

Institution: King's College London		
Unit of Assessment: 28 History		
Title of case study: Using History to Inform UK Naval Strategy and Doctrine		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: March 2005–January 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Tim Benbow	Reader in Strategic Studies	From 2004
Period when the claimed impact occurred: April 2013–May 2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Dr Tim Benbow's research on naval history and naval strategy during and since the Second World War has underpinned sustained engagement with the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Navy. This engagement has influenced new policy and strategy for the use of the new aircraft carriers – one of the UK's most significant military capabilities. It has also informed the Navy's revision and refining of naval doctrine (the fundamental professional knowledge that represents its understanding of how it conducts its roles in policy and strategy, thereby underpinning force planning, education and training and operations), specifically the keystone publications *Fighting Instructions* and *UK Maritime Power*.

2. Underpinning research

Dr Benbow's research has explored how the role and composition of the Royal Navy has evolved as an instrument of UK policy in peace, crisis and war, during and since the Second World War. Through detailed study of key episodes and debates, based on extensive use of primary sources from a number of archives, it has examined how naval power has been understood and used, and how it has adapted as it has faced a series of challenges from changes in technology, the international strategic context and UK foreign and defence policy.

The many parallels between these debates and challenges and those of the contemporary period provide the opportunity to use the past to shed light on the making of policy, strategy and doctrine in the present. Naval capabilities and the context within which they are used have clearly transformed since the middle of the 20th century. However, their roles and utility, as well as many of the core principles for their use, have remained broadly consistent, in terms of ensuring the ability to use the sea and then exercising this ability both to contribute to military operations ashore and to have direct military and diplomatic effect in a wide range of crises and conflicts.

Navies have had a key role in wartime and also in peacetime and crisis

A key theme of Benbow's research has been that that British governments have often found naval forces to offer particular advantages that make them indispensable, notably their utility across the spectrum of conflict, from peacetime diplomacy, to crisis response, to limited war when the use of force is constrained by political and diplomatic considerations, up to major conflict [1,4,6]. Even governments under significant financial pressure have accepted that the UK continues to require the ability to use the sea for economic, diplomatic and military purposes, which has required a navy that includes some sophisticated albeit expensive capabilities, including the ability to project air power from carriers [2,4,6].

Utility of aircraft carriers

Much of Benbow's research analysed the long-running, contentious debate over the utility of aircraft carriers and how they are most effectively used, including during the Second World War [1,5] and during bitter post-war arguments [2,4,6]. Depicted by critics as vulnerable and inferior to land-based air power, they repeatedly survived detailed scrutiny, emanating in part from intense pressure to reduce defence spending, precisely because they demonstrated enormous utility in a broad range of cases and proved to offer some militarily and diplomatically significant advantages over land-based air power — in particular the ability to operate when local air bases did not exist or where their use was denied for political reasons.

Operational differences between naval power and land/air power

Another prominent theme is that how naval power is used, and how it contributes to national and alliance strategy, differs from land and air power [1,3,4,5]. Naval forces tend to operate in a more dispersed fashion, over a greater area, and their campaigns unfold over a longer timescale. Yet individual units, although separated from each other in time and geographically, still act as an integrated whole.

3. References to the research

1. Benbow, T. (2011). 'Menace' to 'Ironclad': the British operations against Dakar (1940) and Madagascar (1942). *Journal of Military History*, 75(3), 769–809. Article in peer-reviewed academic journal.
2. Benbow, T. (2011). British Naval Aviation and the 'Radical Review', 1953–1955. In T. Benbow (Ed.), *British Naval Aviation: The First 100 Years* (pp.125–50). Farnham: Ashgate. Chapter contributed to edited volume.
3. Benbow, T. (2015). The 'operational level' and maritime forces. *RUSI Journal*, 160(5), 52–59. doi:10.1080/03071847.2015.1102545. Article in peer-reviewed academic/professional journal.
4. Benbow, T. (2017). The Queen Elizabeth-class carriers: a historian's perspective. *Naval Review*, 105(4), 360–72. Article in professional journal.
5. Benbow, T. (2017). The contribution of Royal Navy aircraft carriers and the Fleet Air Arm to Operation 'Overlord', 1944, *War in History*, 26(2), 265–286. doi:10.1177/0968344517702417. Article in peer-reviewed journal.
6. Benbow, T. (2018) The Royal Navy and sea power in British strategy, 1945–55. *Historical Research*, 91(252), 375–98. doi:10.1111/1468-2281.12216. Article in peer-reviewed journal. This article was awarded the 2015 Sir Julian Corbett Prize in Modern Naval History by the Institute of Historical Research.

4. Details of the impact

Benbow's research has impacted and influenced government policy and naval strategy for the use of the new aircraft carriers; it has influenced and informed new naval concepts and doctrine for naval operations; and it has informed and helped to shape how the Navy formulates, explains and teaches key concepts. It has therefore benefited the government, the Ministry of Defence, the Royal Navy and the allied navies with which it operates.

