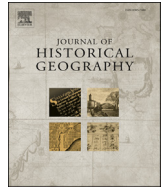




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Historical Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhg

Aircraft carriers and the capacity to mobilise US power across the Pacific, 1919–1929

Alison J. Williams

School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 April 2016

Received in revised form

12 July 2017

Accepted 23 July 2017

Keywords:

Pacific

Air power

War plans

Naval aviation

Power projection

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses how aircraft carriers were developed and positioned within US Navy planning for war in the Pacific during the first decade of the interwar period. Building on Caren Kaplan's framing of military mobility as a capacity, the paper contends that as carrier technologies advanced during the 1920s so recognition of their capacity to act as more than simply mobile islands tasked with supporting the big guns of the fleet emerged. The paper draws on a range of primary sources, specifically pertaining to War Plan Orange (the US's plan for war against Japan primarily developed during the 1920s and 1930s), and analyses US Naval War College documents that positioned carriers, often aspirationally, as key tools of US Pacific power projection. Inflected through discussion of two US Fleet Problems – naval exercises which took place in 1924 and 1929 – the paper contends that the emergence of a recognition that the capabilities of both ship and aircraft needed to be considered in tandem offered new and important strategic opportunities for US war planners during the interwar period.

© 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Mobilisation is defined as active and open preparation for war.... M-Day is the first day of mobilisation.... M-Day may precede a declaration of war.¹

The Airplane Carrier is distinctively an offensive weapon carrier and to fulfil this role should; (a) Be capable of projecting bombing flights in as great strength as possible. (b) Be as mobile as possible. (c) Possess appropriate defensive capabilities.²

These two quotations encapsulate the concerns of this paper. The first provides definitions of mobilisation, as set out in the 1929 revision of War Plan Orange, the US Navy's plans for war against Japan. It clearly illustrates the centrality of the process of mobilisation in the realisation of such a conflict. The second comes from the US Naval War College in 1926, during a set of discussions focused on the size, composition and objectives of the US Navy's future aircraft carriers. It elucidates the core *raison d'être* of

carriers: to be mobile and project power. This paper investigates how the US Navy sought to plan and prepare for conflict across the Pacific and how aircraft carrier technologies and strategies were enmeshed in these processes during the first decade of the interwar period. It foregrounds the classical geopolitical notion of ships as mobile islands in order to consider how the evolution of US aircraft carriers, their utilisation in US naval exercises (known as Fleet Problems), and their role within War Plan Orange were bound up in their capacities to project US power across the Pacific.³ To do this, the paper employs a lens for analysis that draws on mobilities research and geopolitical scholarship to position mobility as a constellation of complex and often messy capacities to act.⁴ This approach enables us to analyse the significance of the carriers' capability to project power through both sea based and airborne assets and to understand how this was represented in and through a range of textual sources and practical exercises.

The paper draws on archival documents pertaining to War Plan Orange and discussions within the US Navy to enable an understanding of how the aircraft carrier was positioned as a tool of US power projection, and how the perception of what aircraft carriers offered in terms of mobility developed as technologies advanced

E-mail address: alison.williams1@ncl.ac.uk.

¹ Department of the Navy, Navy Basic Plan – Orange, Part I – The Strategic Plan, March 1929, United States National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland [hereafter NARA CP], Research Group [hereafter RG] 38, Strategic Plans, War Plans Division, WPL Series, WPL-13, Box 15, 83.

² Commander R.R. Stewart, US Navy, Airplane Carriers (letter to the President, Naval War College), 10th June 1926, United States National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC [hereafter NARA DC], RG 80, General Records of the Navy Department, Office of the Secretary of the Navy, Formerly Secret Correspondence, 1927–1939, Box 253, 1.

³ H.J. Mackinder, *The Nations of The Modern World*, London, 1911, 133. Also see H.J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas*, Oxford, 1907.

⁴ See C. Kaplan, Mobility and war: the cosmic view of US 'air power', *Environment and Planning A* 38 (2006) 395–397.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2017.07.008>

0305-7488/© 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

and war games and fleet exercises indicated their capabilities and limitations. This material, supported by key secondary sources, provides significant insight into the development of US planning for war in the Pacific, and specifically the role and place of aircraft carriers within those plans.⁵ In considering the aircraft carrier components of War Plan Orange, and the mobility of the carriers, as represented in both planning documents and in actuality, this paper offers new perspectives on how the US Navy planned to mobilise its carrier forces to project its power across the Pacific in the event of war with Japan. This demonstrates how a mobilities perspective offers new insights into the debates that surrounded the role and place of carriers in the US Navy during the interwar period.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews relevant literature from military mobilities, aerial geopolitics and the geographies of maritime spaces and ships to provide a conceptual framework based on mobility as a capacity to act. The following three sections analyse how the US Navy, through its plans, reports and training exercises, sought to understand and develop its aircraft carrier strategy during the first decade of the interwar period. These sections consider how the carriers' capacity to mobilise significant aircraft operations was debated and developed by a navy predominantly focused on the battleship. Finally, the conclusion returns to the key conceptual ideas that frame this paper to note the utility of positioning mobility as a capacity to act when investigating the multiple and intersecting mobilities that influence how military forces plan for and operate power projection.

