Mullenheim-Rechberg believed that the *Bismarck*'s ultimate sinking was due to scuttling charges placed by her own crew. This does seem hard to believe, even now.

¹⁷ See www.hmshood.com/crew/remember/tedflagship.htm, accessed 2 January 2012. This webpage, from the website 'H.M.S. Hood Association: Battle Cruiser Hood', provides an excerpt from Ted Briggs and Alan Coles, *Flagship Hood: The Fate of Britain's Mightiest Warship* (London: Robert Hale, 1985).

1941.¹⁸ Added to this is the important fact that the authors have appropriately contextualised Intelligence-related technological aspects of this historic event; matters which have until recently been isolated within Intelligence-specific histories.¹⁹ Although this is not novel history, placing such important technological matters into their appropriate historical context is indeed welcome.²⁰

The Enigma used by *Bismarck* was of the new Neptun variety. This communication encryption device was only used on the rare occasions when German heavy ships ventured out of port. For this reason above others the Bletchley Park codebreakers were unable to decipher Neptun during the *Bismarck* crisis. They were manually able to break the codes but never in time to affect the chase.²¹ In fact, decryption of Neptun did not become current until 1 June 1941, frustratingly for the British, only five days after the *Bismarck* was sunk.²² Thus the British were limited to the (albeit important) sinking of German fuel and supply ships, locations of which were revealed by Hydra Enigma, which Bletchley could decipher in adequate time. However, German Airforce Enigma had also been available for some six months, so when the chief of staff of the *Luftwaffe*, General Hans Jeschonnek, used Enigma to request details of his son's arrival in France, he inadvertently revealed the *Bismarck*'s likely destination because his son was serving as a cadet on the ship. At the crucial moment then, before the *Bismarck* sailed into the

¹⁸ Such overwhelming numbers in favour of the British vividly demonstrate the Royal Navy's dogged determination to sink the *Bismarck*; no doubt heavily influenced by the politics of the day.

¹⁹ As example, see Patrick Beesly, *Very Special Intelligence: The Story of the Admiralty's Operational Intelligence Centre, 1939-1945* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd. 1977); in which Beesly dedicates a whole chapter on the sinking of the *Bismarck*.

²⁰ See for example, Donald P. Steury, 'Naval Intelligence, the Atlantic Campaign and the Sinking of the *Bismarck*: A Study in the Integration of Intelligence into the Conduct of Naval Warfare', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22 (1987), 209-233; in which Steury importantly posited that the 'decisive role played by intelligence in the pursuit of the *Bismarck* was a result of a confluence of technological innovations that altered the character of naval warfare in the mid-twentieth century'.

²¹ See Zetterling and Tamelander, pp. 227-8.

²² For more details on all of these matters, see Ronald Lewin, *Ultra goes to War: The Secret Story* (London: BCA, 1978), pp. 201-203; Ralph Bennett, *Behind the Battle: Intelligence in the War with Germany, 1939-45* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), pp. 66-67. See also Beesly, *Very Special Intelligence*, particularly the chapter entitled 'June-December 1941 – Special Intelligence at Last', pp. 88-101, which refers to the eventual cracking of the Neptun Enigma code.

protection of the continental *Luftwaffe* umbrella, Ultra was able to play its part. All-in-all, a combination of sources had played crucial roles in the *Bismarck* story – a friendly neutral Swedish ship which had alerted British Intelligence of the *Bismarck*'s initial breakout; the Norwegian Resistance man who had alerted the British that the *Bismarck* was off the west coast of Norway; photographic reconnaissance from Coastal Command which photographed *Bismarck* refuelling and replenishing supplies in Bergen; land and ship-borne radar which tracked *Bismarck* extensively, and finally high-grade signals Intelligence which sounded the final death knell for *Bismarck*. As one historian of Intelligence remarked, the story of the *Bismarck* vividly illustrates the co-operation between different types of Intelligence which was to be the hallmark of Allied success.²³

Photographic reconnaissance (PR) has a fascinating history that has rarely been studied in depth. Of particular fascination is that following the remarkable experimental processes in this field of Intelligence during the First World War, all powers almost entirely neglected PR until the Second World War. And in the latter war, the Allies were tremendously superior; so much so that it was, arguably, as crucial to Allied success as was the work of Bletchley Park. However, it is important to emphasise that PR was not enough by itself. The interpretation of the photographs was vital to *all* aspects of offensive war, and the history of this wartime pursuit has been told even less.²⁴ Unlike PR, which spanned the Services, photographic interpretation (PI) was an Air Ministry organisation, and specifically an Air Intelligence source, yet it served all Services admirably throughout the whole of the Second World War (at least after the period of

²³ Bennett, *Behind the Battle*, pp. 66-67.

