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BALANCING ACT: APPLICATION OF THE PIGEAU-MCCANN COMMAND MODEL IN AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAREER OF LEONARD JOSEPH BIRCHALL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

Effective command is fundamental to mission success in military operations. The model developed by Canadian defence scientists Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann focuses on the human aspect of command and illustrates how achieving balance in competency, authority, and responsibility can lead to favourable operational outcomes. The Pigeau-McCann model is a useful tool for charting a path for current and future commanders as well as analyzing historical figures. By doing the latter, members of the profession of arms can learn from the successes and failures of others and better position themselves to be effective in their own command roles.

This study uses the Pigeau-McCann command model to examine the career of Leonard Joseph Birchall, a Royal Canadian Air Force pilot who was taken prisoner during the Second World War and held captive for over three years. The epitome of a true officer, Birchall managed to overcome incredibly daunting circumstances and thrive as a commander owing to the coalescence of his superior competency, heightened authority, and deepened sense of responsibility. The analysis demonstrates that his ability to achieve and maintain balance in these three dimensions allowed him to exercise effective command despite harsh conditions and inhumane treatment. In doing so, it offers military professionals a real-world example of what can be accomplished when commanders are motivated to succeed in their missions.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

He who wishes to be obeyed must know how to command.

–Niccolò Machiavelli

If one were to stroll into any reasonably well-stocked bookstore in the country, one would be inundated with written works spanning all aspects of the management and leadership domains. The prevalence of such literature is even more pronounced at academic institutions offering advanced degrees in areas such as business administration and organizational behaviour. However, despite the ubiquity and popularity of these publications in the civilian sector, there are far fewer mainstream compositions on the closely related, yet still somewhat niche, topic of military command.[1]

This study will narrow the knowledge gap by illustrating the importance of military command. It will accomplish this objective by employing a framework conceived by former Defence Research and Development Canada[2] scientists Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann in an analysis of Leonard Joseph Birchall, a Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) pilot who was captured by the enemy and imprisoned in Japan during the Second World War. As this study of Birchall demonstrates, command is imbued with elements of both management and leadership, and its effectiveness depends largely on the abilities of the individual in charge.

Stephen Covey, an American author, educator, and organizational consultant, offers that in the business sense, management focuses on an industry's bottom line by addressing *how* certain objectives can be best achieved. Conversely, leadership deals with

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[1]Brian Howieson and Howard Kahn, "Leadership, Management and Command: the Officers' Trinity," in *Airpower Leadership: Theory and Practice* (London: The Stationery Office, 2002), 15.

[2]Formerly known as Defence and Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine.

the top line by considering *what* must be accomplished for a company to succeed.[3] To paraphrase Peter Drucker, a pioneer in the discipline, management is doing things right while leadership is doing the right things.[4] Alan Okros, a retired Canadian naval officer and current professor of military psychology and leadership, points out that management and leadership complement military command. Conventional management activities such as planning, organizing, and allocating resources are routine in the armed forces, and leadership is manifested in the military through its organizational culture. Okros further observes that, although there are not complete overlaps, "aspects of both management and leadership are subsumed under the function of command."[5]

To be sure, management and leadership have rightful places in the military context; however, this study will concentrate on command as it is unique to the profession of arms.[6] The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), of which Canada is a member, defines command as "the authority vested in an individual of the armed forces for the direction, coordination, and control of military forces."[7] It is a duty that must not be taken lightly, particularly when those given command face the added challenge of navigating through the "fog and friction" of war. Famed military theorist Carl von Clausewitz coined that term to describe the inevitable uncertainty and the propensity for unforeseen problems to arise on the battlefield at the most inopportune

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[3]Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 101.

[4]Peter Ferdinand Drucker, *Peter Drucker on the Profession of Management* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998), 67.

[5]Alan Okros, "The Conflated Trinity: Command, Leadership and Management," in *Leadership in the Canadian Military Context* (Kingston: Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2010), 8-9.

[6]Department of National Defence (DND), A-PA-005-000/AP-001, *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada 2009* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2009), 4, 27.

[7]North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Standardization Agency, AAP-06, *NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions (English and French)* (Brussels: NATO, 2013), 2-C-8. The same definition appears in Canadian doctrine: DND, B-GJ-005-300/FP-001, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication (CFJP) 3.0: Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2011), 3-1; DND, B-GA-401-000/FP-001, *Canadian Forces Aerospace Command Doctrine* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2012), 4.

times.[8] With national objectives and the lives of subordinates often hinging on the outcome of their decisions, military commanders therefore must always exercise diligence when delivering orders.

While the concept of command will be examined in depth, it is important to note that there are instances in which it cannot be discussed in isolation. Therefore, its counterpart – control – also must be considered to some extent in order to provide a thorough analysis. Once a commander issues an order, it is carried out via various control mechanisms. NATO describes control as "the authority exercised by a commander over part of the activities of subordinate organizations . . . that encompasses the responsibility for implementing orders or directives."[9] While control is an important element of military operations, it remains subsidiary to command. Just as the scope of leadership is broader than that of management, "*command* is strategic – concerned with the 'big picture' – while *control* is tactical or operational and focused on the more immediate management of forces."[10] Although command and control are highly interrelated and often codependent, this study's primary focus will be on command.[11]

Since military professionals exercise command, the human element is paramount. Kenneth Allard, a retired United States (U.S.) Army intelligence officer and military analyst, offers in *Command, Control, and the Common Defense* that one of the most salient attributes of the NATO definitions is the "personal nature of command itself,

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[8]Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119-121.

[9]NATO, *NATO Glossary* . . ., 2-C-13.

[10]Thomas P. Coakley, *Command and Control for War and Peace* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1992), 36.

[11]Collectively known as C^2, command and control are established and perennial foci of armed forces around the world. Simply put, C^2 is "the exercise of authority and direction by a commander over assigned, allocated and attached forces in the accomplishment of a mission." DND, *CFJP 3.0: Operations*, GL-2; DND, *Canadian Forces Aerospace Command Doctrine*, 49.

especially the fact that it is vested in an individual who, being responsible for the 'direction, coordination, and control of military forces,' is then legally and professionally accountable for everything those forces do or fail to do."[12] Additionally, Samuel Hays and William Thomas, both of whom were once professors of leadership at the U.S. Military Academy, preach the importance of human relations and the imperative for commanders to personally relate to their subordinates in *Taking Command: The Art and Science of Military Leadership*.[13] Similarly, in his seminal work *The Mask of Command*, British military historian John Keegan emphasizes the need for a commander to be able "to speak directly to his men, raising their spirits in times of trouble, inspiring them at moments of crisis and thanking them in victory."[14] Finally, *Command in War*, an influential book by renowned Israeli military historian and theorist Martin Van Creveld, stresses the significance of motivation, which can be best provided by a human being.[15]

Thomas Czerwinski, an American political scientist and former infantryman, offers that there are three main styles of command – command-by-direction, command-by-plan, and command-by-influence. Each addresses the uncertainty described by Clausewitz in different ways: "Generally, the directing commander attempts to *prioritize* uncertainty, the [planning] commander seeks to *centralize* uncertainty, and the influencing commander prefers to *distribute* uncertainty."[16] In other words, the first style sees commanders exercise continuous direction over their forces, the second style emphasizes adherence to a pre-established plan, and the third style aims to lower the

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[12]C. Kenneth Allard, *Command, Control, and the Common Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 16.

[13]Samuel H. Hays and William N. Thomas, *Taking Command: The Art and Science of Military Leadership* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1967), 196-198.

[14]John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 318.

[15]Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 16.

[16]Thomas J. Czerwinski, "Command and Control at the Crossroads," *Parameters* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 122.

decision threshold, thereby enabling subordinate units to act in accordance with the commander's overall intent.[17] Regardless of which approach is adopted, command remains an individual pursuit and, by extension, its effectiveness depends largely on the person in charge.

All commanders share the express aim of achieving mission success.[18] With this imperative at the forefront of every military operation, many scholars have attempted to distill command to a function of either military science or military art in order to better understand the discipline and obtain a strategic advantage. More theoretical in nature, military science is the systemized body of knowledge relating to the employment of military force.[19] It seeks to correlate cause and effect to provide greater clarity during military campaigns. Meanwhile, military art is widely accepted as the timely application of superior firepower upon a decisive point.[20] Less structured than its counterpart, it is implemented using instinct, intuition, and talent (even genius).[21] One of the most practical and succinct explanations of the difference between military science and military art was offered by French General and author Jean Colin over a century ago: "Science seeks out laws, establishes and classifies facts; art selects, combines, and

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[17]G.E. (Joe) Sharpe and Allan D. English, *Principles for Change in the Post-Cold War Command and Control of the Canadian Forces* (Winnipeg: Canadian Forces Training Materiel Production Centre, 2002), 67-68. Command-by-influence is therefore consistent with the concept of mission command, which will be discussed later in this study.

[18]Bernd Horn and Craig L. Mantle, eds., *Neither Art, Nor Science: Selected Canadian Military Leadership Profiles* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), iii.

[19]Kelly C. Jordan, "Military Science," in *Encyclopedia of Military Science* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013), 881.

[20]Édouard de la Barre-Duparcq, *Elements of Military Art and History: Comprising the History and Tactics of the Separate Arms; the Combination of the Arms; and the Minor Operations of War*, ed. and trans. George W. Cullum (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1863), 7.

[21]Beatrice Heuser, "Theory and Practice, Art and Science in Warfare: An Etymological Note," in *War, Strategy & History: Essays in Honour of Professor Robert O'Neill*, ed. Daniel Marston and Tamara Leahy (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2016), 188.

produces."[22] To this day, command borrows elements from each field of study, and both science and art are employed by commanders when conducting operations. Therefore, it can be argued that "the exercise of command is neither wholly art, nor wholly science."[23]

Regardless of its academic categorization, it is undeniable that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is acutely aware of the significance of command. Institutional doctrine describes five operational functions that are necessary for the effective employment of forces – Command, Sense, Act, Shield, and Sustain.[24] While each must be considered for all military campaigns, Command is of primary importance as it underpins all other operational functions and serves as the bedrock upon which military activities are based.[25] In other words, the Command element "integrates all the operational functions into a single comprehensive strategic, operational or tactical level concept."[26] Van Creveld underscores the importance of Command by opining that it is the one function that "has to be exercised, more or less continuously, if the [military] is to exist and operate."[27] Command is not a tool to be kept hidden away in a military's arsenal for activation only during times of desperation. Rather, it must be perpetually studied, practiced, and honed at all levels to ensure the readiness and effectiveness of the armed forces.

Given its importance to those in uniform, several models have been designed to articulate and advance the level of understanding of command. For instance, political

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[22]J. Colin, *The Transformations of War*, ed. and trans. L. H. R. Pope-Hennessey (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), xiii. For further discussion on the differentiation between military science and military art, see Milan Vego, "Science vs. the Art of War," *Joint Force Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2012): 62-70.

[23]Douglas Delaney, *The Soldiers' General: Bert Hoffmeister at War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 5.

[24]DND, *CFJP 3.0: Operations*, 1-5. It is important to differentiate between authority to exercise "command" and the operational function of "Command."

[25]DND, *Canadian Forces Aerospace Command Doctrine*, 4.

[26]Defence Terminology Bank, "Record 26166: Command," last accessed 9 January 2018, http://terminology.mil.ca/term-eng.asp.

[27]Van Creveld, *Command in War*, 5.

scientist Eliot Cohen and military history professor John Gooch have proposed a unique model that highlights critical tasks and failures as a way of identifying paths to command misfortune.[28] Additionally, David Alberts and Richard Hayes, two established C^2 researchers, have developed a model that stresses organizational agility – which comprises the attributes of robustness, resilience, responsiveness, flexibility, innovation, and adaptation – as a means to increase the speed at which command is administered over a network.[29] While either of these models could have provided the basis for an interesting analysis of command effectiveness, they were ultimately dismissed for a variety of reasons.

The Cohen & Gooch model focuses on ill-fated operations and essentially ignores those that end in success. In doing so, it examines snapshots in history to pinpoint when and how specific missions took a turn for the worse.[30] Therefore, it is not overly useful in exploring the long careers of particular individuals. Meanwhile, by adopting a network-centric approach to operations, the Alberts & Hayes model shifts the attention away from the human commander to a certain extent.[31] Although there is validity in their methodology, their systems-focused model is not as helpful in analyzing individual commanders as one that focuses on the human element of command.

The framework developed by Pigeau and McCann provides one such human-centric approach. Their work builds on that of the previous military theorists and practitioners who recognized the critical role humans play in command situations. The

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[28]Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 54-56.

[29]David S. Alberts and Richard E. Hayes, *Power to the Edge: Command and Control in the Information Age* (Washington, D.C.: CCRP Publication Series, 2005), 127-128.

[30]Cohen and Gooch, *Military Misfortunes* . . ., 54-56.

[31]Alberts and Hayes, *Power to the Edge* . . ., 6.

Pigeau-McCann model is particularly valuable in illustrating the need to balance three key variables – competency, authority, and responsibility – as one rises in rank, and it can be applied to past and present military commanders alike.[32]

Furthermore, the utility of the Pigeau-McCann command model transcends the three branches of the CAF, being equally applicable to members of the Canadian Army (CA), Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), and RCAF. However, it is worth noting that there are subtle differences in the way these three elements exercise leadership and command. Allan English, a retired RCAF air navigator and Canadian military historian, points out that leaders and commanders "spend their most formative years in a single service culture that shapes their views about what is an appropriate leadership [and command] style."[33] Accordingly, as the focus of this study is an analysis of an RCAF officer, it will consider the subject matter through an air force lens.

Leonard Birchall is one of the most esteemed commanders ever to don an RCAF uniform. His regular and honorary service was remarkable, spanning parts of eight decades. Despite being held captive during much of the Second World War, he demonstrated strong competency, authority, and responsibility as the senior Allied internee which enabled him to capably exercise command over his subordinates. His story is one of perseverance and heroism, and his ability to succeed as a commander despite incredibly difficult circumstances makes Birchall the ideal subject for this study. Since Birchall's saga strongly highlights the human element of command, the framework proposed by Pigeau and McCann is the most suitable means of assessing his

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[32]Carol McCann and Ross Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts of Control and Command* (Toronto: Defence and Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine, 1999), 9.

[33]Allan English, "The Masks of Command: Leadership Differences in the Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force," in *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives – Leadership and Command* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2006), 25.

performance. Using the Pigeau-McCann model, this study will prove that, notwithstanding the occasional minor deviation, Leonard Birchall followed the ideal profile of a commander throughout his career.

To demonstrate the validity of the Pigeau-McCann framework in evaluating Birchall's prowess as a commander, this study is divided into three main chapters. Chapter Two will provide a thorough description of the Pigeau-McCann command model. Next, Chapter Three will explore the incomparable career of Leonard Joseph Birchall, with particular emphasis on his wartime service. Finally, Chapter Four will use the Pigeau-McCann model to analyze Birchall's actions and demonstrate how unique command challenges can be overcome in today's CAF.

As this study will demonstrate, command is a unique endeavour. Unlike management and leadership, which can be exercised by any person at any level in an organizational hierarchy, command can be assumed only by those appointed to a specific position.[34] In the modern era, the obligations associated with command are increasingly extensive since "armed conflict continues to become more complex, characterized by highly nuanced political situations, sophisticated weaponry, revolutionary information technology and unprecedented public scrutiny."[35] Current and future military commanders can learn a great deal from the successes and failures of their predecessors, and it is therefore worthwhile to closely examine the actions of historical figures such as Leonard Birchall. The following chapter will offer a detailed synopsis of the Pigeau-McCann command model, thereby providing an appropriate framework against which Birchall will be analyzed.

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[34]Horn and Mantle, *Neither Art, Nor Science* . . ., iv.
[35]DND, *Duty with Honour* . . ., 4.

CHAPTER 2 – THE PIGEAU-MCCANN COMMAND MODEL

> *It is our contention that the world's militaries exist to help resolve [the] extreme human conflict . . . that reflects the complexity of human society in general and human psychology in particular. It is the commander who is pivotal in military intervention in these complex conflicts.*
>
> –Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann

Although it is not as established in the civilian sector, command is of the utmost importance to military officers and enlisted members. Having identified a gap in existing C^2 models, Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann sought to re-conceptualize the disciplines of command and control in order to illustrate the centrality of human involvement.[36] Understanding the human aspect of command is of considerable value: it allows military professionals to learn from others and refine their own skillsets, thereby advancing the overall effectiveness of the profession of arms.

This chapter will begin with a brief synopsis of why and how Pigeau and McCann developed their framework. Next, the three dimensions of the Pigeau-McCann command model and their components will be explored in detail. The manner in which the elements of the model interact with one another will be illustrated, as will the ideal profile of a commander over the course of their career. Finally, this chapter will identify the utility of the model and address its main criticism.

Background: Genesis of the Pigeau-McCann Command Model

When Pigeau and McCann set out in 1993 to study the concepts of military command and control, they reached an early conclusion that the existing definitions were confusing, overly complex, and not particularly useful to military practitioners. Furthermore, they noted that the official NATO definitions of these terms seemed

[36]Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, ON, 31 October 2013), with permission.

circular and redundant: "The command definition makes use of the word control [and] the control definition uses concepts that are part of the definition of command."[37] As such, the first order of business for the two defence scientists was to offer a revised interpretation that would "stabilize the concept and allow it to guide policy, doctrine, training, system acquisition, and organizational structure."[38]

Based on the premise that command requires the uniquely human characteristics of creativity and will,[39] Pigeau and McCann centred their research on the fundamental assumption that *only humans command*. They contend that:

> . . . only humans demonstrate the range of innovative and flexible thinking necessary to solve complicated and unexpected operational problems. Only humans accept the responsibility commensurate with military success or failure. Only humans possess the dedication, drive and motivation to raise merely satisfactory military performance to outstanding levels.[40]

While the notion that command is driven solely by human beings is a fundamental tenet of the Pigeau-McCann model, it also suggests a potential vulnerability. Military commanders are shaped by their individual experiences, emotions, and education and, as such, each may offer a different perspective and approach. Therefore, any given command process is only as strong as the person running it.[41] Nevertheless, human involvement is crucial; without it "there is no motivation to find and implement new solutions."[42]

With the importance of the human element firmly established, Pigeau and McCann also recognized that any new definition of command would serve little purpose

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[37]Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," *Canadian Military Journal* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 53.
[38]Sharpe and English, *Principles for Change* . . ., 71.
[39]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 55.
[40]*Ibid*., 54.
[41]Coakley, *Command and Control* . . ., 95.
[42]Sharpe and English, *Principles for Change* . . ., 72.

if it was devoid of the values upheld by members of the profession of arms. Given that it is reasonable to conclude that any option is truly viable only if it falls within the acceptable margins of military law, professional standards, and ethical norms,[43] they next sought to constrain the solution space available to commanders. This concept is illustrated in Figure 2.1 by an abstract three-dimensional "infinite solution space" that is "delineated by three bipolar axes: legal versus illegal solutions, professional versus unprofessional solutions, and ethical versus unethical solutions."[44]

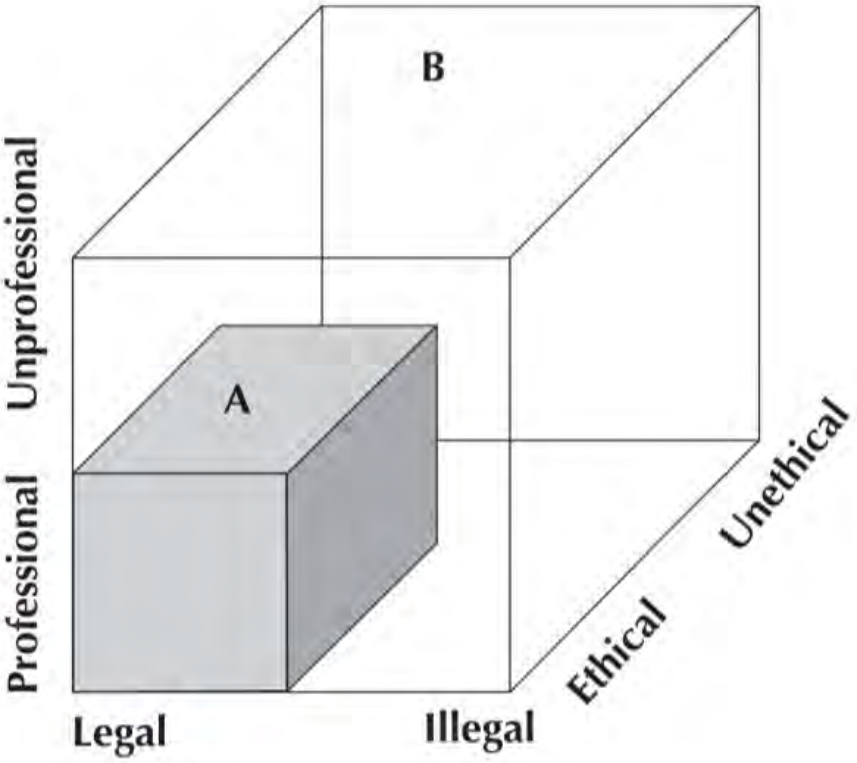

Figure 2.1 – Infinite Solution Space Divided into Acceptable and Unacceptable Regions
Source: Pigeau and McCann, "Establishing Common Intent . . .," 93.