Conceptualising the military mobilities of aircraft carriers

As the introduction to this special issue notes, there is a wealth of scholarship from a number of subject areas that analyses military movements. Of course, historians and political scientists are amongst those who have contributed the most to this. Within contemporary human geography there has been less engagement with the military and with military mobilities as a subject of enquiry.⁶ Those geographical engagements with military mobilities that have taken place have tended to focus on the embodied mobilities of 'the patrolling soldier, the flying fighter-jet pilot, [and] the sailor aboard a ship at sea'.⁷ Whilst there are a multiplicity of other mobilities and many ways to make sense of them, I seek to draw here upon Caren Kaplan's work to define military mobility as a capacity: a power to, or limitation on the ability to, move military bodies and materiel across space in order to project state power.⁸ The conceptualisation of mobility as a capacity to act has been discussed in other contexts, primarily as something that affects bodies and spaces. These engagements overlap with Kaplan's work in recognising that movement is not a flat, linear, universal endeavour, rather that 'capacities to move' are messy, individualised and unique and are spatialized and multi-scalar.⁹ As such,

this builds on Tim Cresswell's assertion that mobility can be usefully construed as a constellation, a concatenation of interrelationships between movement, its representation and its practices.¹⁰ Rather than focusing exclusively on the practices of movement in relation to the physical motion of aircraft carriers themselves, this paper considers how the potentiality of military forces to be deployed, to operate and project state power beyond its borders can also be identified through a number of US Pacific war plans and associated US Navy documents. Moreover, it argues that the particular potentiality of aircraft carriers is recursively inflected through these, changing across the period considered in important ways. This approach seeks to 'reveal the means by which movement is enacted', and connecting this with geopolitical considerations of how power is projected across space makes it possible to consider 'entanglements of movement, power and politics' in this context.¹¹ This enables consideration of how military forces prepare for the possibility of conflict – both in actuality and performatively through war planning and gaming, the writing and dispersal of mobilisation schedules, and discussions and reports on the characteristics and construction of new military technologies – and for the realisation of specific military mobilities in practice.¹² To understand the specific potential and actual mobilities of aircraft carriers and their aircraft we need to engage with two sets of literature: those addressing aerial and maritime mobilities.

In recent years the concept of aeromobilities has emerged as a way of understanding the experiences of being-in-the-air from the perspective of the civilian air traveller.¹³ Within this work, significant insights have been gleaned by those who have strayed from civilian air worlds into those inhabited by military aviators and controlled by military air forces. Engagements with the military aerial have come from a range of quarters, although most focus on the centrality of technological capabilities to the achievement and management of military aerial mobility. Peter Adey's work has been pivotal in opening up discussion of how pilots' bodies have traditionally been made ready for aerial work through the use of military training methods to physically prepare them for flight.¹⁴ Others have questioned the changed modes of movement operationalised through the use of drone technologies, providing an insight into how mobilities have become differentiated by the separation of the constitutive elements of the drone assemblage:

¹⁰ T. Cresswell, Towards a politics of mobility, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010) 17–31.

¹¹ I. Forsyth, On the edges of military mobilities, in: Merriman, Peters, Adey, Cresswell, Forsyth, and Woodward, Interventions on military mobilities, 49.

¹² For more on power projection see A.J. Williams, Flying the flag: Pan American Airways and the projection of US power across the interwar Pacific, in F. MacDonald, R. Hughes and K. Dodds (Eds), *Observant States: Geopolitics and Visual Culture*, London, 2010, 81–99; A.J. Williams, Hakumat al Tayarrat: the role of air power in the enforcement of Iraq's borders, *Geopolitics* 12 (2007) 505–528.

¹³ S. Cwerner, S. Kesselring and J. Urry (Eds), *Aeromobilities*, London, 2009; Adey, *Mobility*; P. Adey, *Aerial Life: Spaces, Mobilities, Affects*, Oxford, 2010. See also, P. Adey, Secured and sorted mobilities: examples from the airport, *Surveillance and Society* 1 (2004) 500–519; P. Adey, L. Budd and P. Hubbard, Flying lessons: exploring the social and cultural geographies of global air travel, *Progress in Human Geography* 31 (2007) 773–791; L. Amoore, Biometric borders: governing mobilities in the war on terror, *Political Geography* 25 (2006) 336–351; L. Budd and P. Adey, The software-simulated airworld: anticipatory code and affective aeromobilities, *Environment and Planning A* 41 (2009) 1366–1385; L. Millward, The embodied aerial subject: gendered mobility in British interwar air tours, *Journal of Transport History* 29 (2008) 5–22.

¹⁴ Adey, *Aerial Life*; P. Adey, 'Ten thousand lads with shining eyes are dreaming and their dreams are wings': affect, airmindedness and the birth of the aerial subject, *Cultural Geographies* 18 (2011) 63–89.

⁵ E.S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The US Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945*, Annapolis, 1991.

⁶ For a discussion of some of the reasons for this see M.F. Rech, D. Bos, K.N. Jenkins, A.J. Williams and R. Woodward, Geography, military geography and critical military studies, *Critical Military Studies* 1 (2015) 47–60.

⁷ R. Woodward and K.N. Jenkins, Soldier, in: P. Adey, D. Bissell, K. Hannam, P. Merriman and M. Sheller (Eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*, London, 2014, 358.

⁸ Kaplan, *Mobility and war*.

⁹ P. Adey, *Mobility*, Abingdon, 2010, 165; P. Adey, '[T]he frantic and portentous beating of the wings of the death angels': intimacy, mobilities and military social networks, in: P. Merriman, K. Peters, P. Adey, T. Cresswell, I. Forsyth and R. Woodward, Interventions on military mobilities, *Political Geography* 56 (2017) 46; D. Bissell, Vibrating materialities: mobility-body-technology relations, *Area* 42 (2010) 479–486.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7447025>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7447025>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)