²⁴ See Constance Babington-Smith, *Evidence in Camera: The Story of Photographic Intelligence in the Second World War* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958); Ursula Powys-Lybbe, *Eye of Intelligence* (London: William Kimber, 1983). Babington-Smith and Powys-Lybbe were both interpreters at the Allied Central Interpretation Unit at Medmenham. For a full wartime Intelligence context see the first four volumes of Francis Harry Hinsley, E. E. Thomas, C. F. G. Ransom, and R. C. Knight, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1979-1990).

phoney war), and deserves to be much more widely recognised as having done so.²⁵ Moreover, there exists in the National Archives the Air Ministry and the Royal Air Force (RAF) Air Historical Branch (AHB) collections pertaining to photographic reconnaissance that also deserve much more focus than they have ever hitherto had.²⁶

Two new publications on Second World War photographic reconnaissance and interpretation help to reduce the need for such focus. Both authors have engaged with the AHB history, and both have made significant beginnings in placing the Central Interpretation Unit (later the Allied Central Interpretation Unit) at Medmenham into its appropriate wartime context. Indeed, Robert S. Ehlers, Jr. in his *Targeting the Third Reich: Air Intelligence and the Allied Bombing Campaigns* begins his assessment with a chapter entitled 'Air Intelligence in its Historical Context', positing that only a handful of books have discussed such issues in more than cursory fashion.²⁷ Clearly, as the book title suggests, Ehlers focus is on the Allied Strategic Bombing Campaign; his emphasis is on the value of PR and PI to both Bomber Command and the United States Army Air Force (USAAF), and their respective and collaborative effectiveness in targeting the Third Reich.

The title of Ehlers's Chapter Three – 'Lessons Learned, Unlearned, and Forgotten' – vividly emphasises the point made earlier about the interwar neglect of PR and PI. However, one of the Allies' primary attributes in their war effort, particularly in the realms of Intelligence, was pragmatism. From rudimentary unorthodox beginnings, PR and PI – first as an RAF organisation, then attached to RAF Coastal Command, and

²⁵ For the British Army photographic reconnaissance organisation see Peter Meads, *The Eye in the Air: History of Air Observation and Reconnaissance for the Army 1785-1945* (London: The Stationery Office, 1984).

²⁶ Air Ministry Records AIR 41 series, comprising the Air Historical Branch Narratives held in The National Archives, Kew, London.

²⁷ Robert S. Ehlers Jr., *Targeting the Third Reich: Air Intelligence and the Allied Bombing Campaigns* (Kansas: University Press, 2009), p. 3.

finally as an autonomous enterprise under the Air Ministry umbrella – experienced a phenomenally steep learning curve; one that was tackled especially well (the analogy ‘caterpillar to butterfly’ is apt here – the time with Coastal Command being the pupae stage of growth). Ehlers relays the history of this metamorphosis particularly well in the first quarter of his book. Thereafter, *Targeting the Third Reich* explores the initially frosty relationship between PR/PI and Bomber Command, and the almost seamless close co-ordination between the RAF and USAAF experienced at Medmenham. Before complete PI/PR unification, the British, for their part, lacked emphasis on operational capabilities with inaccurate bombing; while the Americans suffered from a lack of experience in the pursuit of Air Intelligence. Because of this, Ehlers states, the Americans experienced a near ‘complete reliance on the British’, when they eventually filtered into Medmenham.²⁸ The new-found relationship was also technological; for although the British excelled in high-speed, high-altitude aircraft, the Americans possessed highly-advanced cameras and film.²⁹ For Ehlers, this transatlantic unification was when British (and Allied) Air Intelligence reached maturity; as late as January 1943 through to January 1944. *Targeting the Third Reich* follows this maturity from the highly organised and destructive bombing of German (and occupied territory) targets through D-Day, to the end of the war.

Of particular note is Ehlers consideration of science and scientists throughout. Rarely has the sterling work of the scientific organisation dubbed Research and Experiments Department Eight (RE8) been historically discussed with appropriate effect; Ehlers does this well, explaining in detail precisely why ‘American airmen came to value RE8 damage reports highly’.³⁰ The work of the cryptanalysts is not neglected either. In fact, Ehlers does not fall foul of the all-too common mistake of over-estimating the value of Ultra

²⁸ Ehlers, *Targeting the Third Reich*, p. 84.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Intelligence. For Ehlers, a ‘superb reconnaissance capability came together synergistically with the world’s best signals intelligence and cryptographic units at Bletchley Park’, to provide the Allies with ‘a deep knowledge of the German war effort’s vulnerabilities’.³¹ Technical experts and analysts were also gathered together for organisations specifically designed to target these vulnerabilities, such as the Technical Subcommittee on Axis Oil, the Railway Targets Committee, and the Combined Strategic Targets Committee; organisations which, again, have rarely been discussed by Second World War historians.³²

Although *Targeting the Third Reich* is scholarly brilliant, based as it is extensively on rarely cited primary documentation and the extremely limited secondary source written to date, it is however heavily US-centric. Perhaps this is to be expected from an American scholar, but his overtly transatlantic view of wartime PI/PR provides history with a skewed version of events. In contrast, Taylor Downing’s *Spies in the Sky* adopts an Anglo-centric ‘popular’ history approach to the subject. Downing has provided a thrilling narrative of PI/PR during the Second World War, and convincingly portrays Medmenham’s contribution to the various successes of the Allies – notably in the sinking of German battleships, eventual successes in the Mediterranean, successes directly before and during D-Day, and in Medmenham’s crucial role in the hunt for the Vengeance Weapons. Along the way Downing does produce limited but valuable primary evidence from the rarely-cited Medmenham Collection and the Air Historical Branch Official Narratives on Photographic Reconnaissance held at the National Archives. However, there is so much more primary source material relative to wartime PI/PR that requires historical assessment. Reading Downing’s narrative emphasises the obvious absence of such material.