In particular, his research has impacted doctrine, which is of great importance to the armed forces as the authoritative codification of their professional knowledge: "*Doctrine draws on the lessons of history, upon original thinking and from experiences gained from training and operations. It sets out the fundamental principles by which military force is employed*" (UK Defence Doctrine, 5th ed., 2014, p.iii). It therefore underpins military plans, procurement, education, training and operations.

Influencing policy and strategy for the new aircraft carriers

Benbow's research informed and influenced government policy and Royal Navy strategy and concepts for the operation of the new aircraft carriers and F35 aircraft, which will be among the UK's principal military capabilities for several decades. This impact is divided into two categories:

Government policy for the new carriers

In 2013–14, the Ministry of Defence Strategy Team was instructed to carry out a study to recommend to the government what should be the future operating pattern for the new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers. At that time, there was no agreed policy of routinely embarking F35 aircraft on the ships, as opposed to operating them primarily from bases on land and using the carriers only occasionally and intermittently.

Building on a previous paper on the historical role of British aircraft carriers [A], Benbow was further commissioned to provide a follow-up paper to inform this Ministry of Defence study, drawing on his historical research on the debates over the use of aircraft carriers and the air group that they operate [2,4,5,6]. The resulting paper was delivered in late 2013, with associated briefings provided, and then published as *Corbett Paper No.13* [B].

According to the Deputy Director, Naval Staff: *“The Strategy Team study then provided the basis for current government policy, from the Strategic Defence & Security Review of 2015 onwards. This policy involves having at least one aircraft carrier always available and with a routinely embarked air group including at least 12 F-35B Lightning II jets in order to maximise its flexibility and value to the UK. As justification for this national policy stance the study explicitly cites Dr Tim Benbow’s Corbett Paper No.13, analysing the history of the use of air power from aircraft carriers and shore bases, as the key evidence. Dr Benbow’s paper, which had been commissioned by MOD’s Defence Concepts & Doctrine Centre in 2013, was assessed by the Strategy Team as the most relevant and authoritative research, demonstrating an important historical pattern of requirement and therefore the utility of such a policy into the future.”* [C]

Royal Navy strategy and concepts for the new carriers

The Maritime Warfare Centre (MWC) is the Royal Navy’s internal think tank and is *“responsible for the development of the Royal Navy’s tactics, techniques and procedures and as such plays a key role in the development of wider operational concepts”* [D]. On account of his research on the history of the Royal Navy’s aircraft carrier operations and their utility compared to other military capabilities [D, citing 2,4], Benbow was invited in May 2019 to give a presentation on the lessons for the new Queen Elizabeth-class carriers. *“The 40 strong audience was made up of service and civil service personnel from the MWC, Navy Command Headquarters, the new aircraft carriers and the carrier strike group headquarters, many of whom were engaged in the delivery and operation of the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier project”* [D].

Benbow’s lecture drew out lessons for the operation of the new carriers, in particular the need to continue to educate and inform policy-makers regarding their utility, their advantages over land-based air power and what they can offer policy and strategy. In the words of the Captain of the MWC: *“This clearly came as a surprise — shock even — to many defence practitioners in the audience who thought that the entry of the ships into service was the end of the battle.”* He continued: *“By providing key influencers, advisors and decision makers within the Royal Navy with better information and understanding of key issues, based on a stronger understanding of its own corporate history, Dr Benbow has helped the Navy make better decisions about the political and military use of these powerful national assets.”* He added that the MWC intends to draw further on Benbow’s research in the future to support its work on carriers [D].

Informing the revision of *Fighting Instructions*

Benbow’s research informed the revision and updating of the classified doctrine of the Royal Navy and how it conceives of and conducts naval operations, refining its understanding of a core concept and drawing on history to illustrate its functioning.

Fighting Instructions is the Navy’s core doctrine publication for operations. It *“represents the Royal Navy explaining what it does and to a varying degree of classification, how it does it”*, to establish a common understanding of modern maritime operations, *“among an audience ranging from civil servants and politicians, to senior rates and junior officers, to Joint (other service) and Allied staffs”* [E]. In 2015, the MWC undertook a fundamental revision of *Fighting Instructions* to take account of planned new capabilities including the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers and the F-35 aircraft.

The MWC approached Benbow *“because his expertise on naval strategy, particularly his research on aircraft carriers and amphibious operations, was highly regarded among officers on the staff of the MWC (who were acquainted with it from time as staff or students at the Joint Services Command and Staff College where he teaches)”* [E]. It commissioned him to write a paper and to provide briefings to inform the revision process. He was to draw on his research of previous periods when the Navy operated the capabilities that it is now regaining [1,4,5,6, plus overall body of work] to consider the key concept of the ‘operational level of war’ (that is, the level of the campaign or theatre, a much debated level between the tactical, at which battles are fought, and the strategic, at which wars are waged). In particular, the MWC sought advice on whether this level of war, generally accepted by the Army and the Royal Air Force, exists for the Navy and if so, whether it differs from the land and air environments and what are the implications for how the Navy operates. The resulting paper, a shorter version of which was published in the professional publication *RUSI Journal* [3], analysed the operational level in naval warfare.