In this simplified depiction, it can be seen that a much smaller "acceptable solution space" (cf. Figure 2.1; Region A) is created within the infinite solution space

[43]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

[44]Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, "Establishing Common Intent: The Key to Co-ordinated Military Action," in *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives – Leadership and Command* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2006), 93.

when only legal, professional, and ethical options are considered during the commander's decision-making process. By extension, any course of action that does not fall within the acceptable solution space is considered unacceptable by contemporary standards (cf. Figure 2.1; Region B). Guided by the fundamental assumption that only humans command and bound by the confines of the acceptable solution space, Pigeau and McCann defined *effective command* as "the creative and purposeful exercise of legitimate authority to accomplish the mission legally, professionally, and ethically."[45]

Another discovery Pigeau and McCann made while researching existing literature and practices was that conventional C^2 wisdom tended to overemphasize the role of control at the expense of command. It is true that control is an absolute necessity in warfighting, and Pigeau and McCann acknowledge the mutual interdependence of the two elements of C^2 by asserting that "command cannot be exercised with control, but control is meaningless without command."[46] However, despite their complementary nature, Pigeau and McCann maintain that command and control are not equal and control must always remain subordinate to command. Commanders are capable of creating, initiating, and changing control mechanisms as missions evolve; therefore, it is logical that command must always precede control.[47] For this reason, the focus of Pigeau and McCann's re-conceptualization efforts centred upon developing a model that stresses the pre-eminence of command in the C^2 hierarchy.

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[45]Allan English, *Command & Control of Canadian Aerospace Forces: Conceptual Foundations* (Trenton: Canadian Forces Aerospace Warfare Centre, 2008), 96; Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

[46]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 62.

[47]Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, *Putting "Command" back into Command and Control: the human perspective* (Toronto: Defence and Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine, 1995), 13; Carol McCann and Ross Pigeau, *Taking Command of C2* (Toronto: Defence and Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine, 1996), 9.

Dimensions of the Pigeau-McCann Command Model

The Pigeau-McCann model incorporates three distinct dimensions – competency, authority, and responsibility – that have been identified as core requirements for effective command.[48] When considered holistically, these factors can be accurate predictors of the degree of mission success enjoyed by any given commander. This command model, which is often aptly abbreviated with the simple acronym "CAR," postulates that as one gains competency in the armed forces, the levels of authority assigned to and responsibility accepted by that individual should increase commensurately.[49] Before this concept is developed any further, it is necessary to expand upon the three CAR dimensions.

Competency

According to *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*, "the fundamental purpose of the [CAF] is the ordered, lawful application of military force pursuant to governmental direction."[50] In order to uphold such a formidable obligation, all Canadian soldiers, sailors, and air personnel must maintain unique skillsets that differentiate them from the rest of society. These required competencies, however, are not limited to the tactical level. While CAF members certainly must retain the requisite technical proficiencies dictated by their respective area of expertise, they are also faced with an increasing demand to develop themselves, to a certain extent, as diplomats and scholars.[51] This is particularly true as one rises in rank as senior officers are frequently expected to advise policymakers on matters germane to the profession of arms.

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[48]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 57.
[49]McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts . . .*, 7.
[50]DND, *Duty with Honour . . .*, 4.
[51]*Ibid*., 18.

Therefore, CAF members must not neglect the imperatives of becoming intimately familiar with joint, combined, and interagency operations, understanding the political landscape, appreciating national security issues, and applying the rule of law.[52] Proficiency across such a broad spectrum requires commanders to possess a variety of skillsets. Accordingly, Pigeau and McCann have identified four principal competencies – physical, intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal – which, if properly developed and exercised over the course of a career, will enable effective command.

It is no secret that military members must be physically fit to accomplish many tasks; however, *physical* competency extends well beyond basic strength and endurance. For instance, it also involves the sensory motor skills that are necessary to operate a complex weapon system or fly a high-performance aircraft.[53] A statement of one's overall health, having a high degree of physical competency translates to a greater ability to handle stress, work longer and harder, and recuperate after injury or exhaustion.[54]

Intellectual competency, on the other hand, is associated with cognitive skills.[55] Professional development and continual education have long been clear priorities of the CAF and the cornerstone of the profession of arms in Canada. Those who exhibit deep intellectual competency are generally skilled at "planning missions, monitoring the situation, reasoning, making inferences, visualizing the problem space, assessing risks

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[52]*Ibid*., 17, 52. Joint operations are those involving two or more elements of a nation's military. Combined operations are those involving the militaries of two or more allies. Interagency operations are those involving two or more government departments or civilian agencies.

[53]Sharpe and English, *Principles for Change* . . ., 73.

[54]J. Lewis *et al*, "United States Army Leadership Doctrine for the Twenty-First Century," in *The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000), 130.

[55]Carol McCann and Ross Pigeau, "Research Challenges for the Human in Command," in *The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000), 393.

and making judgements."[56] As warfare continues to increase in complexity, intellectual competency remains a highly coveted attribute of commanders at all levels.

It is not uncommon for commanders to find themselves with the unenviable task of making extremely difficult decisions based on limited information. To further complicate matters, such decisions often have lasting and dire consequences.[57] For these reasons, it is necessary for commanders to possess a certain degree of *emotional* competency, which encapsulates "resolve, resiliency, adaptability, patience, an ability to keep things in perspective, and even a sense of humour."[58] The achievement and maintenance of such a level of hardiness is especially important during difficult times, and it is a hallmark of an effective commander.

Finally, commanders must hone their *interpersonal* competency in order to produce a cohesive team. This competency addresses the requirement for commanders to develop and refine their social skills, particularly the attributes of trust, respect, and empathy.[59] Interpersonal competency is established, in part, by being visible, present, and approachable, and it relies on the ability to motivate and inspire subordinates.[60] For commanders to cultivate a true *esprit de corps*, they must capitalize on interpersonal interactions and be capable of clearly articulating their thoughts, ideas, and visions.[61]

These four pillars of the competency dimension form the foundation of the Pigeau-McCann model. Each competency is expected to evolve as one gains experience, and seasoned commanders are obligated to nurture these skillsets in subordinates so they

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[56]McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts . . .*, 7.
[57]Sharpe and English, *Principles for Change . . .*, 73.
[58]McCann and Pigeau, "Research Challenges . . .," 394.
[59]McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts . . .*, 7.
[60]Stanley Cherrie, "The Human in Command: A Personal View," in *The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000), 22.
[61]McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts . . .*, 7.

too can advance within the institution. Per the Pigeau-McCann model, certain components are emphasized more than others at different levels of the organizational hierarchy, and it is only with a noticeable increase in overall competency that one should be assigned greater authority and accept greater responsibility.[62]

Authority

Regardless of how much competency one may possess, little can be accomplished unless that individual is permitted to take action. In the Pigeau-McCann model, this empowerment constitutes the dimension of authority, which comprises two distinct components – legal and personal. Authority is a critical component of modern combat. For example, as the nature of armed conflict continues to evolve, it is expected that the authority to administer lethal force will be increasingly devolved to more junior levels of the CAF.[63] Therefore, all members of the profession of arms must embrace both the legal and personal aspects of authority.

Legal authority is the power to act that is assigned to a commander by an external agency such as the government.[64] Pigeau and McCann note that "it is designated constitutionally and through legislation, and thus it is explicit, formal and (relatively) static."[65] Legal authority involves the allocation of resources and personnel required to complete assigned missions and, in the military context, it often permits the use of

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[62]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

[63]DND, *Duty with Honour* . . ., 18. It should be noted that this doctrine is in conflict with the recent trend of the "long screwdriver" approach to tactical command which sees greater centralized control. For further discussion on the realities of modern C^2, see Bruce Hargrave, "Mission Command in a Network Enabled Environment," *Joint Air Power Competence Centre Journal*, Edition 11 (2010): 48.

[64]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 59.

[65]McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts* . . ., 8.

controlled violence.[66] Due to the weightiness of its potential effects, care and diligence must always be exercised when assigning legal authority.

Conversely, *personal* authority is far less explicit. Rather, it is the leverage that a commander earns over time and, as such, it is based on one's reputation, experience, and character.[67] Personal authority is informally bestowed upon commanders by their peers and subordinates, often as a result of setting a strong personal example of ethics, values, courage, and integrity.[68] It cannot be designated; it can only be earned. Personal authority is something that all CAF members should strive to achieve, for it "engenders mutual trust, promotes organizational cohesiveness, motivates creativity, increases individual effort and accelerate [*sic*] team building."[69]

For command to be effective, the two types of authority must be synchronized. Pigeau and McCann suggest that commanders are defined, to some extent, by the degree of legal and personal authority they possess. Figure 2.2 offers a graphic representation of this notion, with all commanders residing in one of the four quadrants.

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[66]Sharpe and English, *Principles for Change* . . ., 74.
[67]McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts* . . ., 8.
[68]*Ibid*.
[69]Pigeau and McCann, *Putting "Command" back into Command and Control* . . ., 7-8.

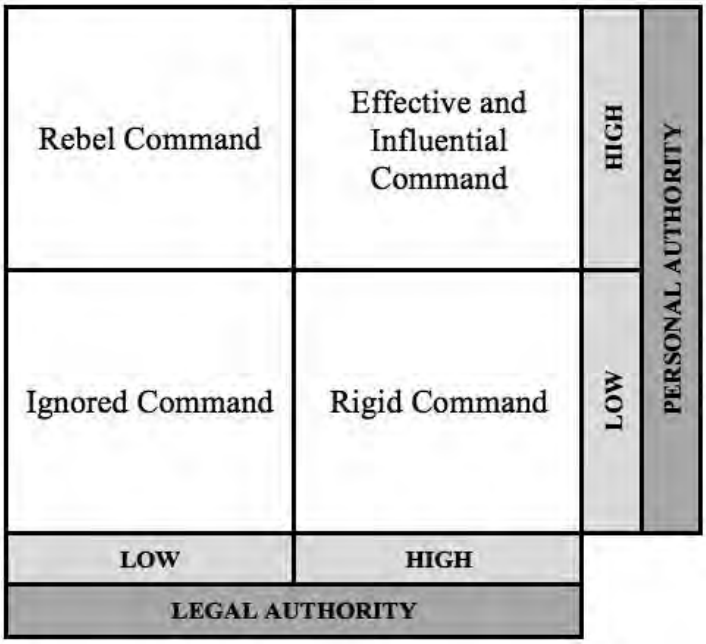

Figure 2.2 – Four Possible Command Styles Based on Legal and Personal Authority
Source: Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

When both legal and personal authority are low, any initiative the commander wishes to implement will struggle to gain traction. Essentially, the command decisions will be *ignored*. When a commander is given a high level of legal authority but lacks personal authority, subordinates will not feel compelled to put forth any extraneous effort and the only course of action available to the commander will be to impose and enforce rules and regulations. This situation is often encountered when new people are placed in command.[70] Although such individuals would have the legal authority to take action, they remain unproven on a personal level in the eyes of the subordinates and, as a result, may be somewhat *rigid* in approach. Conversely, a commander with low legal authority but high personal authority risks being labeled as a *rebel* for precisely the opposite reason. Finally, Pigeau and McCann stress that "authority is optimal when there is both legal authority to endow formal power and personal authority to provide a motivating

[70]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

exemplar."[71] As such, one who embodies high levels of both types of authority is deemed capable of exercising *effective and influential* command. This type of person is trusted by both the organization and the people it comprises.[72] Clearly, achieving this status should be the ultimate goal of all military personnel, but high authority comes with the need for increased responsibility.

Responsibility

Pigeau and McCann advocate that responsibility is the extent to which the commander accepts legal and personal authority.[73] This is a core concept of the Pigeau-McCann model, as the researchers posit that "in few other professions is the taking of responsibility more important than in the military: human lives are often at stake among both own forces and those of the adversary."[74] In fact, *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* suggests that the very legitimacy of the CAF is determined by the degree to which its members fulfil their professional responsibilities.[75] Much like authority, the dimension of responsibility is bisected into two subsets – extrinsic and intrinsic.[76]

Extrinsic responsibility is the externally imposed expectation that commanders be held accountable to their superiors for the resources and personnel assigned to them. It also refers to an individual's willingness to accept public liability for their actions.[77] Since the delegation and assumption of authority are accompanied by certain expectations, either formal or informal, explicit responsibility is closely linked to both

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[71]McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts* . . ., 8.
[72]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).
[73]McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts* . . ., 8.
[74]McCann and Pigeau, *Taking Command of C2*, 2.
[75]DND, *Duty with Honour* . . ., 16.
[76]McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts* . . ., 9.
[77]Sharpe and English, *Principles for Change* . . ., 74; McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts* . . ., 9.

legal and personal authority. However, it is important to note that extrinsic responsibility is in place only when the commander accepts these authorities.[78]

The other half of the dimension is *intrinsic* responsibility which, contrary to its counterpart, is self-generated. Deeply personal, it describes how the commander feels about the mission, the amount of ownership they take, and the level of commitment the individual expresses.[79] Intrinsic responsibility, therefore, is derived from the concepts of honour, loyalty, duty, professionalism, service, and military ethos.[80] Pigeau and McCann assert that it is the most pivotal of all the components in the three dimensions of command: "Without it, very little could be accomplished. It is the source of all motivation, effort and commitment. Indeed, it is the driving force behind the creativity that our definition asserts is essential for command."[81]

Relationship Between Competency, Authority, and Responsibility

Pigeau and McCann posit that, at every stage of a commander's career, they find themselves somewhere within the abstract three-dimensional space bounded by the low and high extremes of competency, authority, and responsibility.[82] This space is illustrated on the left side of Figure 2.3.

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[78]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 59.
[79]McCann and Pigeau, McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts . . .*, 9.
[80]*Ibid*.
[81]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 60.
[82]*Ibid*., 58.

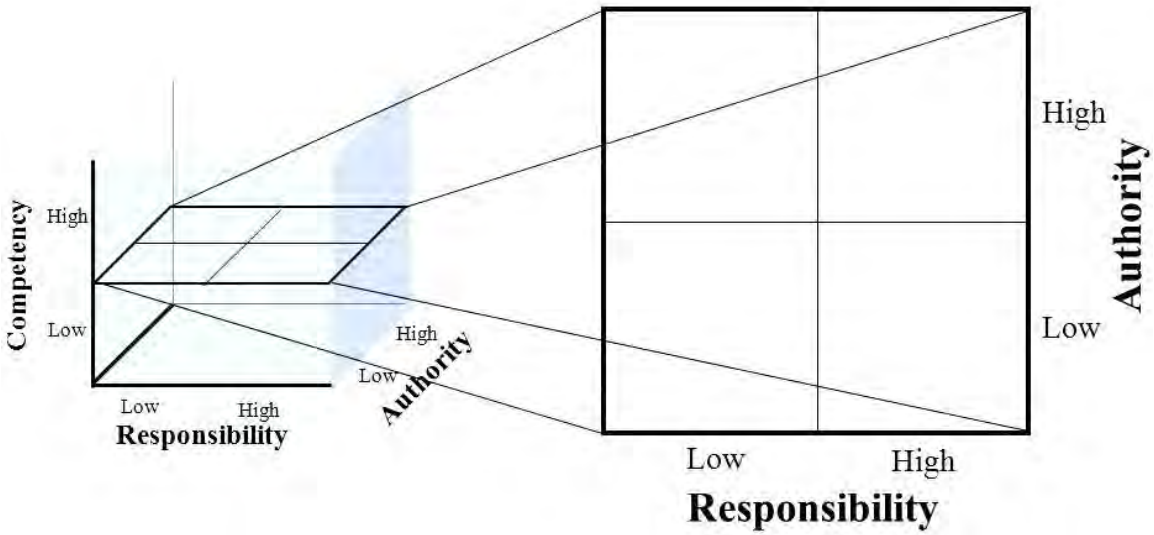

Figure 2.3 – Relationship Between Competency, Authority, and Responsibility
Source: Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

By taking a cross-section at any point along the competency axis, a two-dimensional matrix consisting of four quadrants representing the various possible combinations of authority and responsibility is produced (cf. Figure 2.3). As Figure 2.4 outlines, this resultant matrix describes the different types of command based on an individual's level of authority (both legal and personal) and responsibility (both extrinsic and intrinsic).

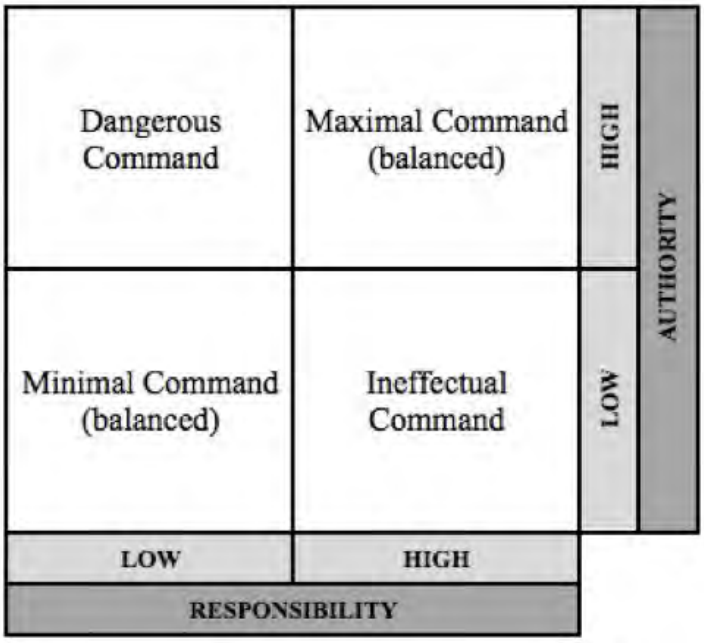

Figure 2.4 – Authority-Responsibility Matrix
Source: Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

When a great deal of authority has been earned by or assigned to an individual, but that individual exhibits a low degree of willingness to accept the responsibility for the proper use of power, a *dangerous* command situation ensues. In this case, there is significant potential for command to be abused or automated.[83] Conversely, when an individual accepts high levels of responsibility but has not been granted a commensurately high level of authority, the command is *ineffectual* due to the lack of assigned personnel, resources, or mandate.[84] If the commander is not properly equipped and empowered, there should be no expectation of mission success. For this reason, Pigeau and McCann suggest that "ineffectual command undermines the very purpose of the military."[85] It is important to note that both dangerous command and ineffectual command are unbalanced; that is, when one dimension is high the other is low, and vice versa. This instability creates the potential for command effectiveness to be compromised and reduces the likelihood of mission success.[86]

Contrariwise, when the dimensions of authority and responsibility are either both low or both high, command is said to be balanced. In the first case, when little scope for action is granted and the individual does not expect to be held accountable, command is *minimal*.[87] However, the outcome of the second case, where both authority and responsibility are at their highest levels, is *maximal* command. This is the ideal quadrant for commanders to operate in because "the military organization can be assured that the authority assigned and earned will be treated responsibly in accordance with stated

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[83]*Ibid*., 60-61.
[84]*Ibid*., 60.
[85]*Ibid*.
[86]Sharpe and English, *Principles for Change . . .*, 75.
[87]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 60.

intentions, implied military values and general societal expectations."[88] Understandably, it is more desirable to achieve maximal command than minimal command; however, only individuals with a proportionately high degree to competency, which takes time to develop, should be placed in a situation requiring maximal command. This notion is fundamental to understanding the final element of the Pigeau-McCann model.