³¹ Ehlers, *Targeting the Third Reich*, p. 183.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 137, and 162.

This is not to suggest that *Spies in the Sky* is too historically superficial to be useful. On the contrary, because of Downing's more preferred mainstream approach to the subject, his account possesses a sociable quality that histories all too often lack. Downing draws upon, and beautifully highlights, some of the personalities present at Medmenham. He also retells the tale of the creation of the Photographic Reconnaissance Units (in Britain and across the world) and the Central Interpretation Unit at Medmenham; matters which have been overlooked by far too many Second World War historians. History is already familiar with much PI/PR character portrayal from the personal memoirs of photographic interpreters, Constance Babington Smith and Ursula Powys-Lybbe, although Downing provides a good deal more by drawing from oral accounts and unpublished memoirs within the Medmenham collection.³³ The experiences and valuable contributions of PIs, such as Elizabeth Johnston-Smith, Geoffrey Stone, Len Chance, Hazel Scott, and Suzie Morgan, would have otherwise have been lost to history had Downing not taken the care to interview them; accounts from Francis Cator, Alfred Stephenson, Dorothy Garrod, among others would have been overlooked too, had it not been for the invaluable document compilation and preservation of the Medmenham Collection, highlighted and utilised so effectively by Downing throughout *Spies in the Sky*.

The more frequently-cited senior PI characters are also well covered by Downing; Constance Babington Smith, Douglas Kendall, Glyn Daniel, and Claude Wavell among others; also the Heston Wing Commander Geoffrey Tuttle and his daring PR pilots such as Adrian Warburton, Maurice 'Shorty' Longbottom, Bob Niven, and Tony Hill. Downing details well the low level reconnaissance missions these men undertook in unarmed Spitfires, and defines such 'dicing with death', or 'dicing' as it was simply

³³ Babington Smith, *Evidence in Camera*; Powys-Lybbe, *The Eye of Intelligence*.

known, as a ‘rare form of bravery’.³⁴ This form of PR, unique to the British and Americans, had been pioneered by a remarkable man named Sidney Cotton – the supposed ‘Godfather of modern photo recon’ – who was, it has to be said, contemporaneously misunderstood and subsequently mistreated by RAF high command when PR was temporarily transferred to Coastal Command without him. It is pleasing to note that at least history has been kinder to Cotton than were his peers, although a fresh biographical study of his life and exploits is still wanting.³⁵ In the meantime, *Spies in the Sky* and Ehlers’s *Targeting the Third Reich* have both nicely positioned Cotton’s role in the development of PI/PR satisfactorily.

Negative aspects of Downing’s PI/PR character examination are his determined efforts to defend R. V. Jones’s involvement. As a ‘client’ of Medmenham he was heavily dependent on their product in order to ascertain and forewarn of any potential Axis (primarily German) scientific and technological developments which may threaten Britain. Although Jones commended the work of the ‘dicing’ pilots, so often sent on missions he had instigated, he was highly critical of the efforts of the PIs, both during and after the war. Ursula Powys-Lybbe commented that she wrote her book *The Eye of Intelligence* primarily to set the record straight after viewing Jones in the 1977 television series *The Secret War*, and from reading his memoirs *Most Secret War*, both in which he gave the impression that Medmenham PIs were not as efficient as him in interpreting photographs.³⁶ Downing has also employed a loose and vague definition of the word ‘boffins’. He offers an explanation after Ronald Clark in the endnotes, but then dedicates

³⁴ Taylor Downing, *Spies in the Sky: The Secret Battle for Aerial Intelligence during World War II* (London: Little, Brown, 2011), chapter entitled ‘A Rare Form of Bravery’, pp. 131-158.

³⁵ The *Secrets of War* television series, produced by Chris Chesser and Alan Beattie for FreemantleMedia Enterprises (1998), correctly credits the foundation of modern PI/PR to Sidney Cotton in the episode (also called) ‘Spies in the Sky’. It is claimed in this programme that photographic Intelligence is ‘the ultimate Intelligence resource’.

³⁶ Powys-Lybbe, *Eye of Intelligence*, p. 13; *The Secret War*, written and produced by Brian Johnson for the BBC, 1977; Reginald Victor Jones, *Most Secret War: British Scientific Intelligence, 1939-1945* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978).

a whole chapter to 'Boffins at War' which contradicts the very essence of boffinry – that of scientists, engineers, and technicians in employment of the Armed Forces. Just because there were academics from many varied disciplines employed at Medmenham for their unique skills does not mean that we should dub them 'boffins'; such terminology should retain its more traditional exclusivity (to the men at the Telecommunications Research Establishment for example) than is commonly and often over-applied today.

