

ABSTRACT

THROUGH ADVERSITY TO THE STARS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AUTONOMOUS BRITISH ROYAL AIR FORCE

On April 1, 1918 the Royal Flying Corps of the British Army and the Royal Naval Air Service of the British Royal Navy were amalgamated into the Royal Air Force – the first independent air force in history. This study argues that the RAF did not actually gain full independence and autonomy on the day; rather it had to endure many years of struggle brought on by both inter-service rivalries and a recessed British economy. Following the armistice, the RAF was without a defined peace-time role, and therefore faced the possibility of having its funding cut-off. Only after Lord Hugh Trenchard took charge of the fledgling air service and had the foresight to make many of the crucial decisions was the RAF provided with a means of survival. By examining a number of primary and secondary sources, a determination will be made as to when the RAF gained full autonomy within the British defense community.

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