Balanced Command Envelope

Having established the importance of finding balance between authority and responsibility, the dimension of competency can be reintroduced. Figure 2.5 pictorially represents the ideal correlation between all three CAR dimensions by now considering multiple cross-sections taken along the competency axis. It can be seen that, at the lowest level of competency, both authority and responsibility are also low. These three dimensions then increase in unison, as depicted by the placement of the shaded ovals in the three authority-responsibility matrices (cf. Figure 2.5).

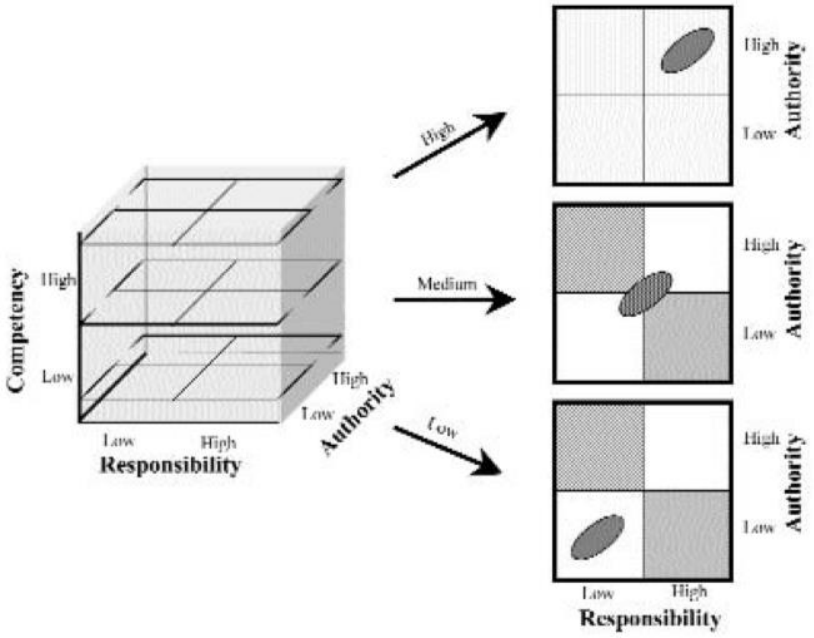

Figure 2.5 – Authority-Responsibility Matrices at Different Levels of Competency
Source: Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 60.

[88] *Ibid*.

When a member is new to the profession of arms, their competency is generally, and naturally, fairly low. This type of person should be given only a small amount of authority and expected to accept a proportionately minimal amount of responsibility for two reasons. First, doing so reduces the risk of overwhelming the individual in the early stages of their career. Second, it protects the organization from the disastrous results that could be produced when a person who lacks adequate competency is entrusted with achieving critical objectives.[89]

As the individual gains experience and competency, the levels of authority and responsibility should rise commensurately (cf. Figure 2.5). When the highest level of competency is reached, typically near the apex of one's career, authority and responsibility should also be high to ensure the individual is placed in the maximal command quadrant (cf. Figure 2.4). If authority and responsibility are not increased alongside competency, the individual is prone to become bored, unmotivated, and professionally dissatisfied.[90]

The Pigeau-McCann model contends that military personnel should move upward along the spectrums of competency, authority, and responsibility so they gradually transition from minimal command to maximal command over the course of their career. This proposed projection mirrors the natural progression from tactician, to operator, to strategist that those who attain the highest ranks experience. During this process, they should always avoid the dangerous and ineffectual command regions by ensuring the three dimensions of command remain balanced. When this ideal evolution is plotted three-dimensionally, the result is the Balanced Command Envelope (BCE). Pigeau and

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[89] *Ibid*., 61.
[90] *Ibid*.

McCann describe the BCE as "the region of the command capability space within which military organizations should ensure that all of their members lie throughout their careers."[91] The BCE is presented in Figure 2.6.

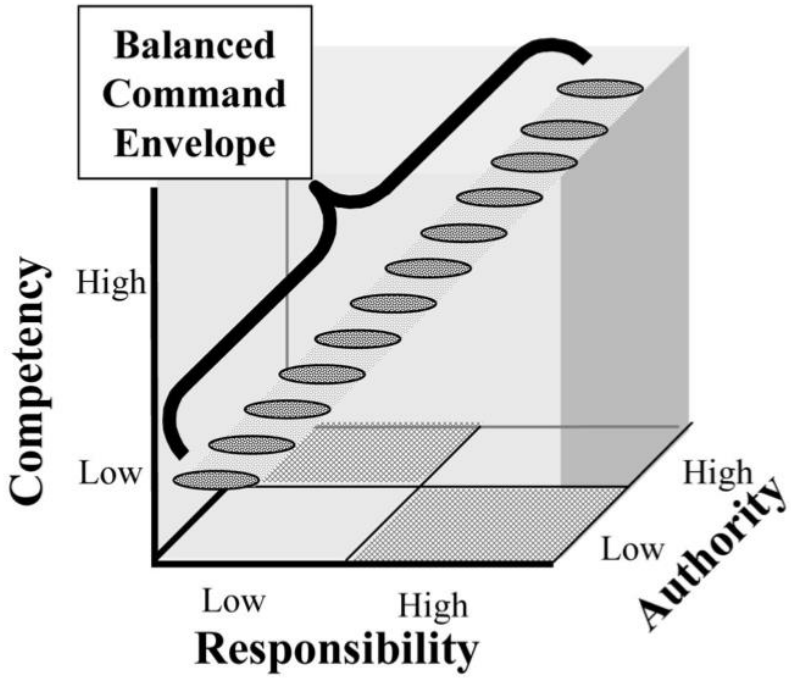

Figure 2.6 – Balanced Command Envelope
Source: G.E. (Joe) Sharpe, "C^2 Evolution From an Air Force Perspective," in *Air Force Command and Control* (Winnipeg: Canadian Forces Training Materiel Production Centre, 2002), 9.

Movement along the BCE is not precisely linear. For instance, when even the most senior officers assume a new position with which they are unfamiliar, their degree of competency is instantly reduced to less than what it was in their previous role. However, the new post may deliver greater authority and responsibility, especially if it is awarded as a result of promotion. The BCE concept accounts for this by affording commanders some leeway in each of the three dimensions. Since the BCE is deliberately thick rather than "pencil thin," superior commanders can push their subordinates in certain ways inside its boundaries to test and develop their command capabilities.[92] For

[91]*Ibid*.
[92]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

example, "an acting position may motivate an individual to acquire greater levels of competency, thereby re-establishing the CAR balance."[93] As such, slight deviation from the BCE can have positive effects.

The BCE is the final component of the Pigeau-McCann command model. It is rooted in the premise that maintaining balanced command allows militaries to guarantee that the extreme power they are capable of wielding is exercised in a safe and appropriate manner.[94] To the extent possible, soldiers, sailors, and air personnel should strive to remain within the confines of the BCE and follow its profile because, as its creators have concluded, "extreme outliers typically induce negative command conditions."[95]

Utility and Criticism of the Pigeau-McCann Command Model

The Pigeau-McCann model is based on empirical evidence and it uses, to a great extent, Canadian data to address some of the major challenges that key Canadian military decision-makers face on a regular basis. As such, it is culturally compatible with the Canadian profession of arms. For these reasons, it has been recommended that the Pigeau-McCann model "be adopted as the theoretical base for C^2 in the [CAF]."[96] Furthermore, the model offers a clear and concise conceptualization of how one's career should ideally progress in order to become an effective commander at the strategic level.

In addition to providing a coherent path for current and future members of the profession of arms to follow, the Pigeau-McCann model is a valuable tool in examining historical commanders. By reviewing past instances of effective or ineffective command, mission success or failure can often be traced back to the commander's ability or inability

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[93]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 61.
[94]*Ibid*., 60.
[95]*Ibid*., 61.
[96]Sharpe and English, *Principles for Change* . . ., 98.

to maintain balance between their competency, authority, and responsibility. Learning from the triumphs and mistakes of others is a worthwhile exercise, and the Pigeau-McCann command model facilitates such efforts. It is therefore the logical foundation for this study.

Despite the Pigeau-McCann model being identified as the most suitable framework for this analysis, it is not immune to criticism. For example, Douglas Delaney, a retired infantry officer and current professor of military history, opines that the Pigeau-McCann model offers an "over-intellectualized" perspective of command.[97] In doing so, he implies that command cannot be reduced to a scientific model by methodically studying the correlation between competency, authority, and responsibility. However, while Pigeau and McCann acknowledge that there is certainly a strong artistic element to command, they maintain that the topic is not bankrupt of science.[98] Allan English defends the importance of studying theoretical command models such as CAR with the assertion that "just as professional engineers must master certain theories founded in the physical sciences to practise their profession, military professionals must master theories of war, leadership and command to be competent to practise their profession."[99] While no command model is perfect, any argument that suggests they should not be studied out of trepidation that doing so would turn practitioners into academics is simply unfounded.

Conclusion

The Pigeau-McCann model is based on the premise that human beings, operating within an acceptable solution space, are the best mechanisms by which effective

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[97]Delaney, *Soldiers' General . . .*, 4-5.
[98]McCann and Pigeau, *Taking Command of C2*, 10.
[99]Allan English, ed., *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives – Leadership and Command* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2006), xiii.

command can be exercised. Command, which always precedes control and requires creativity and will, comprises the dimensions of competency, authority, and responsibility. Understanding the relationship between these three elements is paramount in preventing members of the profession of arms from straying into the areas of dangerous and ineffectual command. Consequently, the framework proposes a state of balance between competency, authority, and responsibility that must be achieved and maintained throughout a commander's career.

Current and future military professionals can learn a great deal by examining historical cases. As such, Pigeau and McCann's concepts will be applied in the subsequent chapters to illustrate how Leonard Birchall overcame immense challenges to exercise balanced command despite being held captive during the Second World War. However, before Birchall's command effectiveness can be assessed, it is first necessary to provide the proper context. The following chapter will therefore provide a detailed account of Leonard Birchall's unparalleled RCAF career.

CHAPTER 3 – LEONARD JOSEPH BIRCHALL

It is incredible how the low morale of disheartened men can rise behind the example of a courageous officer. Birchall came to be something of a symbol, to stand in the minds and hearts of men for a true officer.

–James Davis

Shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War, former British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill declared that, in his retrospective opinion, the most dangerous and alarming moment of the entire war was when he learned of Japanese naval forces approaching Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka). He explained that the fall of Ceylon and the consequent enemy control of the Indian Ocean, coupled with Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's steady advances in Egypt, would have "closed the ring" and severed critical oil shipments to the Allies.[100] Churchill then remarked that this outcome was avoided "only because an unknown Canadian airman . . . located the Japanese fleet and robbed it of the element of surprise. . . . It was just a pity . . . that he had to pay for this heroism with his life and would never know of his contribution to history."[101] Visibly emotional, the British statesman went on to say, "this unknown airman, who lay deep in the waters of the Indian Ocean, made one of the most important single contributions to victory."[102] However, unbeknownst to Churchill at the time, not only was the identity of this brave individual known, he was very much alive and still serving in the RCAF. His name was Leonard Joseph Birchall.

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[100]Herb Kugel, "The 'Savior of Ceylon,'" *World War II* 20, no. 6 (December 2005): 28.

[101]Peter Pigott, "Leonard Birchall: The Saviour of Ceylon," in *Flying Canucks II: Pioneers of Canadian Aviation* (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1997), 14.

[102]Pearson to L.J. Birchall, Ottawa, 7 July 1967, in Dave McIntosh, *Hell on Earth: Aging Faster, Dying Sooner – Canadian Prisoners of the Japanese During World War II* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1997), 230 (cf. Appendix 2); Tom Couglin, *The Dangerous Sky: Canadian Airmen in World War II* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968), 126.

Leonard Birchall enjoyed an incredibly long and distinguished military career during which he epitomized what it meant to be an officer. He served, and continues to serve, as an inspiration to countless soldiers, sailors, and especially air personnel. Despite not knowing his name and believing that he had perished during the war, Churchill assigned Birchall the moniker "Saviour of Ceylon" for his airborne heroics.[103] However, his impressive accomplishment as a pilot is just the beginning of the incredible wartime story, and Birchall's notoriety can be predominantly attributed to his actions *after* the fateful mission to which Churchill had alluded. Although emphasis will be placed on his wartime service from 1942 to 1945, this chapter will provide a biographical account of Leonard Birchall's life.

Early Life: From St. Catharines to Ceylon

Leonard Birchall was born in St. Catharines, Ontario on 6 July 1915.[104] His interest in aviation blossomed at an early age, and he spent much of his youth building and flying model aircraft. His first taste of actual flight came as a teenager when his father paid a local barnstorming pilot to take him up and "give him the works" in an effort to dissuade him from pursuing his passion any further. The result, however, was not what the elder Birchall had envisaged, and seven decades later, his son pointed to that flight as the defining moment in which he knew he wanted to become a pilot.[105] For the

[103]Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), "Meet Air Commodore Leonard Birchall, CM, OBE, DFC, O.Ont, CD," last modified 15 February 2018, http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/on-windswept-heights-2/27-history-1939-1945.page.

[104]David L. Bashow, "Four Gallant Airmen: Clifford MacKay McEwen, Raymond Collishaw, Leonard Joseph Birchall, and Robert Wendell McNair," in *Intrepid Warriors: Perspectives on Canadian Military Leaders*, ed. Bernd Horn (Toronto: Dundurn, 2007), 174.

[105]L.J. Birchall, "Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame Induction Acceptance Speech: Air Commodore (Ret) L.J. (Len) Birchall CM, OBE, DFC, O Ont, CD," *Canadian Aviation Historical Society Journal* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 112.

next few years, the young Birchall earned money by doing odd jobs at the local airfield which he used to fund his flying lessons.[106]

Leonard Birchall's first exposure to military service came in 1932 when, at the age of 16, he enrolled as a private in his local militia unit, The Lincoln and Welland Regiment.[107] The following summer, he began his post-secondary studies at the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) in Kingston, Ontario. Upon graduating in 1937, he served briefly with the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals before being awarded just one of three permanent commissions with the RCAF available to his RMC cohort. As a result, Birchall became a provisional flying officer (cf. Appendix 3) and commenced military pilot training at RCAF Station Trenton, Ontario.[108] The following year, as the Munich Crisis was unfolding, he earned his pilot qualification and a promotion to the rank of flying officer. His first operational assignment was at RCAF Station Dartmouth, Nova Scotia (now Canadian Forces Base [CFB] Shearwater) where he flew the Vickers Supermarine Stranraer flying boat on convoy and antisubmarine patrols with Number 5 Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron (Sqn).[109]

During this time, Leonard Birchall also had the opportunity to pilot the float-equipped Northrop Delta. In particular, this aircraft was difficult to handle when taking off on glassy water. On one memorable occasion, while paired up with his good friend

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[106]Leonard J. Birchall, "Trenton to Dartmouth: Flying in the RCAF 1937-1940," in *Flying Under Fire, Volume 2: More Aviation Tales from the Second World War,* ed. William J. Wheeler (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 2003), 10.

[107]RCAF, "Portrait of a Hero: Air Commodore Leonard J. Birchall, OBE, DFC, CD," last accessed 1 April 2018, http://www.400squadron.ca/Members/honorary-colonels/a-c-l-j-birchall.

[108]L.J. Birchall, "Early RCAF/RCN Maritime Cooperation," in *Salty Dips, Volume 2: "…and All Our Joints Were Limber,"* ed. Mack Lynch (Ottawa: Naval Officers' Association of Canada, 1985), 37; Royal Military College of Canada (RMC), "2364 Air Commodore Leonard Birchall, CM, OBE, DFC, O.Ont, CD," last modified 12 September 2016, https://www.rmc-cmr.ca/en/college-commandants-office/leonard-joseph-birchall.

[109]Birchall, "Trenton to Dartmouth . . .," 21.

from RMC and fellow pilot, Jack Twigg, Birchall had a notably trying time getting the aircraft airborne and turned to Twigg for assistance. Birchall recounted:

> . . . we climbed back into the machine and began roaring up and down, with Jack getting hotter and hotter under the collar. He wasn't going to get off either. Finally he turned back up the harbour and I knew that, this time, we were either going to take off or go charging up on the shore. At the very last moment, he gave it the damnedest yank and bounced it right out of the water. . . . Barely missing the trees on the shore, we roared on up the side of a hill. At the top was a very large convent, which we cleared by zilch feet. I'm sure we broke a few windows with our noise![110]

Immediately realizing the potential repercussions of inadvertently terrorizing a convent, Birchall and Twigg landed back in the harbour, jumped into a car, and drove up the hill to offer an apology. They presented their case and explained that the aircraft was on a very urgent wartime mission: "There were submarines out there and [the] courageous crew was risking life and limb, trying to locate them."[111] The two aviators were quickly forgiven and told that the building they believed to be a convent was actually a hospital and the delivery room was located on its top floor. They also learned that the hysteria caused by their near miss likely aided in inducing labour in more than a few women.[112] Following this escapade, Leonard Birchall returned to piloting the familiar Stranraer, and soon had his first *real* wartime encounter.

When Italy declared war against the British Commonwealth (and, by extension, Canada) on 10 June 1940, Leonard Birchall, then a flight lieutenant (F/L), was tasked with stopping the *Capo Nola*, an Italian freighter that had been operating in the St. Lawrence River and was desperately trying to escape Canadian territorial waters. While on patrol, F/L Birchall spotted the vessel and aggressively dove towards it. The sight of

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[110]*Ibid*., 27.
[111]*Ibid*., 28.
[112]*Ibid*.

the lumbering "Stranny" bearing down on them sufficiently intimidated the crew of the *Capo Nola*, as the captain ran the ship ashore and set fire to it.[113] Birchall landed his machine nearby and, with the assistance of the crew of a RCN vessel that had arrived on the scene, coordinated the capture of the Italian seafarers: "The *Capo Nola* crew became the first Italian prisoners-of-war for Canada. It was also Birchall's first taste of action."[114]

Promoted to squadron leader (S/L) in 1941, Leonard Birchall served briefly as the Chief Navigational Officer at Number 2 Training Command in Winnipeg before being transferred overseas to become second-in-command (2IC) of 413 Sqn based in the Sullom Voe in the Shetland Islands off the north coast of Scotland.[115] Comprising personnel from both the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the RCAF, 413 Sqn flew Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boats outfitted with long range fuel tanks that allowed crews to stay aloft for 25 hours and operate up to 600 miles from their base. The squadron's mandate was to fly endurance escort patrols for RAF Coastal Command, providing protection for Allied convoys going to the Soviet Union.[116] These demanding and exhausting missions, which generally ranged from 12 to 24 hours, often occurred in incredibly poor weather and culminated in pilots having to land their aircraft on turbulent seas. On one occasion, Birchall was unable to reach the shore due to a storm, so he and his crew were forced to stay at sea all night after returning from a patrol.[117]

In addition to the challenging flying conditions that awaited him, S/L Birchall arrived in Sullom Voe to learn that the squadron, particularly its Canadian contingent,

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[113]Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 117.

[114]Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 16.

[115]B. Greenhous *et al*, "The Anti-Submarine War in European and Far Eastern Waters, 1941-5," in *The Crucible of War, 1939-1945: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force – Volume III* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 383; Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 17.

[116]Greenhous *et al*, "Anti-Submarine War . . .," 380-383; Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 17-18. The Canso was the amphibious version of the Catalina.

[117]Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 117.

was suffering from a loss of morale and harbouring hostile feelings towards its higher headquarters. Two months prior, 413 Sqn had been ordered to provide photo-reconnaissance of the Norwegian coast, a mission which necessitated the crew to fly well within the "range of enemy fighters and far beyond the protection of friendly ones. The slow, cumbersome Catalina had never been designed, or armed, to survive air-to-air combat, and, in the absence of cloud cover, the sortie was something of a suicide mission."[118] Wing Commander (W/C) Richard Briese, the squadron's Commanding Officer (CO), elected to fly the patrol himself as a supernumerary pilot "rather than condemn any of his crews to certain death. . . . He and his crew were never seen [or heard from] again."[119]

Briese's successor as CO of 413 Sqn was none other than Leonard Birchall's old colleague, Jack Twigg, who had since been promoted to W/C.[120] Together the two senior airmen strove to raise the spirits of their squadron that had been demoralized and angered by the loss of its previous CO. When 413 Sqn was ordered to conduct another photo-reconnaissance mission over Norway, similar to the one that had claimed the life of W/C Briese, both Twigg and Birchall contravened regulations and volunteered to fly it themselves. Once again, the two old friends found themselves together in the cockpit; however, this time their expectations were considerably lower: "They were so sure of not returning that they chose only a radio operator as their crew."[121] Fortunately, the poor winter weather in which they took off in Scotland had developed into a full-scale white-out blizzard by the time they reached the coast of Norway, and the *Luftwaffe* night

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[118]Greenhous *et al*, "Anti-Submarine War . . .," 383.
[119]Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 18.
[120]Greenhous *et al*, "Anti-Submarine War . . .," 383; Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 19.
[121]Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 19.

fighters were unable to get airborne. Owing only to the prevailing meteorological conditions, Twigg and Birchall evaded certain death that evening.[122]

Figure 3.1 – Squadron Leader Leonard Birchall
Source: DND Photo, PL-7405. This photo of Birchall sitting in the cockpit of his Catalina flying boat was taken on 17 March 1942, just two days before he departed Scotland for Ceylon.