These criticisms aside, Downing's book is a valuable contribution to a sparse historiography on Second World War PI/PR.³⁷ Together with Ehlers's *Targeting the Third Reich*, Downing's *Spies in the Sky* leads us towards a fuller understanding of the essential contribution photography provided toward eventual Allied victory. Fundamentally both books are different; *Targeting the Third Reich* is primarily centred upon the use of airpower in economic warfare, and the role of pre-bombing PR and post-bombing photographic damage assessment in such unprecedented pursuits; in contrast *Spies in the Sky* is much more focused on personalities and the human touch behind PI/PR. Both are historically useful. However, there is much more historical research to be done before Medmenham and the PRUs are given their appropriate place within the history of the Second World War. It has been noted by one source that close to 80 per cent of Allied Intelligence was checked by Medmenham; rarely was an Allied mission enacted without PR/PI scrutiny. The science, technology, and manpower involved deserve much more attention from historians.

One particular result of PR/PI links the three history books reviewed in this article thus far. This is the famous 'picture that sank a battleship', made public to a British and US

³⁷ The most reliable account for the last three decades has been Andrew J. Brookes, *Photo Reconnaissance* (London: Ian Allan, 1975).

audience for the first time as early as 1943.³⁸ For locating and photographing both *Bismarck* and *Prince Eugen*, Spitfire pilot Michael Suckling became a hero within the RAF. More importantly, as Downing enthuses, the attention made PI/PR suddenly famous.³⁹ However, the pursuit of the *Bismarck* was just one episode in a global war of countless events. This is starkly emphasised by Evan Mawdsley who very briefly mentions the *Bismarck* episode as part of the *Kriegsmarine* counter-blockade strategy, which consists of only two paragraphs in a near 500-page 'new history' of World War Two.⁴⁰

Defining his interpretation as a *new history* is problematic, for readers are subliminally inspired to seek fresh evidence of unrevealed facts. Those that do will be disappointed, for this history of the Second World War assumes that all the well known facts are, by now, given and accepted. Fresh primary sources are surprisingly sparse in Mawdsley's *new history*; instead he presents an extensive secondary source reading list for consultation, and directs the reader to various archival and museum websites, thereby encouraging individual research into each of the main belligerents, and each of his chapters' subject matter; perhaps in a fresh approach designed to involve readers in the creation process of World War II history. Mawdsley supplements his own narrative with contemporary literature sources: memoirs, newspaper articles, letters, diaries, etc. It is not unusual source application, or fact regurgitation, however, that makes this 'new history' so valuable. Rather it is the intuitive and often controversial statements of interpretation, which are likely to be cited for generations to come, which make this book a must-read.

The most obvious example is that World War II did not begin with the 3 September 1939 British declaration of war on Germany, but on the night of 7/8 July 1937 with the

³⁸ HMSO, *Coastal Command: The Air Ministry Account of the Part Played by Coastal Command in the Battle of the Seas, 1939-1942* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 9.

³⁹ Downing, *Spies in the Sky*, p. 147.

⁴⁰ Evan Mawdsley, *World War II: A New History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 255-256.

Marco Polo Bridge incident between the Chinese and Japanese Armies. Ever since the 1961 publication of A.J.P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War* historians have hotly debated the reasons behind the outbreak of World War Two, or the Second World War – both definitions which, incidentally, David Reynolds has recently proven to be American cultural literary constructions.⁴¹ What is interesting about the Taylor thesis is that he revised his own stance; stating that 'the title was of course wrong', and that what happened in Poland in September 1939 was a 'minor episode' of the Second World War, and 'not the world war itself, which began either much earlier (in April 1932) or much later (December 1941)'.⁴² This was after, the (still) superb television series *The World at War* had widely publicised the fact that during the years 1939/40 there were two wars – an Asian war, and a European war – both at opposite ends of the globe. Only with the September 1940 Tripartite Pact (which created the Axis) did the two wars become linked, but not yet joined. What joined them was Hitler's declaration of war against America four days after the 'date of infamy' – the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. In effect, with Germany embroiled in a war with the USSR, Hitler's declaration produced an 'alliance as improbable as it was formidable'.⁴³ Most historians (almost all US historians) have followed this reasoning to the letter; that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and Hitler's response to the US declaration of war on Japan, made the wars in 1941 a 'world war'. To further the debate, Reynolds has convincingly argued that the fall of France was the crucial factor which created global conflict; for it caused near-panic in Washington; left Britain heavily dependent on the USA; encouraged the Germans to pursue military goals beyond their capability; 'unleashed' Mussolini; and revolutionised

⁴¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961); David Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (Oxford, OUP, 2006), pp. 14-22.

⁴² A.J.P. Taylor, 'Accident Prone, or What Happened Next', *The Journal of Modern History*, 49: 1 (March 1977), 13.

⁴³ *The World at War*, produced by Jeremy Isaacs for Thames Television, particularly episodes entitled 'Banzai – Japan Strikes: 1941-1942' and 'On Our Way: USA 1939-1942'; See also the accompanying text publication by Mark Arnold-Forster, *The World at War* (London: Collins, 1973), p. 155.