According to the MWC’s then Chief of Staff: *“The paper provided independent and academically credible research to inform and confirm the MWC’s in-house, non-academic analysis*

of the Maritime Operational Level, as a conceptual and practical term ... [It] clarified and provided historical underpinning to deepen our understanding that maritime forces habitually work on a larger span — naval strategy — compared to the Army. It also informed a very live current debate on the relationship between offence and defence, with a growing emphasis on strike capabilities. The result can be seen today in the growth and delivery of F-35 carrier capabilities, development of and investment in the Future Commando Force concept, and a shift in investment towards offensive systems. Dr Benbow's research helped to underpin the context for the new publication, which formally codified a fundamental shift in policy and concepts, and which itself set the conceptual understanding for many subsequent, more specific volumes which provide the Royal Navy with the doctrinal handrail to understand, teach and coherently develop the RN's way of warfare." [E].

Informing the revision of core UK maritime doctrine

Benbow acted as the lead academic advisor for a new, revised edition of the principal official publication for UK naval concepts and doctrine, *UK Maritime Power*, which drew on his research to refine the Navy's understanding of key concepts and to change how they are explained and taught.

UK Maritime Power is *"a core resource in the training and education of officers in the Royal Navy, and also in Allied and partner navies — it also helps to shape wider NATO maritime doctrine"* [F], with secondary audiences in the civil service and government, the media and the public. It sets out an authoritative view of how the Navy understands and performs its role in strategy and defence policy, as a guide for training, procurement and operations. The First Sea Lord (the professional head of the Navy) described it as the *"keystone"* doctrine for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines; it, *"explores the requirement, roles and purpose of UK maritime power ... This doctrine exists to help us understand, to learn from history but more importantly to think about and prepare for the challenges of the future"* [G, p.iii].

When this document underwent revision for its 5th edition in 2016–17, Benbow acted as the lead academic advisor as a result of the expertise derived from his research [especially 1,2,3,4,5,6] to help clarify, refine and explain key concepts. According to the officer who led the revision, *"Benbow's advice and counsel was central in revising the hierarchy of the concepts, and importantly distinguishing between the fundamental principles of maritime power from tactical and operational concepts. The analysis contained in this Fifth Edition drew to a considerable extent on Dr Benbow's input to reduce the number of 'attributes' of maritime power from eight to five, clustered around an overarching attribute of 'influence', which represented a major change on the previous edition."* [F] Benbow's *"advice on the conceptual underpinnings of maritime power theory was invaluable"* in interpreting and presenting the work of classical naval theorists, *"in a manner welcomed by a modern audience"*. The publication used historical vignettes to explain and illustrate key points: *"These real-world examples help to deepen our understanding of the principles of naval strategy and their practical application as they bring the conceptual underpinnings to life. Dr Benbow was the central force in refreshing the old and writing new vignettes for the Fifth Edition."* [F] He wrote three of the vignettes that appear in the final, published version of the document [G], explaining 'decisive battle' (using the Falklands War), 'fleet-in-being' (using the German Navy in the Second World War) and 'maritime manoeuvre' (using the British invasion of Madagascar in 1942).

The resulting document underpins the training and operations of the entire Royal Navy. *"Feedback has confirmed that this revised version and the changes mentioned above have been very well received by the next generation of Naval Officers. In particular the revision of how it explains the conceptual underpinnings of Maritime Power was well received and considered a significant improvement on the previous edition."* [F]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

A. Benbow, T. (2012). *Corbett Paper 9: British Uses of Aircraft Carriers and Amphibious Ships 1945–2010*. Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies.

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/dsd/assets/corbettpaper9.pdf>. This paper was supported by a grant of £2,000 from the Ministry of Defence Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre.

B. Benbow, T. and Bosbotinis, J. (2014). *Corbett Paper 13: The Interoperability of Future UK Air Power, Afloat and Ashore: A Historical Analysis*. Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies.

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/dsd/assets/corbettpaper13.pdf>. This is the published version of a report

Impact case study (REF3)

written with a £2,500 grant from the Ministry of Defence Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre.

C. Letter from Stephen Prince, Deputy Director Naval Staff & Head of Naval Historical Branch, confirming impact on naval policy and doctrine for aircraft carriers.

D. Letter from Captain Christopher O'Flaherty, Royal Navy, Captain Maritime Warfare Centre, confirming impact on naval policy and doctrine for aircraft carriers.

E. Letter from Commander Simon Turnbull, Royal Navy, Commanding Officer HMS Excellent, formerly Chief of Staff, Maritime Warfare Centre, confirming impact on *Fighting Instructions*.

F. Letter from Commander Philip Miles, Royal Navy (retired), formerly of Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, confirming impact on revision of *JDP 0-10, UK Maritime Power*.

G. Ministry of Defence Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (2017). *JDP 0-10, UK Maritime Power*, 5th ed. (Especially vignettes 43–44.)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662000/doctrine_uk_maritime_power_jdp_0_10.pdf.