Not long after his perilous mission over Norway, and within months of arriving in the European theatre, Leonard Birchall was relocated once again. Early in 1942, in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor and with Japanese power at its peak, 413 Sqn was reassigned to Ceylon, marking the first time a Canadian squadron served overseas outside of Great Britain.[123] This was a strategically vital island and home to the Royal Navy's Eastern Fleet which consisted of "two aircraft carriers (with outdated [Fairey] Swordfish and Albacore aircraft), five battleships (of which only one could be considered modern),

[122]*Ibid*.
[123]D.J. Baker, *A History of 413 Squadron* (Burnstown: General Store Publishing House, 1997), 7; Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 117.

one cruiser, four light cruisers and numerous destroyers."[124] Since Ceylon was not equipped with radar, maritime reconnaissance patrols over the Indian Ocean were required to detect enemy forces and warn against a surprise attack. Admiral (Adm) Sir James Somerville, who commanded the fleet, depended on "the long range Catalinas [*sic*] flying boats to be his eyes for the defence of Ceylon – or in future terminology – an early warning system."[125]

W/C Twigg encouraged S/L Birchall to embrace the change of scenery, suggesting he "come on out to Ceylon and enjoy the coconuts and the elephants."[126] However, Twigg himself would not accompany the squadron to its new location. Due to a personality clash with the new RAF Station Commander at Sullom Voe, Twigg was shuffled off to another squadron and did not survive the war.[127]

S/L Birchall was appointed Acting Commanding Officer (A/CO) of 413 Sqn for its operations in the Far East and set off for Ceylon along with three other Catalina crews. On the afternoon of 2 April 1942, Birchall and his men arrived at their new base on Koggala Lake, located on the west side of Ceylon approximately 81 miles south of the capital city of Colombo. After taking just one day to rest, he was assigned his first patrol on 4 April 1942.[128] It proved to be a mission from which he would not return until the end of the war.

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[124]*Ibid*., 13.
[125]Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 19-20.
[126]Birchall, "Early RCAF/RCN Maritime Cooperation," 51.
[127]Baker, *History of 413 Squadron*, 9.
[128]Birchall to W.A.B. Douglas, Downsview, 10 October 1974, in Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), DND, Ottawa, File 74/686; Bashow, "Four Gallant Airmen . . .," 175; Kugel, "'Savior of Ceylon,'" 85; M.E. Waterberg *et al*, *412 Transport Squadron: The Legacy* (Paducah: Turner Publishing, 1995), 105. W/C John Plant, who arrived in Ceylon after S/L Birchall had disappeared, eventually assumed command of 413 Sqn.

4 April 1942: Becoming the Saviour of Ceylon

S/L Birchall's first, and ultimately last, mission in the new theatre was to conduct a lengthy patrol over the Indian Ocean to the south of Ceylon. As Ernest Cable, a former RCAF air navigator, has observed, "the tactic was to search an area during daylight far enough out from Ceylon that the enemy could not sail in during the night and launch an attack at dawn."[129] Since his recent arrival had precluded him from practicing night landings on Koggala Lake, Birchall and his crew of one other Canadian and seven RAF airmen[130] were to patrol all day, remain airborne throughout the night, and return to base at dawn the following morning. As their uneventful mission was drawing to a close, S/L Birchall opted to fly an additional search pattern so the navigator could obtain a reliable celestial fix from the moon which had just risen. While the navigator was busy plotting their exact position, another crewmember spotted some specks far off on the horizon. Already at the boundary of his expected search area (approximately 350 miles south of Ceylon), but with plenty of fuel remaining, Birchall decided to investigate and steered the flying boat further south (cf. Figure 3.2). As they approached, he realized that his crew had stumbled upon a massive enemy flotilla steaming towards Ceylon.[131]

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[129]Ernest Cable, "The Measure of a Leader: Squadron Leader L.J. Birchall (The Saviour of Ceylon)," *Sic Itur Ad Astra: Canadian Aerospace Power Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): 18.

[130]During the Second World War, it was common for overseas RCAF squadrons to consistent largely of RAF personnel; therefore, this was a typical crew composition, and the imbalance of nationalities was the impetus for efforts to "Canadianize" overseas RCAF squadrons. For more information, see Greenhous *et al*, "Anti-Submarine War . . .," 54-68.

[131]RCAF, "Portrait of a Hero . . ."; Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 118.

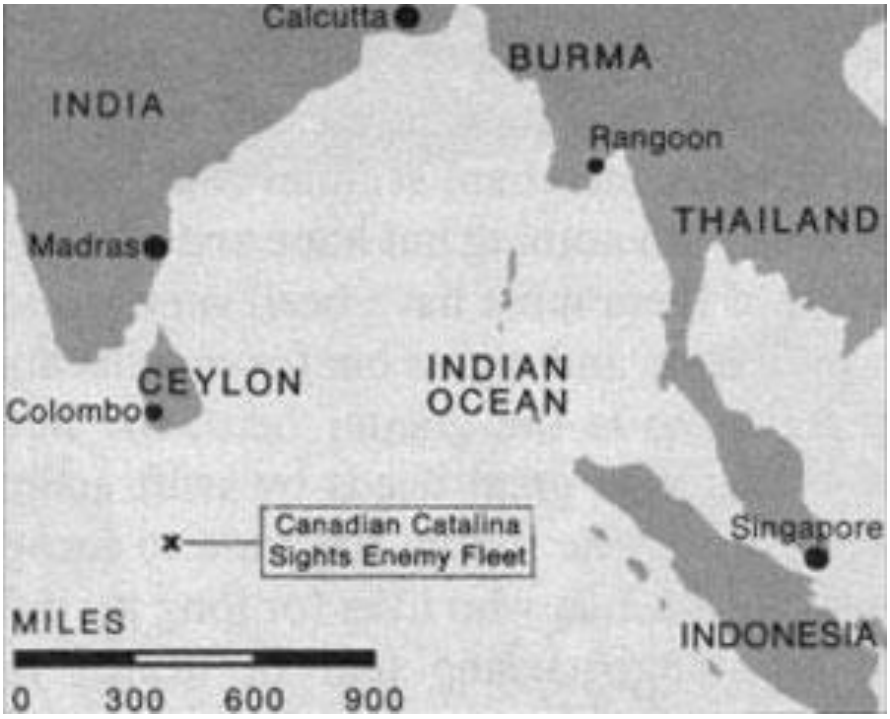

Figure 3.2 – Map Depicting Birchall's Encounter with the Japanese First Air Fleet
Source: Norflicks Productions Ltd., "The Saviour of Ceylon: The Story of Leonard Birchall," last accessed 7 April 2018, http://www.norflicks.com/birchall.html.

The invading force was the Japanese First Air Fleet commanded by Vice-Admiral (VAdm) Chuichi Nagumo, who had been given the objectives of destroying the British naval and air forces in Ceylon, disrupting shipping in the Bay of Bengal, and demonstrating Japanese military might.[132] Nagumo's was the same fleet that had previously attacked Pearl Harbor, and it "consisted of more than 300 first-line combat aircraft embarked aboard five carriers, accompanied by four battleships, two heavy cruisers, a light cruiser, and eight destroyers."[133] Leonard Birchall's lone Catalina, which was unarmoured, lightly armed, and cruised at a leisurely 100 knots, stood no chance of survival.[134] The Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero fighter aircraft scrambled to the sky as Birchall's wireless operator feverishly coded and transmitted a warning to Ceylon, giving the

[132]T.W. Melnyk, *Canadian Flying Operations in South East Asia 1941-1945* (Ottawa: T&H Printers Ltd., 1976), 23; Rob Stuart, "Leonard Birchall and the Japanese Raid on Colombo," *Canadian Military Journal* 7, no. 4 (Winter 2006-2007): 65.
[133]Bashow, "Four Gallant Airmen . . .," 176.
[134]Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 18; Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 17.

position, course, speed, and composition of the armada.[135] As the alert was being sent for a third and final time, per standard procedure, the Catalina was hit by enemy fire that destroyed the wireless communications equipment and wounded its operator. Since the message was never acknowledged by Colombo, the crew was not certain it had been received.[136]

Meanwhile, S/L Birchall was struggling to keep his Catalina airborne. Although its instrument panel had been shattered and Birchall's right leg had been wounded by an explosive burst, he continued to throw the aircraft into evasive manoeuvres.[137] The punctured wing tanks drained burning fuel into the fuselage and the hull started to break apart, but it was impossible for the crew to bail out due to their low altitude. Ditching the aircraft was their only hope, and Birchall managed to get "the poor old bird on the water before the tail fell off."[138]

One member of the crew went down with the Catalina, and two more were killed by enemy strafing. Just as sharks began to circle, S/L Birchall and the five other survivors were plucked from the Indian Ocean by a lifeboat and taken aboard the Japanese destroyer *Isokaze*. Three of the men were very badly wounded, while Birchall and the two others suffered relatively minor injuries. When Birchall voluntarily identified himself as the senior officer, he was promptly beaten and interrogated.[139] Desperately wanting to carry out another surprise attack, the Japanese sailors were keen to learn whether or not a warning message had been transmitted back to Ceylon. S/L Birchall attempted to deflect

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[135]Colin Haskin, "The 'Saviour of Ceylon,'" *Globe and Mail*, 18 September 2004.
[136]Kugel, "'Savior of Ceylon,'" 85; Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 21.
[137]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 19.
[138]Birchall undated postwar account, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 84.
[139]*The Saviour of Ceylon: The Story of Leonard Birchall,* directed by Marta Nielsen (Toronto: Norflicks Productions Ltd., 2006), DVD; Baker, *History of 413 Squadron*, 17.

the questioning by maintaining that only the wireless operator knew the answer and he had been killed. "Actually," Birchall later admitted in an interview with filmmaker and journalist Richard Nielsen, "he was lying there on the deck – he was one of the badly wounded ones – so he immediately became an air gunner and he stayed that way for the entire war."[140] Despite Birchall's efforts to conceal it, the Japanese learned the truth when they intercepted a transmission from Colombo asking the Catalina's crew to confirm the details of the enemy armada sighting.[141]

Although he had lost the element of surprise, VAdm Nagumo decided to launch an air raid on Colombo the following day. Having been forewarned by the reconnaissance crew, the British forces were prepared for the invasion: "The main fleet sailed from [the secret base at] Addu Atoll as quickly as fuelling could be completed, [and] the cruisers *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall*, the aircraft carrier *Hermes*, and 48 merchant vessels were cleared from Ceylonese ports and defences [were] alerted."[142] With emptied harbours and Allied fighter aircraft standing by to greet the Japanese attackers, Nagumo's principal objective of neutralizing the Eastern Fleet was ultimately foiled.[143] According to journalist and author Leslie Roberts, "a single Catalina and its crew had averted a second Pearl Harbor."[144]

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[140]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[141]Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 119-120.

[142]Melnyk, *Canadian Flying Operations* . . ., 29. Addu Atoll, the southernmost atoll of the Maldives, is located approximately 600 miles southwest of Ceylon. For a detailed account of the British preparation for the attack, see Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Hinge of Fate* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 178-180.

[143]Larry Milberry, *Aviation in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1979), 207; Michael Pearson, "The End of the Beginning," in *The Burma Air Campaign: December 1941 – August 1945* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2006), 53.

[144]Leslie Roberts, *There Shall be Wings: A History of the Royal Canadian Air Force* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., 1959), 151.

The unsuccessful raid on Colombo had profound and enduring effects on subsequent Japanese war efforts. Bloodied by Somerville, the weakened Japanese First Air Fleet limped out of the Indian Ocean and sent three of its five aircraft carriers back to their home ports to be refitted and re-equipped with aircraft. As a result, Nagumo was ill-prepared for his next bout, the Battle of the Coral Sea, and had to settle for a draw. Then, just two months after the failed attack on Ceylon, the fleet was wiped out entirely in the Battle of Midway, marking what many believe to be the war's turning point in the Pacific theatre.[145] However, S/L Birchall and the other surviving crewmembers knew none of this. The six battered airmen had been stuffed into a cramped paint locker at the bow of the destroyer and left there for several days before they were transferred to VAdm Nagumo's flagship, the aircraft carrier *Akagi*, and shipped off to Japan.[146] They were to live out the remainder of the war confined to a succession of Prisoner of War (POW) camps, unaware that "their initial sighting of the Japanese fleet had set off a series of events that changed the course of the war."[147]

Captivity: Life as a Prisoner of War

Upon arrival at the Japanese naval base in Yokosuka on 22 April 1942, the three severely wounded airmen were taken to the hospital while Leonard Birchall and the two others were sent to a special interrogation camp in Ofuna. The purpose of this camp was to provide the Japanese with a living dictionary of all Allied military occupations. As such, "the only way out – other than death – was if the Japanese captured a more up-to-

[145]Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 22; RCAF, "Portrait of a Hero . . ."; Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[146]A.R. Byers, ed., *The Canadians at War 1939/45*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: Reader's Digest Association of Canada Ltd., 1986), 102.

[147]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 21.

date serviceman in [the same] trade."[148] Much like each of the other POW camps that S/L Birchall would eventually occupy, the conditions at Ofuna were horrendous. Those held captive endured malnutrition and disease while being subjected to slave labour, torture, and routine beatings.[149] To make matters worse, Birchall's capture "was not reported [to the Red Cross] by the Japanese, and he was constantly reminded it didn't matter if he disappeared."[150] After five months of unimaginable hardship, another Catalina pilot arrived and S/L Birchall was relocated on 15 September 1942 to a POW work camp that had been constructed under the grandstands of an old baseball stadium in Yokohama.[151]

Upon his indoctrination at Yokohama, Leonard Birchall learned that the earlier actions of the imprisoned officers at various camps had generated severe hatred and hostility from the troops. By hoarding a disproportionate share of the food, medicine, cigarettes, and contraband for personal consumption, these officers had gained a reputation of looking after themselves first, which resulted in widespread distrust and disrespect.[152] S/L Birchall was resolved to remedy this and, as the highest-ranking officer amongst the prisoners, "the horror show was his."[153] On his first night at Yokohama, he convened a meeting with his fellow officers and ultimately convinced them to put the collective needs of the camp ahead of their own.[154] In a postwar account, Birchall recalled:

> . . . we officers soon realized that somehow we had to convince the troops our greatest chance of survival lay in working together – not an easy task

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[148]Baker, *History of 413 Squadron*, 19.
[149]Kugel, "'Savior of Ceylon,'" 86; Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 22.
[150]Dave Brown, "Len Birchall," in *Faces of War: A Collection* (Burnstown: General Store Publishing House, 1998), 90.
[151]Leonard Birchall POW Identity (ID) Card, Leonard Joseph Birchall Fonds, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Accession 2011-00481-0, R14031, Volume 2, File 1; Baker, *History of 413 Squadron*, 19.
[152]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 22.
[153]Dave Brown, "Len Birchall: Real-Life Hero," *Ottawa Citizen*, 3 October 2004.
[154]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 22.

> when we faced death every day. Slowly, I guess, the decision was reached that we officers would never get out of this mess alive. We lived only for the moment. In this way we were able to work with and for the men.[155]

To counter the selfishness that had prevailed to that point, S/L Birchall instituted and enforced a policy whereby the meagre supply of food would be equally distributed amongst all inmates. He insisted that the officers' food pails be filled in full view of the men, and he allowed anyone who thought he had received a lesser portion to exchange bowls with an officer without question. Birchall recalled that, in the beginning, the occasional man would try to cheat by taking a few bites and then changing bowls, "but when nothing was said or done he soon found out that all he did was earn the enmity of his mates. Towards the end, [the officers] had to put a careful watch on [their] food as the troops tried to give more to any sick officer."[156]

Similarly, S/L Birchall ensured the meticulous care and control of scarce medicines. Collectively, the POWs had managed to smuggle three morphine pills into the camp and, under Birchall's leadership once again, the inmates agreed that they would only be used with unanimous approval. Clearly, his efforts to confront the attitude of "every man for himself" had succeeded, because when the doctor (also a POW) recommended the use of the sedatives for various *ad hoc* surgeries and amputations, "a vote of the camp was taken and in every instance the man who was to be given the pill always cast the one negative vote. The surgeries would proceed without the pills and it took several men to hold the patients down and muffle the screams."[157] When Leonard

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[155]Birchall undated postwar account, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 127.

[156]*Ibid*. It was common practice for the Japanese to reduce an officer's ration if he was sick or if punishment was warranted.

[157]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 23.

Birchall eventually left Yokohama for another POW camp, the three morphine pills remained unused.[158]

S/L Birchall further increased morale and helped restore trust in the officer cadre by asking the nearest officer to physically intervene whenever he witnessed a POW being abused by the guards. Time and again, Birchall led by example and was often "the first officer to jump between a prisoner and the Japanese guard when a man got in trouble. This action gave time for the prisoner to get lost in amongst the other POWs [while the officer took the beating]."[159] While this earned him a tremendous amount of respect, one notable intervention nearly cost Birchall his life.

Each evening, Lieutenant Jusho Hayashi, the CO of the camp, would inform S/L Birchall of the required number of prisoners for the following day's work detail (cf. Figure 3.3). When Birchall, in turn, reported back that he did not have enough healthy men to fill the quota, the sick and injured were beaten in an effort to make them work.[160] One day, Sergeant (Sgt) Hiroshi Ushioda, the particularly sadistic leader of the guards, was witnessed beating a prisoner who was too weak to join the work party. Birchall stepped in and started slugging, leaving Ushioda with a broken nose, a fractured jaw, and several missing teeth and earning the Canadian flyer a death sentence. Leonard Birchall vividly recollected the fallout:

> . . . everyone was stunned but the damage was done. The sick took off as fast they could while I waited for the storm to burst, which it did. After a bit, I was put in solitary. When the camp commandant got back to camp, I was beaten again and hung by the thumbs. A few days of solitary and I was taken to Tokyo for court-martial. This was a real farce. It ended up

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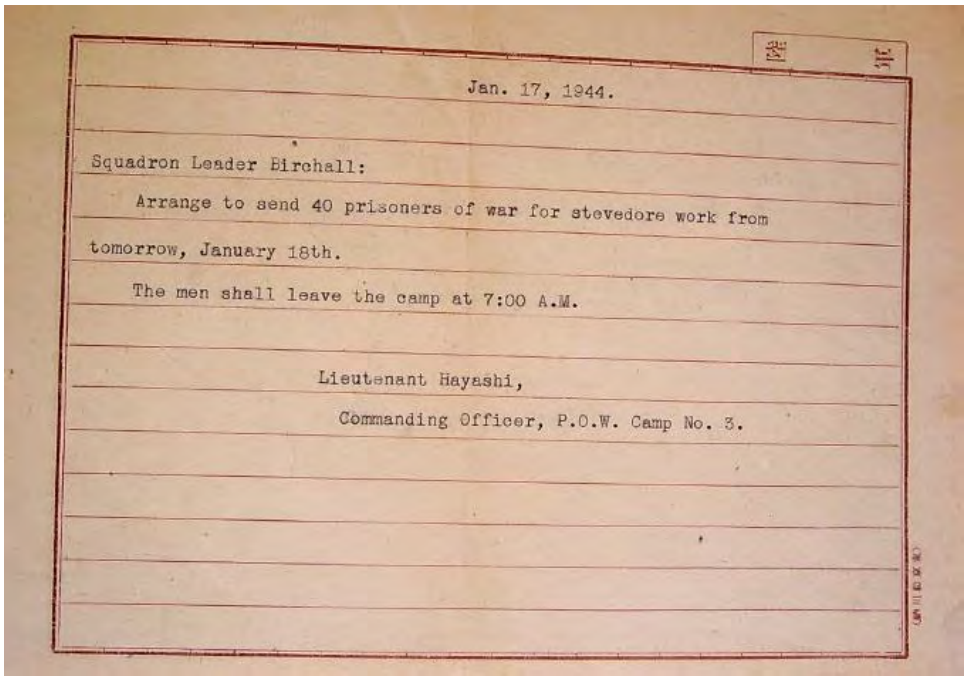
[158]Birchall undated postwar account, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 130.