Japanese policy, for the already aggressive Japanese Empire further gained Indo-China in the wake of the fall of France. These latter three points of course are what reinforced the Axis relationship, and set the three primary Axis nations on an (albeit fractious) determination to break up the 'old order'.⁴⁴

Mawdsley also speaks of war designed to replace the 'old order' for the 'new order', and follows much the same lateral thought – that there were two wars which were joined through circumstance. Where Mawdsley differs is in his definition of a 'long World War II' (running from 1937 to 1945); a point of view which itself places the beginnings of war firmly in China. Mawdsley is right to emphasise that for the Axis powers the war was primarily about resources and living space; and thus for the Allies, their war of reluctant but necessary participation was a 'just war' – a 'crusade'.⁴⁵ Yet throughout Mawdsley's narrative the reader becomes aware that the Second World War was also imperialist, brutally racial, and above all industrial. It was also a war of modernity, vividly symbolised particularly by the dramatic developments in aviation and electronics, (especially communication technology). Mawdsley takes care to emphasise that of the crucial elements to Allied success the two that stood out were technological superiority, and mass-production capability; the 'Allies easily won the battle for production' (the US produced three times as many aircraft than the Germans, and the USSR over 50 per cent more tanks), and this was starkly evident on the gruesome battlefields of Europe, and in the Pacific Islands and the furious naval battles in the Pacific Ocean.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, especially the chapter entitled '1940 – Fulcrum of the Twentieth Century?', pp. 23-48.

⁴⁵ Mawdsley, *World War II*, pp. 5, 6 and 12.

⁴⁶ Mawdsley, *World War II*, pp. 361 and 331. Mawdsley provides fascinating statistics to corroborate the Allied technological production superiority throughout the book. A fine example for the Pacific War is the comparisons provided for US and Japanese production of steel, motor vehicles, and oil in 1940: non-belligerent America produced 60 million tons of steel, 4.8 million motor vehicles and 180 million tons of oil; Japan produced 5 million tons of steel, 43,000 motor vehicles, and 2 million tons of oil (p. 198). This is significant evidence for the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' stance in historical consideration as to the origins of the Second World War.

Other controversial statements of interpretation from Mawdsley, that will no doubt fuel further historical debate, are as follows: the alteration of Germany's eastern border (in the Versailles Treaty) was the immediate cause of war in Europe; the Germans did the right thing (especially for diplomacy) in building multi-purpose aircraft; Anglo-French 'betrayal' of Poland is a myth; Hitler re-fought World War I and this time won it; the Battle of Moscow, more than the Battle of Stalingrad, marked the turning point of the war: World War II made the Holocaust possible, but it had no crucial impact on the conduct or immediate course of the war; the importance of the Battle of Kursk can be exaggerated historically, and has been; the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor matched the German Army's 'sickle Cut' operation in France as an equally daring 'operational' solution to a huge strategic challenge; the peripheral conflicts (North Africa, Balkans, Scandinavia, Baltic, Italy, Southern France) were important throughout the war; the P-51 Mustang was the most important fighter of the war; we can blame the Japanese, including the Emperor, for taking so long to surrender; and now that China is a superpower, a different perspective on its role in the war might be considered.⁴⁷

For the British perspective of World War II, Mawdsley provides some grim reminders: the Allies became entangled in Scandinavia partly to help Finland fight the USSR; the death toll of 568 in Coventry on the night of 14/15 November 1940 (the most controversial bombing in Britain) was a hundredth part of the 1943 Hamburg losses (although this estimation seems rather excessive); Churchill's fixation with, and defence of, Greece was his worst strategic mistake of the war; although, to his credit, he never spoke of a 'soft' underbelly of Nazi-occupied Europe; Singapore was the most dramatic example of Britain's 'imperial overstretch'; a grim reminder for the Americans is that

⁴⁷ Mawdsley, *World War II*, pp. 90, 80, 100, 132, 156, 161, 180, 206, 286, 344, 429, and 232 respectively.

more Japanese died (some 410, 000) in air raids in the last six months of the war than the total US combat deaths during the whole war.⁴⁸ Clearly there is still a great deal more to discuss about the Second World War!

Mawdsley applies a unique method of ensuring that his 'new history' is not burdened with over-narration of strategy, tactics, characters and events. Maps are presented where required to supplement the text, and boxes are employed to separate key events and personalities from the main threads of his story of the war. These boxes are provided for prime considerations, such as Ultra, Lend-Lease, and production statistics; for key events of controversy, such as the Nanjing massacre, Dunkirk, the Katyn Massacre, the Warsaw Uprising, Crete, among others; and for key events of diplomatic importance, such as Yalta and Potsdam. Key personnel of the war are provided special treatment within the illustrations. Examination of those whom Mawdsley deems worthy of such treatment further demonstrate the fundamental arguments of this book; that the war in Asia (and the Pacific) was as important as the war in Europe, and to see World War II as a global whole both in its causes and in the way in which it was fought.⁴⁹ In the order they appear, the characters Mawdsley isolates are: Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, Jieshi, Prince Konoe, Churchill, von Manstein, Zhukov, Roosevelt, Tōjō, Marshall, Eisenhower, Truman, and Hirohito, the Emperor of Japan – ten statesmen/heads of state (four of whom were Asian), four Field Marshals/Generals (none of which, notably, are British or French; although it could be argued that Churchill directed Britain's war as a 'warlord', as did Stalin, Hitler, and Tōjō). Notably, there are no Admirals either. Of prime interest is that

