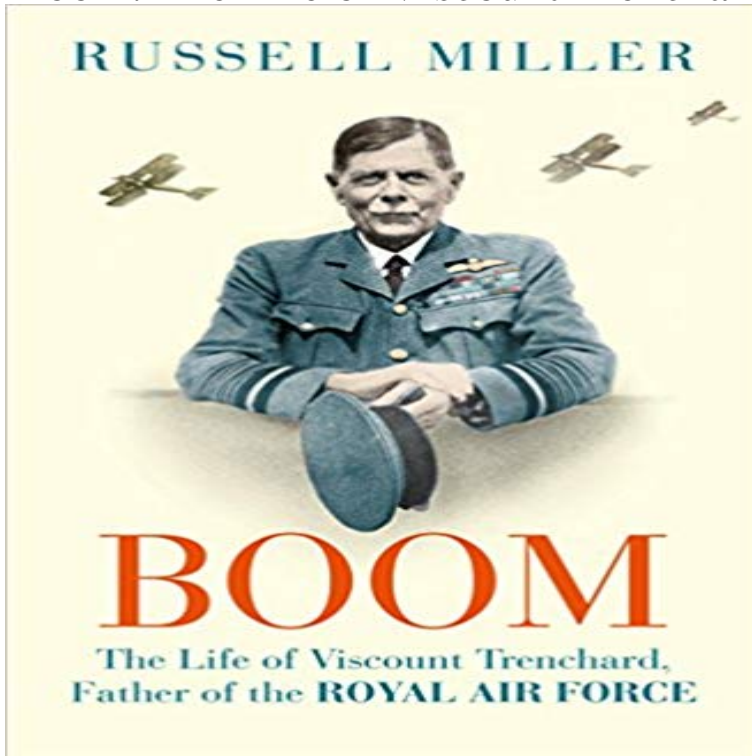


Boom: The Life of Viscount Trenchard, Father of the Royal Air Force



Hugh Trenchard loathed being known as The Father of the RAF, although the description was entirely appropriate since no man did more to ensure the creation of an independent air force. Born in Taunton in 1873, Trenchard struggled at school and was greatly affected by his solicitor-father's bankruptcy when he was 16. He failed entrance examinations to both the Royal Navy and the Army several times, but he found his destiny when he joined the fledgling Royal Flying Corps in 1912. Although he was an indifferent pilot, he was quick to recognise the huge potential aircraft offered in future conflict. His rapid rise to commander of the RFC in France after the outbreak of the First World War was marked by a series of bitter disagreements with other senior officers he either didn't like or didn't trust. Through persistence and hard work he led his political masters by the nose to secure the future of the RAF as an independent force after the war, in the teeth of fierce opposition from both the Admiralty and the War Office, and eventually became the first Marshal of the Royal Air Force. Even in retirement Trenchard remained a powerful influence, embarrassing his successors by issuing critical papers on defence issues. He never wavered in his belief that mastery of the air could only be achieved by offensive action, or in his advocacy of strategic bombing, until his death in 1956. His admirers claim he richly deserves the plaudits and his statue in Whitehall. His detractors say his influence led directly to the needless strategic bombing of Germany in the Second World War and the deaths of thousands of civilians.

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