[159]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 22.

[160]Hayashi to Birchall, memorandum, 17 January 1944, Leonard Joseph Birchall Fonds, LAC, Accession 2011-00481-0, R14031, Volume 2, File 7; Birchall undated postwar account, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 130; Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 123.

> with a long harangue and an order that I was to be shot. I was taken out and we went through the charade of loading, etc. Then I was told I was dishonourable and only honourable people were shot. They said I was to have my head cut off. Once again outside, knee over and the sword went by my head. Again a change of mind and back into solitary for two weeks.[161]

When the Japanese failed to carry out the punishment, S/L Birchall, having just narrowly avoided his own demise, made a bold premonition directly to Sgt Ushioda: "You have just made a terrible mistake. We will win this war and I will live to see you hanged."[162]



Jan. 17, 1944.

Squadron Leader Birchall:

Arrange to send 40 prisoners of war for stevedore work from tomorrow, January 18th.

The men shall leave the camp at 7:00 A.M.

Lieutenant Hayashi,
Commanding Officer, P.O.W. Camp No. 3.

Figure 3.3 – Correspondence from Lieutenant Hayashi to Squadron Leader Birchall
Source: Hayashi to Birchall, Birchall Fonds, LAC, Accession 2011-00481-0, R14031, Volume 2, File 7.

Although his life had been spared, S/L Birchall's defiance netted him a trip to another camp, this one at the dockyards in Asano. When Birchall arrived at Asano on 25 March 1944,[163] the other POWs there learned of the exploits that had led to his relocation. Fearing that he would not escape another death sentence if he physically lashed out against the guards once more, Birchall's fellow inmates implored him to take

[161]Baker, *History of 413 Squadron*, 20.
[162]Haskin, "'Saviour of Ceylon.'"
[163]Birchall POW ID Card, Birchall Fonds, LAC, Accession 2011-00481-0, R14031, Volume 2, File 1.

alternative action. S/L Birchall heeded the advice and, when the sick prisoners were again forced to work, he organized a sit-down strike and informed the guards that the men would not move until the infirm were excused from labour. The Japanese capitulated, but Birchall was immediately sent to Omori, a special disciplinary camp located on a small manmade island in Tokyo Bay. The men were told he had been executed, which was the standard punishment for such disobedience.[164]

Upon his arrival at Omori on 7 July 1944,[165] S/L Birchall was confronted with a new obstacle. Like in other camps, tobacco was a valued commodity at Omori; so much so that it became something of a currency. However, there was no sharing in this camp and a few men controlled the majority of the supply. The problem was so dire that it was common for starving men to trade away their last bit of food for one more cigarette. To be free of any criticism, the officers gave up smoking under Birchall's leadership. Their cigarette rations were instead given to the camp's imprisoned doctor to be redistributed to desperate patients at his sole discretion. As a result, the most addicted men got additional cigarettes without having to sacrifice their nourishment, and the inmates began looking out for one another's wellbeing: "If a man was trying to sell his food for cigarettes, or if somebody was offering cigarettes for food, the men themselves now started to report this to the doctor knowing nothing was going to happen in the way of punishment from [the officers]."[166] Innumerable lives were saved, and there were no more "cigarette barons" in Birchall's camp.

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[164]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 25; Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 123-124; Birchall undated postwar account, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 139; Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[165]Birchall POW ID Card, Birchall Fonds, LAC, Accession 2011-00481-0, R14031, Volume 2, File 1.

[166]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

The island camp also afforded S/L Birchall a rare opportunity to escape. Working in a brick plant opposite a naval seaplane base, Leonard Birchall spotted a Catalina, which the Japanese had purchased before the war, sitting out in the water. For days, he carefully observed its movements and noticed that it was always refuelled upon returning from a flight. He managed to steal a map out of a children's atlas and determined that he could make it to Vladivostok in the Soviet Union, which at that point was considered neutral. Birchall developed a plan whereby he, along with a Catalina engineer and navigator who were also imprisoned at Omori, would sneak away from the camp at night, swim out to the aircraft, and attempt to get airborne before the Japanese could intervene. When he shared this idea with the other officers, he was cautioned that the guards would likely retaliate by executing scores of POWs, thereby undoing all of his efforts to date. The officers also informed S/L Birchall that he could contribute more from inside the prison than he could if he managed to escape. They told him, "there is no way that the Allies can get somebody into this camp and run this camp the way we're doing it. Nobody can replace you here. It's up to you to make the decision."[167] Leonard Birchall simply tore up his plan and never tried to escape.

Omori did not look like a POW camp from above; it more closely resembled a typical Japanese military installation. As such, when Boeing B-29 Superfortress aircraft were spotted high above, S/L Birchall surmised that their crews were conducting photo-reconnaissance and arranged for the prisoners to organize themselves in a manner that spelled out "POW" while pretending to watch the aircraft innocuously.[168] This was done in hopes that the Allies would recognize Omori as a POW camp and spare it from the

[167]*Ibid*.
[168]Birchall undated postwar account, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 141.

bombing raids he was certain would ensue. Not long afterwards, "with immense satisfaction Birchall and the other prisoners watched American bombers roar overhead and turn Tokyo and Yokohama into wastes of flaming ruins. . . . The POW camp escaped destruction."[169]

The firebomb raid destroyed many of the industries in which prisoners were forced to work, so the POWs of Omori were redistributed to various other camps. S/L Birchall, along with a trainload of other prisoners, was relocated to an open-faced mining camp up in the mountains near Nagano. He arrived at this camp, named Suwa, on 5 June 1945 and remained there until the end of the war.[170] According to Birchall, "it was a real death camp. We got in there and [within] the first week three guys died. It was just awful."[171]

Stealing had become a way of life for Leonard Birchall and the other POWs throughout their entire internment. However, at Suwa, where food was at its scarcest and malnutrition was rampant, the POWs' very existence depended on their ability to obtain additional nourishment. S/L Birchall assembled teams of reliable men with sufficient stamina to slip through the fence at night, raid local farms, and return with vegetables that were then used to supplement the scant supply of food they had been rationed.[172] On each of these clandestine missions, the men were accompanied by an officer who, if caught, would tell the guards that he had ordered the thievery. This would result in the officer

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[169]Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 124.

[170]Birchall POW ID Card, Birchall Fonds, LAC, Accession 2011-00481-0, R14031, Volume 2, File 1; Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 25.

[171]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[172]Birchall undated postwar account, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 144-145; Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 26.

receiving the full beating while the men escaped relatively unscathed. Leading by example, S/L Birchall took part in countless stealing missions.[173]

One of the men imprisoned alongside S/L Birchall was Seaman Second Class Joseph Rust Brown, an American serviceman who had been captured after his aircraft was shot down off the coast of Alaska. Brown became so adept at stealing that he earned the nickname "Fingers" and, decades after his release, he penned a memoir entitled *We Stole to Live*. With the book's dedication, Brown paid homage to his former wartime mentor: "Everything I learned about stealing I learned from Birchall."[174] Although appreciative, Birchall chuckled, "[it] was one of the worst accolades I've ever had in my life."[175]

On 15 August 1945, S/L Birchall learned from a sympathetic interpreter that Japanese Emperor Michinomiya Hirohito had announced Japan's surrender. He informed his fellow inmates that their release would be imminent, and the men were expectedly jubilant: "There was a terrific uproar, handshaking, laughing and a wild show of emotions."[176] Birchall then notified the CO that he was taking over the camp and had his men relieve the guards of their weapons. Despite the radical turn of events, Leonard Birchall's concern for the wellbeing of his subordinates was not assuaged. He feared that the men were too weak to depart the camp in their existing condition, so he announced that everyone would stay put until they were in the best possible physical shape; only then would the journey down from the mountains be attempted.[177]

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[173]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[174]Joseph Rust Brown, *We Stole to Live* (Cape Girardeau: Missourian Litho and Print, 1982), viii; Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[175]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[176]Birchall diary entry for 19 August 1945, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 146.

[177]Jonathan F. Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 213.

Birchall and his men obtained a bucket of yellow paint and emblazoned "POW" on the roofs of the buildings. Allied aircraft soon found them and the residents of Suwa were showered with bundles of food and clothing.[178] As they gradually regained their strength, Birchall had his men use old sheets and crayons to create flags representing their home nations: "The flags would give the men a sense of security and unity when they exited the camp together."[179] On 5 September 1945, weighing just 95 pounds, S/L Birchall led approximately 200 POWs and the Japanese guards out of the prison.[180] His three-and-a-half-year ordeal was finally over.

Aftermath: Recognition and Reckoning

Leonard Birchall's wartime heroics and his ability to instill in his fellow POWs a resolve to live did not go unrecognized; he returned to Canada as a newly-promoted W/C.[181] For his role in reporting the Japanese invasion fleet, he was presented the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), which had previously been bestowed upon him *in absentia* when he was believed to be resting in a watery grave. The citation reads, in part, "he did not return from his mission, but his timely warning enabled preparations to be made which resulted in considerable losses to the enemy forces."[182] In 1946, W/C Birchall was awarded the rare and prestigious Order of the British Empire (OBE) for

[178]Birchall diary entry for 29 August 1945, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 147.
[179]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 26.
[180]Brown, "Len Birchall," 90.
[181]Bashow, "Four Gallant Airmen . . .," 180.
[182]Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) Citation, Squadron Leader Leonard Birchall, award effective 13 May 1943 as per *London Gazette* dated 18 May 1943 and Air Force Routine Order (AFRO) 1078/43 dated 11 June 1943, RCAF Association, "Birchall, Leonard Joseph," last accessed 6 April 2018, http://rcaf association.ca/heritage/search-awards/?search=C775&searchfield=servicenumber&type=all.

Gallantry for his extraordinary courage and leadership in the various POW camps (cf. Appendix 4).[183]

Figure 3.4 – Wing Commander Leonard Birchall
Source: DND Photo, PL-37202. This photo of Birchall and his wife was taken at the Rockcliffe Airport (near Ottawa) on 9 October 1945, approximately one month after his release from the Suwa POW Camp.

The entire time he was held captive, Leonard Birchall kept detailed records chronicling the atrocities that he and his men encountered. He collected small books and pencils that had been issued to the prisoners by the Japanese and subsequently used them

[183]Order of the British Empire (OBE) Citation, Wing Commander Leonard Birchall, award effective 2 February 1946 as per *London Gazette* dated 5 February 1946 and AFRO 280/46 dated 15 March 1946, RCAF Association, "Birchall, Leonard Joseph."

to record the events of the day each evening.[184] He managed to convince the guards that the books had been used as toilet paper, but in reality, they had been carefully wrapped in oilcloth and buried. Notwithstanding the fact that there was a death penalty for keeping such notes, Birchall managed to file and bury a total of 22 diaries.[185]

In 1947, W/C Birchall returned to Japan to provide instrumental testimony at the ensuing international war crimes tribunal. As his aircraft circled over Tokyo in preparation for landing, he glanced down to see Omori, the island discipline camp he once called home. At that moment, Leonard Birchall felt incredible internal confliction and asked himself, "was I coming back there for revenge, or was I coming back there for justice?"[186] Ultimately, he convinced himself that his motivation was the latter and that he would do his utmost to ensure justice was delivered. His hidden diaries, which had since been dug up and scrutinized, became primary pieces of evidence that led to the conviction of several guards including Sgt Ushioda, the recipient of Birchall's wrath back at Yokohama. Hiroshi Ushioda was handed a death sentence, and W/C Birchall made good on his earlier promise by witnessing the execution of his former tormentor.[187]

Later Life: Continuing Service

After the war, Leonard Birchall was subsequently promoted to group captain (G/C) and served in various staff and command positions both in Canada and abroad. In 1948, he became the Assistant Air Attaché to the Canadian Joint Staff in Washington, D.C. At the end of this two-year posting, President Harry Truman appointed Birchall an

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[184]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 23.

[185]Obituary, "Air Commodore Leonard Birchall," *The Telegraph*, 18 September 2004; Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 123; Birchall to Douglas, 10 October 1974, DHH 74/686; Brown, "Len Birchall: Real-Life Hero."

[186]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[187]Haskin, "'Saviour of Ceylon.'"

Officer in the U.S. Legion of Merit (LOM), noting that his wartime exploits became "legendary throughout Japan and brought renewed faith and strength to many hundreds of ill and disheartened prisoners. Subsequent to his liberation he contributed information and material of inestimable value in connection with war crimes investigations."[188] Birchall returned to Canada as the CO of RCAF Station Goose Bay, Newfoundland before being named Senior Personnel Staff Officer of Air Materiel Command Headquarters in Ottawa in 1952. In 1954, G/C Birchall was once again stationed abroad, this time in Paris where he served as a member of the Canadian delegation to NATO. Upon his homecoming in 1958, he was named the CO of RCAF Station North Bay, Ontario where he became qualified to fly the Avro CF-100 Canuck.[189]

Promoted to air commodore (A/C) in 1960, Leonard Birchall was made Chief of Operations at Air Force Headquarters in Ottawa for his penultimate tour of duty as a regular officer.[190] In 1963, Birchall's military career came full circle when he was appointed Commandant of RMC, his *alma mater*. In this capacity, he also served as Honorary *Aide-de-Camp* to their Excellencies, Governors General Georges Vanier and Rolan Michener.[191] Interestingly, A/C Birchall was at the helm of the military academy when George Stanley, the Dean of Arts, designed Canada's new flag based on that of RMC. John Matheson, a parliamentarian and member of the special committee charged with selecting a new national emblem, later wrote, "we must accordingly acknowledge,

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[188]United States Legion of Merit (LOM) Citation, Group Captain Leonard Birchall, awarded as per AFRO 443/50 dated 8 September 1950, RCAF Association, "Birchall, Leonard Joseph."

[189]Birchall, "Trenton to Dartmouth . . .," 9-10; RCAF Association, "Birchall, Leonard Joseph."

[190]RCAF Association, "Birchall, Leonard Joseph."

[191]Richard Arthur Preston, *Canada's RMC: A History of the Royal Military College* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 389; Pigott, "Leonard Birchall . . .," 23.

with gratitude, the contribution made by [Air] Commodore Birchall to the flag of Canada."[192]

Leonard Birchall opted to retire from the RCAF in 1967 rather than be associated with the unification of the military's three branches.[193] The same year, he became the Chief Administrative Officer of the Faculty of Administrative Studies at York University in Toronto. He remained in this position for 14 years before permanently leaving the private sector, at which point the university bestowed upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* in recognition of his loyal service.[194]

In his retirement, Leonard Birchall was "a strident, articulate and unrepentant advocate for improving the pension benefits . . . [for those] who had been incarcerated under the most inhumane of conditions by the Japanese during the Second World War."[195] In 1986, when Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's government offered compensation to Japanese Canadians who had been held captive during the war, Birchall demanded that Japan reciprocate the gesture by compensating individuals like himself who had been interned and abused at the hands of the Japanese. Receiving no support from the Canadian government, Birchall resigned from the Progressive Conservative Party in protest.[196] Leonard Birchall's lobbyist efforts eventually paid dividends, although they were small and controversial: "More than 50 years after they were released, the

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[192]John Ross Matheson, *Canada's Flag: A Search for a Country* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Company, 1980), 126. In a serendipitous string of events, Stanley had been invited to appear in front of the committee to promote his design, but A/C Birchall, desirous of protecting RMC from political controversy, would not allow the summons to be answered. The committee proceeded without him, and Stanley's design was selected by a vote of 15-0. Matheson estimated that, had Birchall permitted Stanley to attend, at least some opposition would have been generated and the decision certainly would not have been unanimous.

[193]Daniel Gosselin, "Hellyer's Ghosts: Unification of the Canadian Forces is 40 Years Old – Part One," *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 6; Obituary, "Air Commodore Leonard Birchall."

[194]York University, "Former York administrator dies at 89," last accessed 7 April 2018, http://yfile-archive.news.yorku.ca/2004/09/30/former-york-administrator-dies-at-89/; Brown, "Len Birchall," 90.

[195]Bashow, "Four Gallant Airmen . . .," 182.

[196]Brown, "Len Birchall," 90.

surviving Canadian prisoners of war were awarded $24,000 each by the *Canadian* [emphasis added] government. Under the 1952 treaty, Japan was not responsible for the claims."[197] Although the payment offered an acknowledgement of the pain and suffering endured by POWs, Birchall lamented the fact that the compensation came from the pockets of Canadian taxpayers when, in his opinion, the financial burden should have been borne by the Japanese.[198]

In 1994, Leonard Birchall returned to Sri Lanka. He was there as an official observer of the general election that, following a violent campaign marked by 24 killings, saw the historic defeat of the longstanding ruling party.[199] During this visit, he learned that many of the local hospitals were impoverished and, without any fanfare or publicity, arranged for the delivery of several tons of medical supplies at his own expense.[200] The following year, Birchall spearheaded another trip to the island nation during which he, accompanied by a delegation from 413 Sqn, conducted a pilgrimage to his old wartime base. Here the airmen dedicated a memorial cairn in honour of the former squadron members who perished in the Second World War.[201] Leonard Birchall remarked that "the memorial erected at the wartime base in Koggala gives mute testimony of those members who paid the supreme sacrifice for freedom and this will bind together the countries of Sri Lanka and Canada forever."[202] Of Birchall's enduring commitment to their legacy, one veteran commented, "Birch is still looking after his men."[203]

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[197]Joanne Laucius, "Hero was 'the saviour of Ceylon,'" *Ottawa Citizen*, 14 September 2004.
[198]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.
[199]Sri Lanka Parliamentary Chamber, "Elections held in 1994," last accessed 7 April 2018, http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2295_94.htm; Obituary, "Air Commodore Leonard Birchall."
[200]Obituary, "Air Commodore Leonard Birchall."
[201]Baker, *History of 413 Squadron*, 159.
[202]*Ibid*., vi.
[203]Obituary, "Air Commodore Leonard Birchall."

Having already been appointed to the Order of Ontario (O.Ont), Leonard Birchall was invested as a Member of the Order of Canada (CM) in 2000 as a result of his many contributions to the nation.[204] The following year, he was inducted into Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame (CAHF) and awarded the prestigious Vimy Award for his "significant and outstanding contribution to the defence and security of [Canada] and the preservation of [its] democratic values."[205] In 2003, he was recognized yet again when a new search and rescue training boat was named *Saviour of Ceylon* in his honour.[206]

Despite having retired from active duty, Leonard Birchall did not hang up his uniform. During his tenure at York University, and for several years that followed, A/C Birchall maintained his affiliation with the RCAF through his appointment as Honorary Colonel (HCol) of 400 Sqn, Canada's senior serving RCAF squadron, which was also located in the Toronto at the time.[207] After spending more than 20 years with 400 Sqn, Leonard Birchall continued his *ex-officio* service to the RCAF when he was named HCol of 413 Sqn in 1989, the same squadron for which he flew Catalinas during the war, now located at CFB Greenwood, Nova Scotia.[208] His continual and steadfast dedication to the profession of arms resulted in him becoming the only serviceman with five clasps to his Canadian Forces Decoration (CD), representing more than 62 years of service and eventually putting him in unique company:

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[204]Order of Ontario, "Leonard J. Birchall," last accessed 7 April 2018, https://www.ontario.ca/page/order-ontario#section-6; Order of Canada, "Leonard Birchall, C.M., O.B.E., D.F.C., O.Ont., C.D.," last accessed 7 April 2018, https://www.gg.ca/honour.aspx?id=8203&t=12&ln= Birchall; Bashow, "Four Gallant Airmen . . .," 182.

[205]Conference of Defence Associations Institute, "Vimy Award Guidelines," last accessed 12 March 2018, https://cdainstitute.ca/awards/vimy-award/vimy-award-guidelines/.

[206]Laucius, "Hero was 'the saviour of Ceylon.'"

[207]Ron Wylie, *400 (City of Toronto) Squadron History: 1932 to 1996* (Toronto: 400 Squadron, 1997), 110, 116. 400 Sqn was relocated to CFB Borden, Ontario in 1996.