⁴⁸ Mawdsley, *World War II* pp. 130, 291, 299, 212, and 410 respectively. In reference to the supposed 'soft underbelly' metaphor, what Churchill actually said to Stalin in 1942, illustrated with a rough drawing of a crocodile, was it was the British 'intention to attack the soft belly of the crocodile as we attacked his hard snout'. In addition, Churchill wrote, in a paper dated 25 November 1942, about the importance of conquering the African shores in order 'to strike at the under-belly of the Axis in effective strength and in the shortest time'. Clearly since, the two incidences have been superimposed; see Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume IV: The Hinge of Fate* (London: The Reprint Society, 1953), pp. 393 and 526; see also Colin F. Baxter, 'Winston Churchill: Military Strategist?', *Military Affairs*, 47: 1 (February 1983), 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

of all Hitler's cronies – politicians, admirals, field (and air) marshals, and generals alike, Mawdsley chose Erich von Manstein. His reasoning is mostly due to Manstein's 'crucial impact on the conduct of German operations in 1940'.⁵⁰

Arguably, Manstein is the lesser known of Hitler's Field Marshals, yet directly after the war, Manstein was headline news for years. This was due to the fact that the Attlee Government came under intense scrutiny in their dealings with Manstein's prosecution as a war criminal.⁵¹ Controversially, in December 1949, Field Marshal Fritz Erich von Manstein was sentenced to eighteen years in prison, essentially for mistreatment of Soviet prisoners of war (he ordered them to mine-sweep among other forced labours) and complicity in the massacre of Eastern European Jewish populations. Even more controversially, Manstein served only four years of his sentence; his liberation being negotiated at the highest level by Churchill, who was then serving his second term as Prime Minister.⁵² During his incarceration, Manstein wrote his two-volume memoirs (dubbed 'Boy was I Brilliant' by one commentator), and these, along with memoirs from Heinz Guderian and Albert Kesselring, have been hugely influential in development of strategic understanding of the conduct and prosecution of the war in Europe.⁵³

French scholar and historian Benoît Lemay of the University of Montreal has meticulously scrutinised Manstein's memoirs in a quest for the historical truth behind a

⁵⁰ Mawdsley, *World War II*, p. 121. Interestingly, this links well with Reynolds's stance of the fall of France being the primary factor in determining the pivot for the war turning global.

⁵¹ For a good overview of these events, see J.H. Hoffman, 'German Field Marshals as War Criminals? A British Embarrassment', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23: 1 (Jan.1988), 17-35.

⁵² Supposedly Churchill denounced the Manstein trial as an Attlee Government attempt to appease the Soviet Union. It has also been mooted that Churchill even donated money to Manstein's defence; see Rob Granger, 'How Guilty were the German Field Marshals?', *Finest Hour*, 150 (Spring 2011), 54-55.

⁵³ Erich von Manstein, *Aus Einem Soldatenleben, 1887-1939 & Velorene Siege* (Bonn: Athenäum, 1958), published in English as the two volume *Lost Victories* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1958); Heinz Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (Heidelberg: Kurt Vowinckel Verlag, 1950), published in English as *Panzer Leader* (London: Da Capo Press, 2001). Albert Kesselring, *Gedanken zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bonn: Athenäum-Verlag, 1955), published in English as *A Soldier's Record* (London: Greenwood Press, 1970). See Richard DiNardo, 'Guderian Panzer pioneer or Myth Maker? By Russell A. Hart', *The Journal of Military History*, 71:2 (April 2007), 560, for the 'Boy was I brilliant' quote.

man Basil Liddell Hart defined as ‘the ablest of all the German generals’.⁵⁴ A.J.P. Taylor once wrote that ‘inside every historian there lies concealed a biographer struggling to get out’, and that the ‘greatest achievements have been made by mixing biography and history together’.⁵⁵ In both instances Lemay does not disappoint. This biography is superb in every way; it is heavily researched (almost entirely from German archives and German and English secondary sources), is translated almost perfectly, and is presented with such splendid historical appreciation of the subject matter surrounding Manstein’s war. This latter point is important, because, as the publication title suggests, Lemay focuses almost entirely on Manstein’s military career, specifically relative to the Second World War, rather than his early career and other aspects of Manstein’s life. As such, this book is a valuable contribution to the historiography of 1939-1945 war in Europe.

Lemay begins by emphasising this very point; that compared to the western fascination for Erwin Rommel, for example, Anglo-Saxon and French historians have accorded Manstein little interest. And yet a fresh look at Manstein’s career provides a new historical perspective of the war on the Eastern front. Lemay also focuses significant attention on Manstein’s involvement in the ideological/racial genocide which took place in Russia, and questions how much Manstein really knew about the Final Solution. This was a primary issue in the Nuremberg Trials of 1946 and in Manstein’s individual trial of 1949; which in both he stood as guarantor for the Wehrmacht, and defended vehemently his belief that he and the General Staff did their duty by following orders, and that Hitler was solely to blame. Indeed, according to General Westphal, the ‘most gifted of [German] military leaders’ was the ‘soul of the [Wehrmacht’s] defence’ after the war. This

⁵⁴ Benoît Lemay, *Erich von Manstein: Hitler’s Master Strategist* (Newbury: Casemate, 2010). The Liddell Hart quote (cited by Lemay on p. 4) is extracted from his *The Other Side of the Hill: Germany’s Generals, Their Rise and Fall, With their Own Account of Military Events, 1939-1945* (London: Cassell, 1951).

⁵⁵ A.J.P. Taylor, ‘The Historian as Biographer’, in Chris Wrigley (ed.), *A.J.P. Taylor: From Napoleon to the Second International, Essays on Nineteenth Century Europe* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993), pp. 24 and 35.

is not doubted; but there is still much to discuss about the politics behind the post-war trials, particularly how the grip of the Cold War affected the decision-making process at the time. As for Manstein's implicit but denied knowledge of the Final Solution and other acts of criminality by the Wehrmacht, Lemay deduces that Manstein was guilty as charged; that like all colonel-generals and field marshals, Manstein accepted monetary and property inducements – the 'Führer's gratitude' for services to Germany – making him a 'coerced' accomplice to Hitler and his regime; that Manstein was active, not passive in genocide; was incapable of not knowing what was occurring behind the front; was undoubtedly in full knowledge of the facts; and was thus a complete liar. This is all the more fascinating as Manstein was born Erich von Lewinski, and was investigated by the SS in 1944 for Jewish lineage. Although this was (and remains) unproven, the implication does add a twist to the tale.⁵⁶

However, while this biographical history of Manstein is certainly not hagiographical, it is also not a demonisation. Wherever deserved, Lemay criticises or praises Manstein accordingly. On the matter of genocide in Russia, Lemay explains that Manstein, like many in German society at the time, inherited anti-Semitic tendencies from the prevalent *Kultur* following the First World War. These were, of course, taken to the extreme by the Third Reich, particularly in the racial and ideological struggle which took place in Bolshevik Russia. Lemay clarifies the fact that all German military leaders were not realistically able to forbid their troops from implementing an order descending directly from the Führer. None of this is exoneration, but rather confirms Lemay's belief that 'the conquest of *Lebensraum*, the extermination of Bolshevism, and the annihilation of the Jews were objectives inextricably joined together'.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Lemay, *Erich von Manstein*, pp. 1, 5, 6, 437, 439, 167-168, 270, 268, 475, 292 and 36.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 293 and 246.

It was in conquest, of course, that Manstein's tactical brilliance ensured his great success, and not surprisingly Lemay waxes lyrical over Manstein's battlefield accomplishments. He was 'both brilliant and daring', and had 'strategic clairvoyance' in designing the 'Sickle Cut' – 'the most gigantic envelopment manoeuvre in military history' – which ensured the fall of France in 1940, and eternal fame for Manstein.⁵⁸ Even Hitler believed that Manstein, then only a Lieutenant-General, had 'an intelligent mind' and was 'a great operational talent' although he believed that Manstein was not to be trusted.⁵⁹ Many of Hitler's cronies did not trust Manstein either, which explains why his Sickle Cut was not initially accepted by the German High Command, and why for the first two years of the war Manstein was a peripheral commander. But the superb success of the Sickle Cut ensured Manstein's legendary status as the 'Schlieffen of the Second World War' – a status he was able to solidify in his unsurpassed successes in the Crimea. As commander of 56th Panzer Corps during Operation Barbarossa, Manstein advanced into Russia faster than any other German general in terrain hardly suitable for tank manoeuvres. Thereafter, he consolidated his position within the command structure on the Eastern front. In the Spring/Summer offensives of 1942 Manstein demonstrated his superb military leadership capabilities, and in July of that year Colonel-General Manstein received his Field Marshal's baton for capturing the Sevastopol fortress. This Lemay states, 'represented unquestionably the crowning moment of Manstein's military career'.⁶⁰

Of the Stalingrad tragedy, Lemay convincingly proves that Manstein is not to be held responsible; but he was responsible for a 'brilliantly orchestrated retreat' from Kursk

⁵⁸ Lemay, *Erich von Manstein*, p. 160.

⁵⁹ Manstein was not a National Socialist henchman, which is perhaps why he was not trusted. This is confirmed in a highly valuable contribution to the historiography of the Second World War entitled *Tapping Hitler's Generals: Transcripts of Secret Conversations, 1942-1945* (Barnsley: Frontline Books, 2007), edited by Sönke Neitzel. When British Intelligence interrogated General Eberbach, (captured in Amiens in August 1944), he said of Manstein; 'I think I can assure you that Manstein was and still is also one of those soldiers who thinks for himself and who is not carried along by the National Socialist Party' (p. 260).