[208]Jeff Agnew and Holly Bridges, eds., "Honouring the passing of 413 Squadron Honorary Colonel Air Commodore Len Birchall," *Crew Brief* 2, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 4.

> . . . when [Birchall] was informed that Elizabeth, the Queen Mother had qualified for the award of a fifth clasp to her own Canadian Forces Decoration, based upon her own service as an honourary [*sic*] colonel, the cheeky man quipped that he should go to Buckingham Palace to present it to her, based upon his own seniority with the decoration![209]

By 2004, Leonard Birchall was confined to a wheelchair and unable to travel due to his poor health. As such, a contingent from 413 Sqn flew to Kingston, where he was residing, so they could conduct their ceremonial Change of Command parade under the watchful eye of their beloved HCol. The wartime legend took great pride in the event, and he was observed to be "a gallant gentleman to the end, carrying out his last official military duty with typical dignity."[210]

Figure 3.5 – Air Commodore Leonard Birchall
Source: Petie LeDrew and Holly Bridges, "Canadian hero saved Ceylon in World War II," *The Sri Lanka Reporter*, 11 November 2013. This photo was taken after Birchall received a fifth clasp to his CD in 1996.

[209]Bashow, "Four Gallant Airmen . . .," 182.
[210]Agnew and Bridges, "Honouring the passing . . .," 4.

Leonard Joseph Birchall passed away from lung cancer on 10 September 2004 at the age of 89. Unsurprisingly, his funeral was attended not only by family and friends, but also by the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Canada, numerous high-ranking military officers, and scores of veterans and citizens alike who simply wanted to pay their respect to a genuine war hero.[211] With 71 consecutive years in uniform, which put him just one shy of earning an unprecedented sixth clasp to his CD, he was the longest serving member in the history of the Canadian military.[212]

Conclusion

On New Year's Eve of 1942, the first of three he celebrated in captivity, Leonard Birchall made a special entry into his diary after the clock struck midnight: "Twelve o'clock! We all shouted, shook hands and laughed like mad, anything to relieve our emotions, ending by joining hands and singing *Auld Lang Syne*."[213] The first line of the classic Scottish poem-turned-song asks, "should old acquaintance be forgot?" This question was answered for Leonard Birchall years after his release from custody when he received a telephone call from an American serviceman with whom he had been imprisoned at Asano, the dockyard camp where Birchall staged the legendary sit-down strike. Through a network of former POWs, the man had just recently learned that his one-time camp leader had not been executed as he was led to believe when Birchall was shipped off to Omori. Elated and eager to reconnect to with the man who had become known as the Saviour of Ceylon, he came up to Canada and the two former POWs

[211]Based on personal observations of the author who attended A/C Birchall's funeral and had the honour of serving as a pallbearer.

[212]Kugel, "'Savior of Ceylon,'" 86.

[213]Birchall diary entry for 31 December 1942, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 132.

remained close friends for years to follow.[214] Indeed, the old acquaintance had not been forgotten, and it is difficult to imagine that he ever could have been.

Leonard Birchall was an iconic Canadian who personified the concept of "duty with honour" from the moment he enrolled in the RCAF until the day he died. During his detention, he "strove courageously for reasonable treatment for the prisoners, particularly those who were too sick to work."[215] His social efforts continued long after his release and well into the latter stages of his life. According to Birchall himself, in a speech he delivered upon his induction into CAHF, "if I had it all to do over again I would do exactly the same thing and not change one minute of it."[216] Leonard Birchall's story offers many lessons about the effective application of command. These will be explored in the following chapter, which will use the Pigeau-McCann model to analyze the interaction between Birchall's command competency, authority, and responsibility.

[214]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.
[215]Michael Tomlinson, *The Most Dangerous Moment* (London: William Kimber, 1976), 175.
[216]Birchall, "Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame . . .," 115.

CHAPTER 4 – ANALYSIS

I believe honestly that we will not see his like again.

–Frank Norman

Leonard Birchall's story offers both inspiration and motivation. His numerous feats while interned in a series of Japanese POW camps for much of the Second World War are nothing short of astounding, and they serve as a testament to the importance of effective leadership and command. In order to gain a deeper appreciation of his accomplishments, Birchall's actions will be examined against the Pigeau-McCann command model.

This chapter will first consider Leonard Birchall's competency, authority, and responsibility individually. In doing so, it will draw on examples from various periods of his life; however, emphasis will be placed on the time he spent in captivity since his honourable service as a POW makes him a unique subject of study. Next, the three CAR dimensions will be assembled and Birchall's placement relative to the BCE will be assessed. This analysis will offer insight into how air force command effectiveness can be achieved even in extraordinary circumstances.

Competency

Per the Pigeau-McCann command model, professional competency requires four distinct aptitudes – physical, intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal. Leonard Birchall's overall level of competency was consistently high throughout his career. This contention can be better appreciated by considering each of the four elements in turn.

Physical Competency

Leonard Birchall's superior skill as a pilot was the hallmark of his physical competency. His abilities are partially evidenced by his receipt of the DFC for his role in

reporting the Japanese First Air Fleet despite being wounded and under intense enemy fire. Furthermore, the high survival rate of his crew following their encounter with the Japanese Zeros is directly attributable to the talent S/L Birchall displayed in ditching his battered Catalina once its airworthiness had been irreversibly compromised.

However, Leonard Birchall exuded advanced skill as an airman long before his aforementioned fateful patrol over the Indian Ocean. By piloting his Stranraer flying boat in a manner that resulted in the capture of the Italian freighter crew in the St. Lawrence River in 1940, Birchall scored an early victory for the RCAF in the Second World War. This almost certainly had a profound positive effect on morale within his squadron. His ability to thrive as a pilot in Sullom Voe, despite facing demanding missions, challenging weather, and turbulent sea states, is further testament to his pre-Saviour of Ceylon physical competency.

Leonard Birchall continued to demonstrate his piloting abilities long after the war came to an end by flying routinely as CO of RCAF Station North Bay. In doing so, Birchall exercised what Allan English refers to as "technical leadership," which is the "the ability to influence others to achieve a goal, based on the specialized knowledge or skill of the leader."[217] Birchall's proficiency in piloting high-performance military aircraft despite his senior rank challenged some managerial models, such as the Three-Skill Approach developed by social and organizational psychologist Robert Katz. This framework suggests that technical skills should give way to interpersonal and conceptual aptitude as one rises in the organizational hierarchy.[218] It is consistent with the Pigeau-McCann command model in terms of the expectation that an officer's physical

[217]English, "Masks of Command . . .," 5.

[218]Robert L. Katz, "Skills of an Effective Administrator," *Harvard Business Review* 33, no. 1 (January/February 1955): 34.

competency will naturally diminish as greater emphasis is placed on the other competencies at senior ranks.[219] However, since his intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal competencies did not suffer as a result of his retained physical competency, Leonard Birchall proved that he could effectively handle competing workplace demands.

Even more impressive was Leonard Birchall's ability to fly a vintage Noorduyn Harvard aircraft, albeit with an instructor, at the age of 86. At his CAHF induction ceremony, Birchall recalled the almost instantaneous return of the physical competency he thought he had lost long ago:

> . . . as I strapped myself in . . . I asked for a refresher briefing on the knobs and levers. [The instructor's] reply was: "Don't worry, it will all come back to you." Sure enough, as we lifted off he turned over control to me and my hands went instinctively to the trim tabs, throttle and other controls. At the same time my eyes started doing their ingrained cross-checking of the instruments. . . . Once again I felt the eager response of that lovely aircraft.[220]

In addition to his pure abilities as a pilot, Leonard Birchall's physical competency can be appreciated through an examination of his endurance. Already accustomed to flying long missions off the north coast of Scotland, S/L Birchall required only one day of rest before setting out from Ceylon on his historic and consequential maiden patrol over the Indian Ocean.[221] Moreover, during his 39 months of captivity, the dreadful living conditions and physical brutality took a heavy toll on his health. Still, Birchall remained strong enough to physically intervene when the situation so dictated, as evidenced by his pummelling of Sgt Ushioda.

The years of malnutrition and sadistic beatings through which Leonard Birchall suffered had long-term consequences for the veteran aviator. As Birchall himself stated in

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[219]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).
[220]Birchall, "Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame . . .," 114.
[221]Couglin, *Dangerous Sky* . . ., 118.

a 1997 speech on leadership at the Canadian Forces School of Aerospace Studies in Winnipeg, "my indoctrination into Japanese culture . . . was administered with severity by clubs of various sizes . . . resulting in my having to have a series of drastic throat operations and intense radiation treatments."[222] Notwithstanding the requirement for specialized medical care, Birchall's superior physical competency was ultimately proven in the latter stages of his life. Despite enduring wartime atrocities most Canadians could not fathom, Leonard Birchall lived into his ninetieth year, a full decade longer than the national average life expectancy for males at the time of his death.[223]

Intellectual Competency

As a child, Leonard Birchall showed signs of intellectual competency by learning to fly aircraft at just 15 years of age. When he began his studies at RMC, Birchall was one of only 2,364 cadets to have been admitted to the institution in its 57-year history, as indicated by his assigned college identification number, which translates to an average annual admission rate of less than 42 students.[224] Attrition rates were extremely high at the time, and many students failed to follow the academic program to completion. Therefore, his acceptance to and graduation from such an exclusive fraternity speaks volumes for his level of intelligence, as does his subsequent receipt of a rare permanent commission in the RCAF.

Birchall's willingness to learn was perhaps eclipsed only by his creativity. When he was captured and brought aboard the Japanese destroyer, he demonstrated mental

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[222]Leonard Birchall, "Leadership" (speech, Canadian Forces School of Aerospace Studies, Winnipeg, 17 September 1997). Birchall subsequently delivered this speech, which is considered a timeless classic by many in the RCAF community, to various other audiences including that of the 1997 Conference on Ethics in Canadian Defence, with only minor amendments.

[223]Statistics Canada, "Table 1a: Complete life tables, males, Canada, 1980 to 1982," last accessed 13 April 2018, https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/84-537-x/84-537-x2017001-eng.htm.

[224]RMC, "2364 Air Commodore Leonard Birchall."

agility by proclaiming that the wireless operator had been killed, which allowed his crewmate to feign ignorance to the Japanese about any transmissions sent back to Ceylon.[225] Years later, while incarcerated, Birchall's intellectual competency was further demonstrated when he creatively organized the famous sit-down strike, thereby getting his way without resorting to violence. There were myriad other examples of S/L Birchall's creativity in situations fraught with peril, such as his human POW signal to photo-reconnaissance aircraft and his detailed, yet ultimately unimplemented, plan to escape.

Leonard Birchall's overall knowledge of the art of officership allowed him to assume a leadership and command role in each of the POW camps in which he was held. Due to his quick-thinking and understanding of the importance of setting a positive example for his subordinates, Birchall was able to swiftly reverse the standard practice of hoarding food, medicine, cigarettes, and contraband. In doing so, he improved morale, ensured fairness and equity, and prolonged the lifespan of his fellow inmates. Faced with the unique challenges inherent to spending the war in captivity, S/L Birchall's high intellectual competency increased the likelihood of survival for himself and his subordinates.

Emotional Competency

As a POW, S/L Birchall's resilience was unparalleled. He was routinely subjected to torturous acts, solitary confinement, and even execution attempts, but the Japanese guards never succeeded in breaking his resolve. Despite being on the receiving end of countless beatings, many of which he invited upon himself by standing up for his men, Birchall never relented in his pursuit to improve the living conditions in the camps. At a

[225]Cable, "Measure of a Leader . . .," 19.

time when other officers had failed to protect their men, S/L Birchall's emotional competency helped restore trust and respect in the chain of command.

In addition, the diaries that S/L Birchall hid illustrate his unparalleled sense of balance and perspective. Dave McIntosh, an author who reproduced Leonard Birchall's original journal entries, has drawn attention to the fact that "there is a difference between the immediacy of a diary and the postwar recollection. The latter can be shown to be faulty in the case of some survivors and some incidents."[226] Since the Japanese war crimes tribunal followed the "best evidence rule,"[227] it is reasonable to conclude that justice may never have been delivered to the war criminals had S/L Birchall not had the foresight to keep the meticulous records that later allowed him to provide reliable firsthand testimony.

Even at an advanced age, Leonard Birchall demonstrated his emotional competency through his sense of humour. The levity with which he recalled the dedication of the book by "Fingers" Brown and his comedic remark about presiding over the presentation ceremony to honour the Queen Mother's service offer proof of his lightheartedness. Similarly, the opening remarks of his timeless speech on leadership reveal his innate sense of humour:

> . . . I apologize for my copious notes, but at my age, and this past July I became 82 years young, there are three serious losses which you encounter in your physical capabilities. First your eyesight grows dim, and you will note the rather strong lenses in my glasses. Second, your hearing is not too good, and I admit that I am in great need of a hearing aid. Third – and I'll be damned if I can ever remember what that one is. Thus, I must stick closely to my text or I shall wander all over the place. Actually there is a fourth serious loss in our physical capabilities which we old chaps

[226]McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 83.

[227]Richard H. Minear, *Victors' Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 123. The best evidence rule is based on the legal principle that original documentation is superior to copies, personal accounts, or hearsay.

> encounter but we do our utmost to not even think about that one, let alone discuss it, as whenever we do all we do is sit around and cry.[228]

Leonard Birchall experienced many serious events in his life, but his ability to find humour in much of it attests to his advanced emotional competency.

Interpersonal Competency

Throughout his captivity, S/L Birchall fully appreciated the human element of command, as evidenced by his ability to empathize with his fellow inmates. As newspaper columnist Dave Brown has remarked, "he never asked, or ordered, anybody to do anything he wasn't willing to do himself."[229] This empathy extended beyond the walls of the POW camps, as substantiated by Birchall's diary entry on 4 April 1945: "Thirty-five American B-29 bomber men are being held in a special compound. Tales of their treatment make one shudder and I pray that if any of our lads are shot down that they are dead before they reach the ground."[230]

Notwithstanding his ability to understand and share the emotions of others, Leonard Birchall's interpersonal competency was best exemplified by his steadfast promotion of teamwork. Birchall firmly held to the belief that the sole realistic means of survival was for the officers and men to work together to achieve their common objective of getting out alive. Accordingly, his internment offers many examples of effective teamwork such as the organization of stealing parties and the selfless sharing of scarce resources. Following the Japanese surrender, S/L Birchall's insistence that the men leave the Suwa POW Camp together offers further insight into his conviction that they would be exponentially stronger as a united group.

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[228]Birchall, "Leadership."
[229]Brown, "Len Birchall: Real-Life Hero."
[230]Birchall diary entry for 4 April 1945, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 140.

Even in the direst of circumstances, S/L Birchall was able to envision better treatment in his succession of POW camps, and his strong social skills proved a blessing to his fellow inmates: "By a mixture of discipline, cajolery, [and] incidental foolhardiness, . . . [he] brought through the ordeal many men who otherwise might not have survived."[231] Long after he retired from active duty, Birchall continued to exhibit interpersonal competency through his 37 years of service as an HCol, during which his duties included fostering *esprit de corps* and promoting civil-military relations within the local community.[232] Upon his induction into CAHF, he once again expounded the importance of interpersonal relationships, this time as they pertain to the field of military aviation: "Be it aircrew, ground crew, senior officer or the lowest of low sweeping the hangar floor – no matter how important or menial your task – you are still a fully fledged member of the [team]."[233]

Summary

Leonard Birchall's physical, intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal competencies were high throughout his RCAF career. With promotions premised on meritocracy, Birchall proved his overall competency by his relatively rapid ascent through the ranks. In fact, when he was delivered to his first POW camp at Ofuna, the year of his birth was incorrectly recorded on his POW identity card because the Japanese did not believe he could have attained the rank of S/L at such a young age.[234] His subsequent promotion to W/C was directly attributable to his accomplishments while interned, and the two more that followed further demonstrated his competency.

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[231]McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 125.
[232]RCAF, *Honorary Colonel Handbook* (Ottawa: RCAF, 2013), 7.
[233]Birchall, "Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame . . .," 114.
[234]Birchall POW ID Card, Birchall Fonds, LAC, Accession 2011-00481-0, R14031, Volume 2, File 1.

When assessing competency, it is important to consider the dimension holistically. As John Keegan once cautioned, "action without forethought or foreknowledge is foolhardy."[235] This perspective was echoed by Birchall himself when he underscored the importance of "having the necessary knowledge, education, training and judgement, and [making] full use of them."[236] Leonard Birchall's competencies were indeed well-rounded and, as a result, the lives of countless POWs were saved.

Authority

Pigeau and McCann assert that two types of authority – legal and personal – are required for command effectiveness. Leonard Birchall was empowered to act through both his rank and his character. As a POW, he deftly used his legal authority to influence his personal authority, and vice versa.

Legal Authority

Immediately prior to his capture, S/L Birchall enjoyed considerable legal authority as both the interim leader of 413 Sqn and the pilot-in-command of his Catalina flying boat. This authority was demonstrated on 4 April 1942 when Birchall exercised mission command[237] by deliberately flying beyond the southernmost boundary of his designated search area. His astute employment of resources supported Adm Somerville's overall intent of defending Ceylon. This resulted in mission success as Birchall was able to transmit a warning and ultimately foil the Japanese surprise attack. Similarly,

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[235]Keegan, *Mask of Command*, 325.

[236]Birchall, "Leadership."

[237]"Mission command articulates the dynamic and decentralized execution of operations guided throughout by a clear articulation and understanding of the overriding commander's intent." DND, B-GJ-005-000/FP-001, *CFJP 1.0: Canadian Military Doctrine* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2011), 4-3. For further discussion on the concept of mission command, see Pux Barnes, *Mission Command and the RCAF: Considerations for the Employment of Air Power in Joint Operations*, Article #4 in a series on command and control and the Royal Canadian Air Force, last modified 9 February 2016, http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/cf-aerospace-warfare-centre/c2-article-4-mission-command-and-the-rcaf.page.

Birchall's postwar appointments, such as CO of two different RCAF stations and Commandant of RMC, offered him the requisite legal authority to effectively command the installations. However, Leonard Birchall's legal authority was tested during his lengthy captivity.

As the highest-ranking officer in the POW camps, S/L Birchall had the legal authority to impose and enforce a strict code of conduct amongst the inmates. However, unlike in most regular garrisons, this authority was not immediately respected solely by virtue of his rank. The imprisoned men were struggling to survive and had lost faith in the officers with whom they had been held captive. As a result, they did not feel inclined to subject themselves to restrictions, rules, and regulations beyond those already asserted by the guards. Birchall himself noted that being the senior POW was a title in name only; and his authority "was only that which the men wished to give [him] when and if they felt like it."[238] S/L Birchall therefore abandoned any thought of enforcing discipline through traditional means such as punishment, but still wisely insisted on exerting his legal authority over the scarce resources the POWs were afforded.

The manner in which Leonard Birchall controlled the food, medical, and cigarette rations showed that he was committed to his implied mission of keeping the men alive as long as possible. More importantly, his actions had a profound secondary effect in that they demonstrated to the men that Birchall could and should be trusted. The conscientious manner in which S/L Birchall used his legal authority earned him an abundance of respect from his fellow POWs and, correspondingly, his personal authority was drastically increased.

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[238]Birchall, "Leadership."

Personal Authority

If ever there was an officer who exuded personal authority, it was Leonard Birchall. As Allan English has observed, "the best squadron COs in both world wars were bold, skilled airmen who led by example."[239] Although Birchall never served as a squadron CO,[240] he certainly personified this concept in his capacity as both 2IC and A/CO of 413 Sqn. By volunteering to fly the extremely dangerous photo-reconnaissance mission off the Norwegian coast, and by accepting the fateful patrol over the Indian Ocean on short rest, S/L Birchall demonstrated his courage through the imperative declared by Keegan: "Those who impose risk must be seen to share it."[241] Although S/L Birchall's capture put an end to his airborne bravery, his "heroic leadership"[242] was exceptional as he consistently set the example and shared the risk with his fellow POWs.

Through his numerous acts of empathy, courage, and defiance, many of which resulted in physical punishment, as well as his responsible administration of valuable resources, the men began to recognize the strength of S/L Birchall's character. His ethics and values became unquestioned, and Birchall succeeded in gradually reversing the unfavourable reputation that the other officers had earned through their wanton dereliction of duty. The kinship that was cultivated through his actions gave S/L Birchall

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[239]English, "Masks of Command . . .," 11.

[240]One criticism of the S/L rank itself is that a squadron leader does not typically command a squadron in the modern RAF: a wing commander does. However, this demonstrates the difference between leadership and command. A S/L is not necessarily a CO (although this has happened), but he or she can still be a leader within the squadron. That is, the "leader" aspect of the S/L rank places emphasis not on leadership *of* but leadership *in* a squadron. This concept is articulated in John J. Alexander, "A Return to the Royal Canadian Air Force Ranks: A Historical Examination," *RCAF Journal* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 13.

[241]Keegan, *Mask of Command*, 329.

[242]English, "Masks of Command . . .," 5. The counterpart of technical leadership, heroic leadership is practiced by leaders through the sharing of risk with their subordinates.

moral legitimacy, beyond his legal authority, which in turn resulted in the men obeying his directions.[243]

Leonard Birchall had the moral fibre "to face the issues of right and wrong and then the courage to stand up firm and strong regardless of the consequences."[244] As a direct result of his efforts, morale was substantially improved, the men began to show concern for the officers they once held in such contempt, and Birchall's legacy as a selfless leader was born. As further testament to his unshakable resolve, S/L Birchall even earned a modicum of admiration from the guards. According to Lieutenant-Commander James Davis of the U.S. Navy, who spent time imprisoned with Birchall, "the Japs came to hate him, but they respected him, too, for nothing they could say or do could frighten him."[245]

Summary

Although Leonard Birchall possessed adequate legal and personal authority throughout his career, neither was initially recognized in the POW camps. However, his advanced understanding of officership enabled him to deliberately use his legal authority to demonstrate his devotion to advancing the collective interests of the camp. Once he had proven himself and earned sufficient personal authority, his legal authority went unchallenged and he was empowered to effectively command his fellow POWs. S/L Birchall's solid understanding of the extent of his legal and personal authorities, and his ability to synergistically use both to advance his agenda, shows that he was an extremely enlightened officer.

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[243]*Ibid*.
[244]Birchall, "Leadership."
[245]McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 136.

While legal authority is certainly important, Pigeau and McCann draw attention to the fact that the trust, cohesiveness, and motivation engendered by personal authority are paramount to effective command.[246] Leonard Birchall recognized these aspects of command in his comments on leadership, which he rearmed is "judged not by your rank, but by whether your men are completely confident that you have the character, knowledge and training that they can trust you with their lives."[247] At the end of the war, when S/L Birchall directed the anxious men to stay put at Suwa until their health was sufficiently restored, they did so only in part out of respect for his rank; his order was primarily obeyed because the POWs had vested enormous personal authority in their commander.

Responsibility

Much like authority, the responsibility dimension consists of two varieties – extrinsic and intrinsic. During the Second World War, Leonard Birchall assumed considerable responsibility as the senior officer in each of the POW camps. While some aspects of this responsibility were imposed on him, others were self-generated.

Extrinsic Responsibility

Before he ever left Canadian soil, Leonard Birchall showed extrinsic responsibility when he and Jack Twigg offered a sincere apology to the hospital workers they had unintentionally frightened with their low-flying Delta. Although their excuse was fabricated, Birchall demonstrated early in his career that he was willing to be held publically accountable for his actions. With his later appointment as A/CO of 413 Sqn, S/L Birchall was given great responsibility for the effective operation and wellbeing of

[246]Pigeau and McCann, *Putting "Command" back into Command and Control . . .*, 7-8.
[247]Birchall, "Leadership."

his squadron during its relocation to Ceylon. By all accounts, he answered the call, although his time as the squadron's frontman did not last long before he was shot down, captured, and presumed dead.

Notwithstanding Leonard Birchall's earlier actions, he admitted that it was not until he was hauled aboard the Japanese warship that he truly appreciated what his appointment and rank entailed:

> . . . I never really realized the responsibility of being in command until I hit this thing. My first lesson was on that deck of that destroyer when I realized that I had to do something to protect those chaps that were lying there, otherwise they were going to be killed. This was when I had to stand up . . . and do what I could.[248]

S/L Birchall took this lesson with him to the various POW camps where he continually displayed extrinsic responsibility by publically accepting liability for his actions and those of his fellow inmates. By repeatedly taking the blame, as well as the associated beatings, and by urging the other officers to do the same, Birchall put into practice his belief that "nothing destroys a unit's effectiveness and leadership quicker than the leaders not taking the sole responsibility for their actions."[249] His willingness to take on such a heavy burden to ensure the welfare of his men was one of the principal reasons he was awarded the OBE for Gallantry and several other prestigious decorations.

Leonard Birchall also demanded extrinsic responsibility through public accountability from others. This expectation was the driving force behind the maintenance of his diaries and his decision to testify at the war crimes tribunal. Furthermore, it was the reason he lobbied for Japan to compensate the victims of its POW camps and the source of his frustration when the payment came from his own

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[248]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.
[249]Birchall, "Leadership."

government instead. Leonard Birchall had an exceptional sense of extrinsic responsibility that was perhaps eclipsed only by the responsibility he imposed upon himself.

Intrinsic Responsibility

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Canadian airmen were required to swear allegiance to a special reserve force and volunteer to go overseas. Birchall recollected that "this griped those of us in [Dartmouth] no end, because, here we were, permanent force officers who had taken the King's Commission and said we would serve anywhere at any time. What in hell was going on?"[250] As evidenced by this anecdote, Leonard Birchall had a profound sense of duty and loyalty from his earliest days in the RCAF.

These attributes were displayed once again through S/L Birchall's deft application of mission command on 4 April 1942. Birchall's decision to take it upon himself to patrol beyond his assigned search area and investigate the unknown advancing flotilla demonstrates his self-imposed responsibility. Similarly, Birchall's efforts to alert Colombo once the intruders had been identified as the Japanese First Air Fleet offers further proof of his extensive intrinsic responsibility, which he went on to employ in the POW camps.

At the time of Leonard Birchall's detention, Japan had signed the 1929 Geneva Convention governing the humane treatment of POWs and, although they had never ratified the agreement, they were bound by its provisions.[251] As such, S/L Birchall and

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[250]Birchall, "Early RCAF/RCN Maritime Cooperation," 40.

[251]"Although Japan never ratified the 1929 Geneva Convention, being a signatory did confer a moral obligation to abide by the convention's provisions, in accordance with an accepted principle of international law that simply by signing a treaty, a government immediately is obliged not to violate the spirit of that treaty. Regardless, the Hague Convention (IV) of 18 October 1907 Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, which was ratified by Japan, contained prescriptions almost identical to those of the Geneva Convention." Maria Hsia Chang and Robert P. Barker, "Victor's Justice and Japan's Amnesia: The Tokyo

his fellow inmates should have been afforded certain inalienable rights including appropriate quarters, rations, clothing, hygiene supplies, and medical attention. As an officer, S/L Birchall was entitled to the additional benefits of exception from manual labour and overall treatment with due regard to his rank.[252] The guards offered to extend these rights to S/L Birchall, but with a strict caveat. Leonard Birchall recalled:

> . . . I was suddenly confronted with a deal that I could live fairly comfortably if I went along with what the Japanese wanted. In other words, I could turn my hand one way and I could live fairly well, [or] I could turn my hand the other and try to protect as many [men] as I could and it was just going to be one life of hell.[253]

Acutely aware that *every* POW deserved to be treated with honour and respect,[254] and unwilling to watch the men suffer while he basked in relative luxury, S/L Birchall opted for the latter. In doing so, he demonstrated his deep-seated internally-generated sense of responsibility to protect others.

Birchall conveyed his intrinsic responsibility on numerous other occasions while interned, and his honour and commitment to the military ethos never wavered. Despite being "sick, starving, cold, filthy, [and] infested with lice," Birchall recounted, "when we turned out on parade it may have been in rags and tatters, but we were as clean, upright, formidable, proud of our heritage and still as undefeated as we could possibly be."[255] Furthermore, he showed his loyalty and sense of duty by opting not to attempt to escape and by protecting his men at all costs. Leonard Birchall's intrinsic responsibility is, however, best illustrated by a diary entry he made upon receipt of the news that the

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War Crimes Trial Reconsidered," in *Japanese War Crimes: The Search for Justice*, ed. Peter Li (New York: Routledge, 2017), 44.

[252]International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Annex to Convention (IV): Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land* (The Hague: ICRC, 1907), art. 6-7; ICRC, *Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War* (Geneva: ICRC, 1929), art. 10-15, 21, 27.

[253]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[254]ICRC, *Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War* . . ., art. 3.

[255]Birchall, "Leadership."

Japanese had surrendered. While the other POWs could barely contain their excitement, S/L Birchall confessed a conflicting emotion: "The funny part of all this is that I can feel no relief but in its stead an intense feeling of responsibility. The only time I shall feel relief is when I can hand the command of these men over to the responsible people."[256]

Summary

Time and again, Leonard Birchall proved that he was both extrinsically and intrinsically responsible. In his speech on leadership, he declared that accepting responsibility means "taking a full out interest in your subordinates [and] having true respect and concern for them to the extent that at all times and in all circumstances you put their welfare and well-being ahead of your own, regardless of the cost or inconvenience to yourself."[257] Leonard Birchall certainly did all of these things and, as such, he remained accountable to both others and himself.

By the very design of the military hierarchy, the level of responsibility imposed upon members should be commensurate with their rank.[258] However, when he was taken captive by the Japanese, Birchall suddenly faced a situation that demanded far more responsibility than would normally be imposed on a young S/L. By drawing on his competency and effectively employing his authority, Leonard Birchall rose to the occasion and accepted the responsibility of caring for his men. In doing so, he ensured that he would be remembered not as another selfish imprisoned officer but instead, rightfully, as a *bona fide* war hero.

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[256]Birchall diary entry for 19 August 1945, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 146.
[257]Birchall, "Leadership."
[258]DND, *Duty with Honour* . . ., 50.

Birchall's Placement Relative to the Balanced Command Envelope

According to Pigeau and McCann, command effectiveness is maximized when competency, authority, and responsibility are balanced. When an imbalance in one or more of the CAR dimensions occurs, individuals find themselves lying outside the BCE and their command capability is reduced.[259] By all accounts, Leonard Birchall's command was balanced before he was taken prisoner by the Japanese; however, he briefly strayed from the BCE when he became a POW. Fortunately, he was quick to take corrective action and, as a result, his command effectiveness did not suffer noticeably.

The analysis of Birchall's physical, intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal abilities reveals that he was not deficient in any aspect of the competency dimension of command. Similarly, from the moment he was hauled aboard the Japanese destroyer *Isokaze* until the day he marched his men out of Suwa and turned them over to their respective guardians, S/L Birchall demonstrated his strong sense of responsibility. By and large, the greatest variable in Leonard Birchall's command during captivity was his authority.

When S/L Birchall first arrived at Yokohama as the senior POW and was given "the facts of life" about how other officers had shirked their obligations to care for the men, he immediately found himself at a distinct disadvantage.[260] As an unknown entity in the camp, he possessed absolutely no personal authority. Furthermore, since the men had grown skeptical of officers in general, they were extremely reluctant to follow his directions, thereby also stripping him of any residual legal authority he reasonably could

[259]Sharpe and English, *Principles for Change* . . ., 75.
[260]Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

have expected to bring to the camp. As a result, S/L Birchall became an *ignored* commander (cf. Figure 4.1).

However, by devoting himself to the mission of looking after the men, and by taking control of key resources, Birchall began to exert his legal authority. As the other POWs realized that S/L Birchall was not abusing his power by taking more than his fair share of food and other commodities, as had been done in the past, they began to trust him at a continually increasing rate. In turn, he was able to establish himself as an ethical, values-based, and courageous officer, and his personal authority rose accordingly. Consequently, the men became more inclined to follow his orders as they recognized that he was working with their best interests in mind. The resultant combination of high legal authority and high personal authority placed S/L Birchall in the *effective and influential* command quadrant (cf. Figure 4.1).

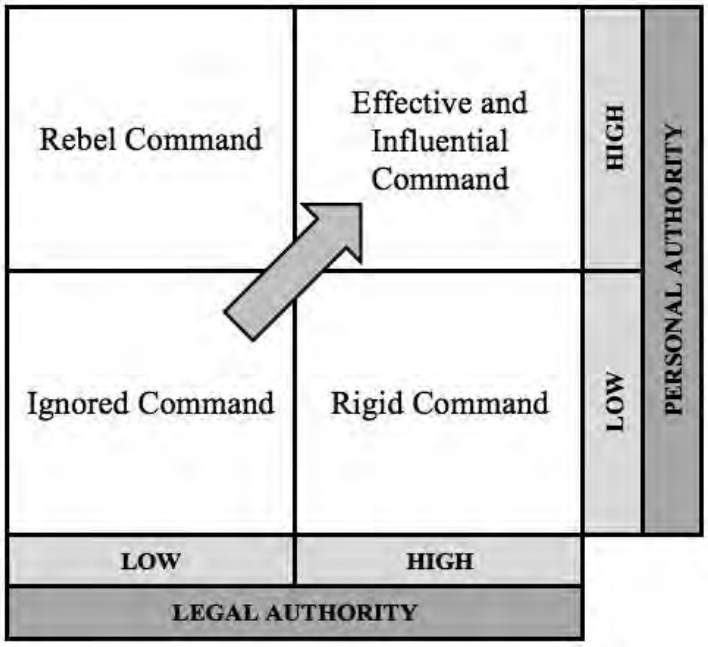

Figure 4.1 – Birchall's Progression from Ignored to Effective and Influential Command
Source: Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

Leonard Birchall's initial willingness to accept authority that he did not possess made him an *ineffectual* commander in his early days at Yokohama (cf. Figure 4.2). However, by remaining steadfast in his high degree of responsibility while proactively taking measures to increase his authority, he soon found himself inside the BCE with *maximal* command (cf. Figure 4.2). The guards tried on several occasions to derail his authority and break his sense of responsibility, but S/L Birchall's obstinacy solidified his placement in the BCE and further strengthened his capacity to command.

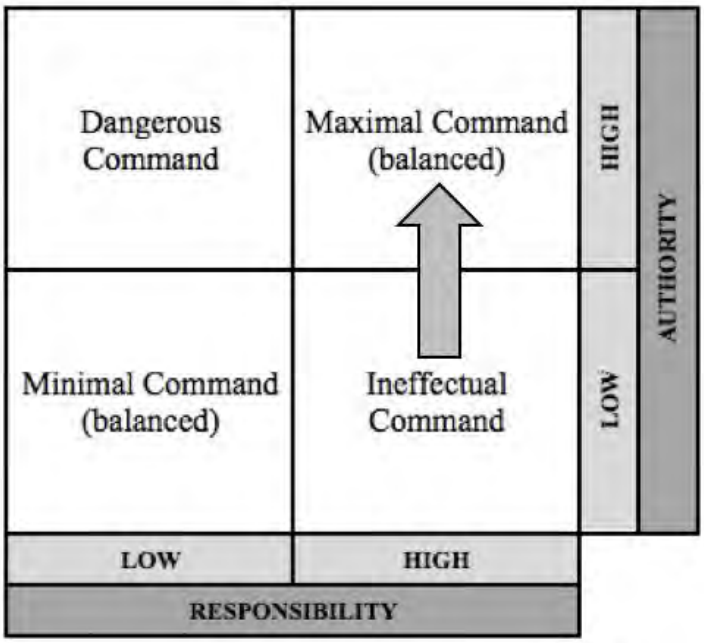

Figure 4.2 – Birchall's Progression from Ineffectual to Maximal Command
Source: Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control" (lecture . . .).

Following his repatriation and during his postwar service, his advanced competency netted him a series of three promotions – to W/C, G/C, and A/C, respectively. Each promotion came with a corresponding increase in authority, for which Birchall readily accepted responsibility, thereby keeping him inside the BCE. Towards the end of his active duty, Leonard Birchall was a staunch opponent to the Canadian government's plan to unify the military. His strong intrinsic responsibility to the RCAF

made him unwilling to serve in another shade of uniform, so he wisely announced his retirement before his inevitable departure from the BCE. In his later capacity as an HCol, Leonard Birchall capitalized on the opportunity to recalibrate his intrinsic responsibility by continually taking it upon himself to ensure the wellbeing and future of his unit despite no longer occupying a formal command position. In doing so, he managed to show enduring loyalty to the profession of arms he so endeared while divorcing himself from its unification that he strongly derided.

The examination of Leonard Birchall's placement relative to the BCE illustrates how achieving equilibrium between competency, authority, and responsibility results in effective command. Furthermore, it shows that brief deviations from the BCE are acceptable as long as corrective actions are taken immediately, thereby justifying the thickness of the BCE itself. Finally, Birchall's case demonstrates that it is possible for commanders to work their way up to maximal command effectiveness regardless of their starting point or the challenges they face. This is a useful lesson for members of today's CAF who are charged with commanding subordinates through the complexities of modern warfare.

Conclusion

As analysis based on the Pigeau-McCann model demonstrates, Leonard Birchall was the embodiment of an effective commander. His superior competency, heightened authority, and deepened sense of responsibility coalesced to make him the ideal leader of Allied POWs during the Second World War. Although he faced immense challenges throughout his 39 months of internment, he persevered and succeeded in safely guiding his men out of captivity at the end of the war. His placement relative to the BCE offers

contextual evidence of how achieving and maintaining balance in the three command dimensions can lead to mission success.

The Pigeau-McCann model is useful in understanding how historical figures such as Birchall exercised effective command. It is important for contemporary military members to reflect on the achievements of their predecessors to better appreciate the intricacies of the profession of arms. Learning from the past is a primary means by which institutional knowledge is gained and retained. The last chapter will summarize the findings and offer additional insight into Leonard Birchall's impressive accomplishments and source of motivation.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

Nothing is ever free in this life or handed to you on a plate; the price you must pay is hard work, total effort, and self-sacrifice.

–Leonard Joseph Birchall

Carl von Clausewitz once asserted that "if one has never personally experienced war, one cannot understand in what the difficulties . . . really consist, nor why a commander should need any brilliance and exceptional ability."[261] Arguably, Clausewitz's statement applies not just to tactical engagements on the battlefield but also to the unique challenges that present themselves once taken prisoner. During the Second World War, Leonard Birchall faced horrors that most people, fortunately, cannot imagine, and he and his men survived the ordeal primarily because of his exceptional brilliance and ability as a commander.

In today's CAF, it is paramount that military personnel perpetually seek to develop themselves professionally. This can be accomplished, in part, by absorbing institutional knowledge and in particular by learning from those who have already forged an inspirational path in the profession of arms. By using the Pigeau-McCann model to contextualize Leonard Birchall's abilities and accomplishments as an officer, this study proved that, notwithstanding the occasional minor deviation, Birchall followed the ideal profile of a commander throughout his career.

Juxtaposing the concept of command with the more mainstream disciplines of management and leadership shows that command is unique to the profession of arms. Furthermore, review of the relevant literature and various frameworks demonstrates that Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann's command model is the most suitable means of

[261]Clausewitz, *On War*, 119.

assessing the human element of command. Current and future military commanders can gain a competitive advantage by examining the successes and failures of their predecessors, thereby justifying this study as a worthwhile endeavour.

The central tenet of the Pigeau-McCann command model is the notion that *only humans command*; all other "concepts, technologies, etc. must support this overriding axiom."[262] Commanders are most effective when they achieve a balance between their competency, authority, and responsibility. In addition to offering a theoretical framework for current and future military professionals to follow, the Pigeau-McCann model is an effective tool in examining historical cases.

Leonard Joseph Birchall, who was captured during in the Second World War and spent 39 months detained in a succession of Japanese POW camps, was an iconic commander in the RCAF. Throughout his internment, Birchall was instrumental in increasing morale and decreasing the mortality rate amongst his fellow captives. Following his release at the end of the war, he went on to serve in various active duty and honorary positions, earning him the distinction of being the longest-serving member in the history of the CAF.

Many leadership and command lessons, particularly as they pertain to air force personnel, can be learned from Leonard Birchall's story. Birchall possessed significant competency, authority, and responsibility throughout his career. Although his authority was challenged early in his tenure as a POW, his solid understanding and clever application of officership enabled him to quickly find balance between the three CAR dimensions, which made him an *effective and influential* commander.

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[262]Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, *Re-defining Command and Control* (Toronto: Defence and Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine, 1998), 17.