⁶⁰ Lemay, *Erich von Manstein*, pp. 104, 105, 126, 137, 161, 209, and 237.

which delayed the final outcome of the war – a very mixed bag of responsibility. In March 1944, with the *Wehrmacht* in interminable retreat, Hitler awarded Manstein swords to his Knight's cross and declared that his services were no longer required. This was irrespective of the fact that Manstein's defensive successes were achieved at six-to-one odds. Manstein retired to Schleswig-Holstein, and remained there until arrested by the forces of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery.⁶¹ Although requested to do so, Manstein took no part in Count von Stauffenberg's plot to assassinate Hitler, expressing the famous line, 'Prussian Field Marshals do not mutiny'.⁶²

Of particular interest is how Lemay questions Hitler's decisions regarding the halt in France which enabled the 'Dunkirk Miracle', and the halt before Leningrad which resulted in the longest siege in modern history. In both instances, Lemay portrays Manstein as livid over such incomprehensible stupidity. This mirrors Manstein's recollection of Hitler's 'most critical mistakes', and his belief that, given the opportunity to continue the *Blitzkrieg*, the war would have been entirely different. Manstein also displayed bitter disappointment over the cancellation of Operation Sealion – the planned invasion of Britain.⁶³ Lemay further provides some literary historiographical gems for future discussion/debate, such as: the principle of unconditional surrender was in perfect harmony with the Walhalla mentality characteristic of the Führer; the German mistake was to believe that military success could solve political problems; and the invasion of Poland (a campaign the German senior officers were 'dying to fight!') was imperialistic and criminal.⁶⁴ As for Manstein, Lemay's final assessment is that as a man who held

⁶¹ Lemay, *Erich von Manstein*, pp. 323, 378, 416, 434, and 436.

⁶² This quote is often cited. See for example, Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1939-1945: Nemesis* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), p. 666; John Weitz, *Joachim von Ribbentrop: Hitler's Diplomat* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992), p. 276. Lemay cites an alternative of 'Prussian field marshals do not revolt' yet refers to the same source as Kershaw. Perhaps this too is simply semantics related to translation.

⁶³ Lemay, *Erich von Manstein*, pp. 148-153, 174, 185-186, and 210.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 251, 359, 71, and 77.

obedience, loyalty, and a sense of duty as three principle virtues, he ended up allowing himself to become an ‘obedient instrument in a criminal enterprise’.⁶⁵

In 1995, the great military historian John Keegan wrote that the ‘history of the Second World War has not yet been written’, and that perhaps in the next century it will be.⁶⁶ Perhaps we are too soon into the twenty-first century to yet make a significant difference to the ‘history of the Second World War’. However, if the five books reviewed here are representative of the histories being written and published universally, then we are at least heading in the right direction for they represent vibrancy in the history being written about the Second World War. Contextualised histories of specific events of fascination, written by scholars across the world will not only prove inspirational, but will increase our understanding of the contemporary geo-political nature of the Second World War. Zetterling and Tamelander’s *Bismarck* and Lemay’s *Erich von Manstein* demonstrate this only too well; the latter particularly, being written by a French scholar using German archives to study a German subject’s involvement on Polish, French, and Russian soil. So much Second World War literature recently has responded to a fabricated urge to ‘myth-bust’; yet history is representative of so much more, and there are so many aspects of the war not yet historically uncovered. The two studies on the Allied application of hi-tech aerial photographic technology are fine examples of such (and much) ‘needed’ histories, examining as they do still uncharted factors of how the war was fought, lost, and won. Indeed, in the field of the history of science and technology relative to the Second World War, and the organisation and production of such science and technology, there is still so much more historical research to undertake to even begin to appreciate the full historical picture.

⁶⁵ Lemay, *Erich von Manstein*, pp. 19 and 482.

⁶⁶ John Keegan, *The Battle for History: Re-Fighting the Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1997), p. 30.

Robert Berkhofer, after Hayden White, called for historians to ‘tell many different kinds of ‘stories’ from various viewpoints, with many voices, emplotted diversely’.⁶⁷ Although not defined as a postmodern approach, Mawdsley’s ‘new history’ satisfies Berkhofer’s criteria well, employing as it does varied mediums of historical interpretation, ranging from films and websites to diplomatic and archival documentation. Lemay’s historical method of critiquing war memoirs is another example; one which applied liberally could significantly enhance our historical representation of the war. Such source application to represent the past does not (and should not) automatically assume fictive history. Instead, it provides history with less fact regurgitation for the sake of it, and much more intuitive interpretation. This is to be welcomed, and probably will be. Mawdsley is categorised as an ‘international historian’ and his history of World War II (a title he prefers, but which does somehow have a more international presence) is a fine example of the way in which future histories of the war are likely to be written. Histories of the twentieth century written in (and for) the twenty-first century may well be histories of the present; but if that is the way twenty-first century audiences wish to receive their history, then that is their prerogative – one which historians must embrace.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Kevin Passmore, ‘Poststructuralism and History’ in Stefan Berger, Heiko Feldner, and Kevin Passmore (eds), *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2003), p. 125.