Leonard Birchall's command effectiveness is supported by impressive statistics. During the Second World War, approximately 27 percent of all POWs held by the Japanese perished (compared to four percent of POWs detained by the Germans).[263] Meanwhile, the average overall fatality rate of men imprisoned alongside Birchall was less than two percent.[264] Even more astoundingly, during Birchall's first winter in captivity (1942-1943), approximately 35 percent of all POWs taken by the Japanese were either killed or succumbed to their injuries or maladies. Yet in S/L Birchall's camp, which had an average population of 375 POWs, only three men were lost during the *entire first two years*, representing a mortality rate of "less than one half of one percent per year [and] giving ample proof of the success of the efforts made by that entire camp."[265] Weakened by steady abuse, rampant disease, and a starvation diet, the risk of death remained high even after the war came to an end. Birchall's final camp, Suwa, had the distinction of being the only one in Japan with a 100 percent survival rate from the instant the Japanese surrendered until the moment Birchall and his men marched out.[266] The profound dichotomy between the nationwide death rate and that of Birchall's POW camps offers incontrovertible evidence of his remarkable ability to exercise effective command despite nightmarish circumstances. It also reinforces the human element of command.

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[263]Charles G. Roland, "Allied POWs, Japanese Captors and the Geneva Convention," *War & Society* 9, no. 2 (October 1991): 96; Chang and Barker, "Victor's Justice . . .," 43. Some sources put this figure at or above 30 percent; cf. Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD; RCAF, "Meet Air Commodore Leonard Birchall…"; Birchall, "Leadership."

[264]RCAF, "Meet Air Commodore Leonard Birchall…"; Nielsen, *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[265]Birchall, "Leadership." Unsurprisingly, this was the lowest death rate in all Japanese POW camps.

[266]*Ibid*.

Command is a deeply personal undertaking, and its essence is the expression of human will.[267] According to Pigeau and McCann, will requires both opportunity and motivation.[268] As a POW, Leonard Birchall had plenty of opportunity to act, but his source of motivation was somewhat unconventional.

Martin Van Creveld holds that "to motivate others a commander must be motivated himself, or else cheat all of the people all of the time."[269] The importance of maintaining motivation is even more pronounced when facing life-threatening conditions such as those that existed in Japanese POW camps. Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who survived various Nazi death camps during the Second World War, found his motivation in the realization that he could retain control of his mental faculties despite being subjected to ignoble physical abuse and experimentation. This awareness became the impetus for and basis of his bestselling book *Man's Search for Meaning*, which evokes the importance of finding purpose in life.[270] In *This Soldier's Story (1939-1945)*, former Canadian infantryman George MacDonell, who was captured in Hong Kong and imprisoned alongside Birchall in the baseball stadium camp in Yokohama, offers that he was able to stay motivated by never giving up hope that an Allied victory, and his ensuing freedom, was inevitable.[271] Similarly, Dave Carey, an American aircraft carrier-based pilot who was shot down during the Vietnam War and interned in Hanoi for over five years, points to his faith in both God and his country as primary sources of motivation to survive in his book *The Ways We Choose: Lessons for Life from a POW's*

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[267]DND, *CFJP 1.0: Canadian Military Doctrine,* 5-2.
[268]Pigeau and McCann, "Re-conceptualizing Command and Control," 57.
[269]Van Creveld, *Command in War*, 16.
[270]Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 36-93.
[271]George MacDonell, *This Soldier's Story (1939-1945)* (Nepean: O'Keefe Publishing Inc., 2000), 52.

Experience.[272] Leonard Birchall was, however, less optimistic that he would survive and therefore was not motivated by the possibility of regaining his freedom.

Unlike Frankl, MacDonell, and Carey, S/L Birchall gave up all hope of coming out alive.[273] Resigned to the certitude that he would perish in captivity, Leonard Birchall devoted himself to carrying out his duty as an officer, which he did with the utmost honour and integrity. Ensuring the wellbeing of his men proved to be all the motivation Leonard Birchall needed and, fortunately, he lived to see the fruits of his labour. The dissimilarity in Birchall's source of motivation and that of the three others highlights the fact that human beings process and respond to environmental stimuli differently. Just as the manner by which individuals overcome hardship varies from person to person, so too does the way in which they command. Command is a uniquely human activity, and many of its aspects are unique to the human.[274]

This study has offered Leonard Joseph Birchall's personal approach to command. As noted by the Saviour of Ceylon himself, "men are shrewd judges of their leaders, especially when their lives are at stake, and hence your character and knowledge must be such that they are prepared to follow you, to trust your judgement and carry out your commands."[275] Leonard Birchall's extraordinary balancing act, by which he achieved equilibrium in his competency, authority, and responsibility, enabled him to exercise effective command while devoting himself to the service of his comrades-in-arms. There can be no nobler pursuit in life.

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[272]Dave Carey, *The Ways We Choose: Lessons for Life from a POW's Experience* (Wilsonville: BookPartners Inc., 2000), 139-143.

[273]Birchall undated postwar account, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 127; *Saviour of Ceylon* . . ., DVD.

[274]McCann and Pigeau, *Taking Command of C2*, 12; McCann and Pigeau, *Clarifying the Concepts* . . ., 9.

[275]Birchall, "Leadership."

APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of common terms used in this study are listed below.

2IC	Second-in-Command
A/CO	Acting Commanding Officer
AFRO	Air Force Routine Order
BCE	Balanced Command Envelope
C^2	Command and Control
CA	Canadian Army
CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
CAHF	Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame
CAR	Competency, Authority, and Responsibility
CD	Canadian Forces Decoration
CFB	Canadian Forces Base
CFJP	Canadian Forces Joint Publication
CM	Member of the Order of Canada
CO	Commanding Officer
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DHH	Directorate of History and Heritage
DND	Department of National Defence
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ID	Identity
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
LOM	Legion of Merit
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OBE	Order of the British Empire
O.Ont	Order of Ontario
POW	Prisoner of War
RAF	Royal Air Force
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RCN	Royal Canadian Navy
RMC	Royal Military College of Canada
Sqn	Squadron
U.S.	United States

Abbreviations of military ranks[†] used in this study are listed below.

Adm	Admiral
HCol	Honorary Colonel
Sgt	Sergeant
VAdm	Vice-Admiral

[†]Past and present RCAF ranks have been excluded from this list (cf. Appendix 3).

APPENDIX 2 – PEARSON'S LETTER TO BIRCHALL

As the Canadian Ambassador to the U.S. (1944-1946), Lester Pearson was in attendance when Sir Winston Churchill made his remarks regarding the "unknown airman" who saved Ceylon. Later, when he became Prime Minister of Canada, Pearson invited Leonard Birchall to attend the state dinner for visiting Sri Lankan dignitaries. At this event, Pearson related the earlier musings of Churchill, which Birchall later asked to be put in writing. Pearson obliged in a letter dated 7 July 1967, replicated below.[276]

My dear Birchall,

I was interested to receive your letter of June 26th and am glad to put on record the conversation with Sir Winston Churchill over the episode which you mention and which resulted in your spending three and a half years in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp.

It took place at a dinner at the British Embassy in Washington, either just before or after the end of the war. Lord Halifax was our host and the conversation over coffee and port turned to the critical moments of the struggle which had just resulted in victory. Someone asked Sir Winston what he felt to be the most dangerous and most distressing moment in the war. I believe most of us thought he would refer to the events of June and July, 1940, and the imminence of invasion; or to the time when Rommel was heading toward Alexandria and Cairo at full speed; or when Singapore fell. However, his reply to the query was not concerned with any of these incidents. He said he thought the most dangerous moment in the war and the one which caused him the greatest alarm was when he got the news that the Japanese fleet was heading for Ceylon and the naval base there. The capture of Ceylon, the consequent control of the Indian Ocean and the possibility of a German conquest of Egypt would have "closed the ring" and the future would have been black.

However, he went on to say, we were saved from this disaster by an airman, on reconnaissance, who spotted the Japanese fleet and, though shot down, was able to get a message through to Ceylon which allowed the defence forces there to get ready for the approaching assault; otherwise they would have been taken completely by surprise. Sir Winston went on very dramatically to say that this unknown airman, who lay deep in the waters of the Indian Ocean, made one of the most important single contributions to victory. He got quite emotional about it.

I broke in to tell him that the "unknown airman" was not lying deep in the Indian Ocean but was an officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force stationed down the street from the British Embassy where he was active in our military mission. I gather I was not quite accurate in this, as you were not in Washington at the time, but I hope I will be forgiven.

Mr. Churchill was surprised and delighted to know that the end of the story was a happier one than he had envisaged.

With kindest personal regards,

Yours sincerely,

L.B. Pearson

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[276]Pearson to Birchall, 7 July 1967, in McIntosh, *Hell on Earth* . . ., 229-230.

APPENDIX 3 – PAST AND PRESENT RCAF OFFICER RANKS

On 1 February 1968, the CA, RCN, and RCAF were unified into one service known as the CAF.[277] As a result, the ranks that had been used by the RCAF were changed to army ranks. Since much of this study discusses the pre-1968 era, the following table is offered to familiarize the reader with the past and present RCAF officer rank structures.

Table A3.1 – Past and Present RCAF Officer Ranks

Pre-Unification (before 1968)	Post-Unification (1968 to present)
Air Chief Marshal (ACM)	General (Gen)
Air Marshal (AM)	Lieutenant-General (LGen)
Air Vice-Marshal (AVM)	Major-General (MGen)
Air Commodore (A/C)	Brigadier-General (BGen)
Group Captain (G/C)	Colonel (Col)
Wing Commander (W/C)	Lieutenant-Colonel (LCol)
Squadron Leader (S/L)	Major (Maj)
Flight Lieutenant (F/L)	Captain (Capt)
Flying Officer (F/O)	Lieutenant (Lt)
Pilot Officer (P/O)[†]	Second Lieutenant (2Lt)
Officer Cadet (O/C)	Officer Cadet (OCdt)

Source: National Defence Act, R.S.C., c. N-5, s. 21 (1985). Ranks are listed in descending order.

[†]Pilot Officer was sometimes referred to as Provisional Flying Officer, as was the case with Leonard Birchall.

[277]Gosselin, "Hellyer's Ghosts . . .," 6.

APPENDIX 4 – BIRCHALL'S ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE CITATION

Throughout his captivity, Leonard Birchall repeatedly risked his own life to improve the living conditions for his fellow POWs, particularly those who were gravely ill or injured. For his steadfast display of courage, leadership, and resolve, he was invested as an Officer in the OBE with a "Gallantry" appointment on 2 February 1946. The citation aptly summarizes Birchall's bold efforts and impressive achievements, and is therefore offered in its entirety:

> . . . In April 1942, this officer was shot down and captured after sending out the warning from his patrolling seaplane that a large force of Japanese warships was approaching Ceylon. Throughout his three and a half years as a prisoner of war, Wing Commander Birchall, as Senior Allied Officer in the prisoner of war camps in which he was located, continually displayed the utmost concern for the welfare of his fellow prisoners. On many occasions, with complete disregard for his own safety, he prevented, as far as possible, Japanese officials of various camps from sadistically beating his men and denying prisoners the medical attention which they so urgently needed. Typical of his splendid gallantry was when in the [Asano] Camp, he called a sit-down strike in protest against ill-treatment of his men. On another occasion when the Japanese wanted to send some sick prisoners of war to work, Wing Commander Birchall found it necessary, at great personal risk, to forcibly prevent the Japanese non-commissioned officer in charge from making these prisoners work. As a result, Wing Commander Birchall spent several days in solitary confinement. Nevertheless, the sick prisoners of war did not have to work. Knowing that each time he forcibly intervened on behalf of his men he would receive brutal punishment, Wing Commander Birchall continually endeavoured to improve the lot of his fellow prisoners. He also maintained detailed records of personnel in his camps along with death certificates of deceased personnel. The consistent gallantry and glowing devotion to his fellow prisoners of war that this officer displayed throughout his lengthy period of imprisonment are in keeping with the finest traditions of the Royal Canadian Air Force.[278]

[278]OBE Citation, Birchall, 2 February 1946.

APPENDIX 5 – BIRCHALL'S PRISONER OF WAR IDENTITY CARD

An "identity card," containing all pertinent personal information and internal movements, was kept for each POW held in Japan. That of S/L Birchall is shown below, with his handwritten comments superimposed.

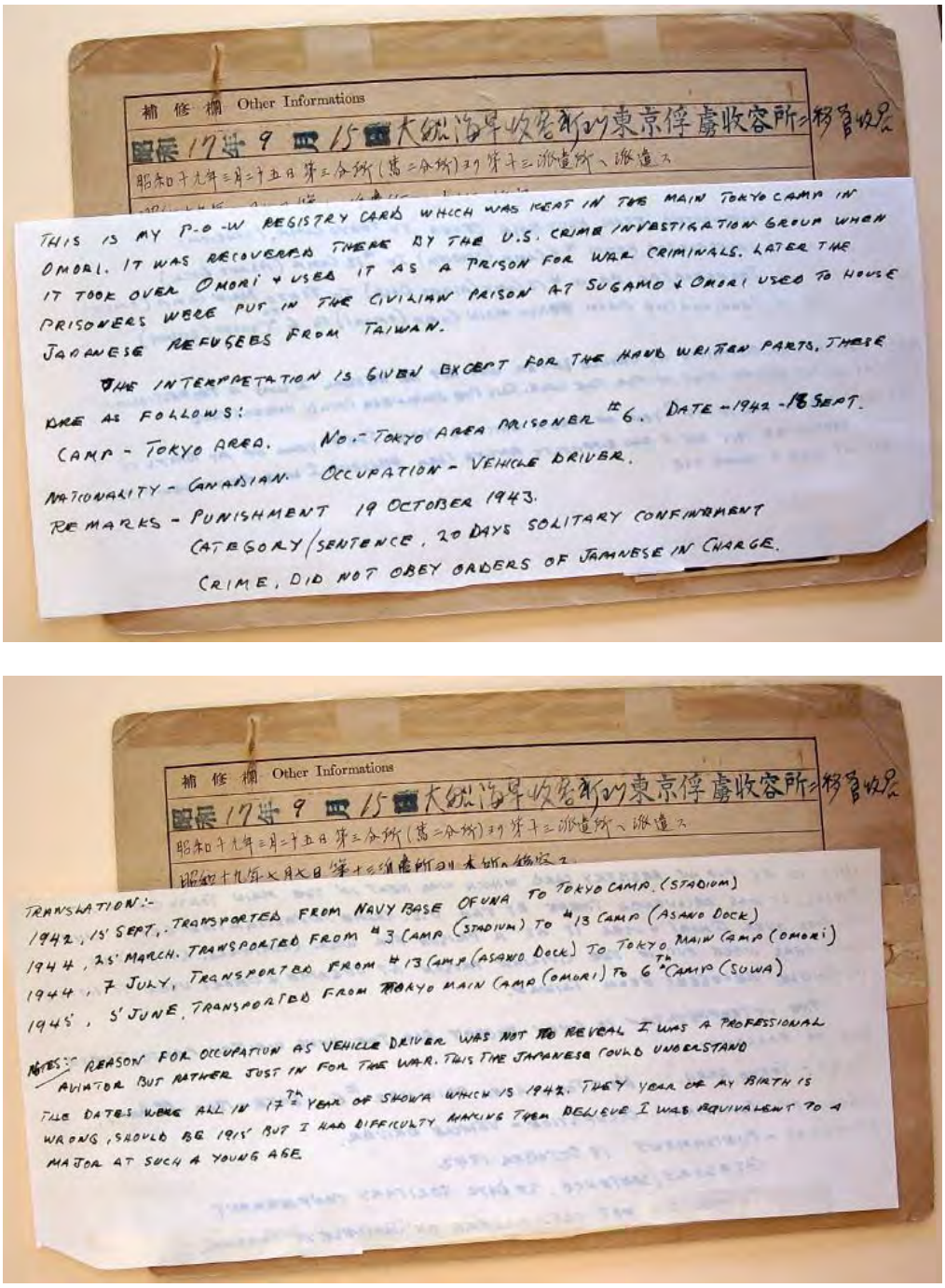

Figure A5.1 – Birchall's Prisoner of War Identity Card
Source: Birchall POW ID Card, Birchall Fonds, LAC, Accession 2011-00481-0, R14031, Volume 2, File 1.

APPENDIX 6 – BIRCHALL'S BIRTHDAY CARD

Leonard Birchall was highly regarded by the men with whom he was imprisoned. Depicted below is a card they made for him on the occasion of his thirtieth birthday, which was celebrated at Suwa, the open-faced mining camp up in the mountains.

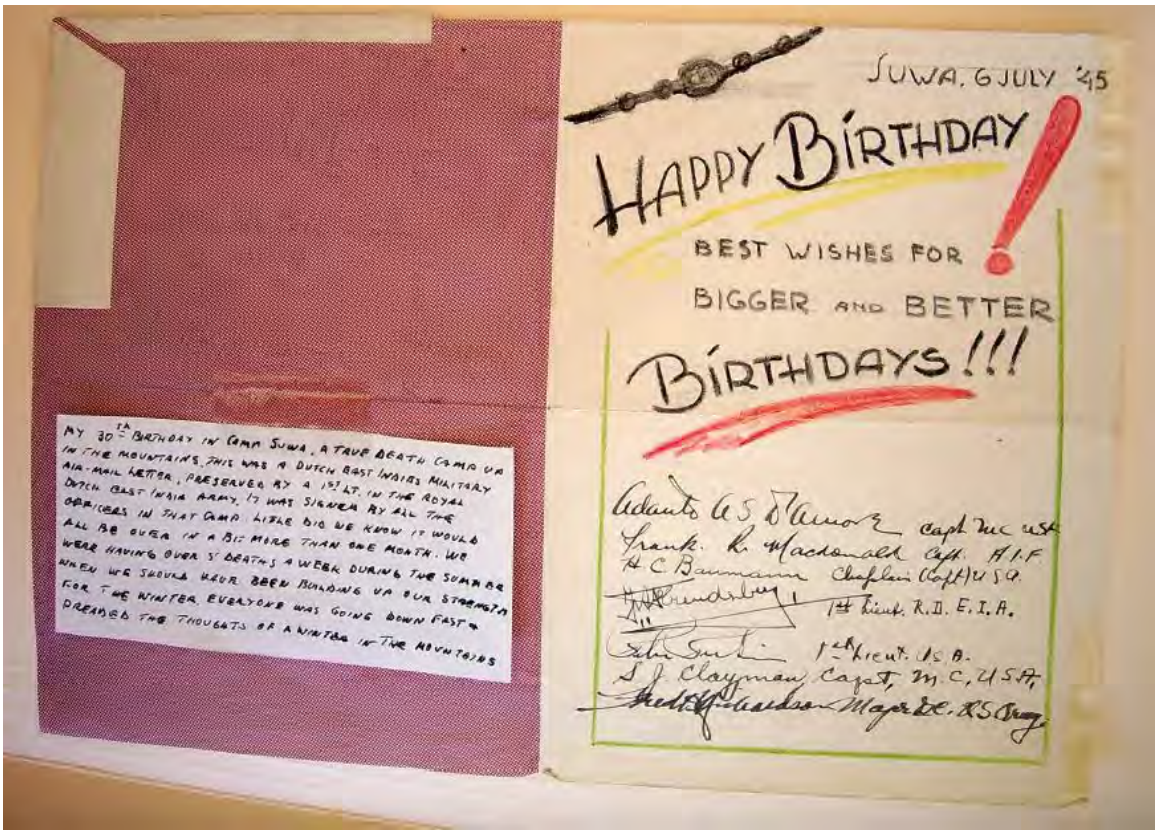

Figure A6.1 – Birchall's Birthday Card
Source: Birthday Card, Birchall Fonds, LAC, Accession 2011-00481-0, R14031, Volume 2, File 20.

APPENDIX 7 – BIRCHALL'S FULL COMPLEMENT OF MEDALS

Throughout his career, Leonard Birchall was recognized numerous times for his long and distinguished service. His full complement of medals, which includes the CM, OBE (for Gallantry), DFC, O.Ont, CD (with five clasps), and U.S. LOM, is presented below.

Figure A7.1 – Birchall's Full Complement of Medals
Source: National Air Force Museum of Canada, "Air Commodore Leonard Birchall," last accessed 8 April 2018, http://airforcemuseum.ca/en/news/august-14-15-v-j-day.html.

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