**Dissertation Proposal**

*What is the Key Question You Want to Answer?*

The key question proposed for this dissertation is “How did modifications to the de Havilland Mosquito between 1942 and 1945 shape the development and effectiveness of British aerial intelligence during the Second World War?”. The paper would aim to unpack the relationship between technological innovation and the evolution of wartime intelligence, focusing on one of the most versatile and important aircraft of the period.

The Mosquito was unique in its adaptability, initially conceived as a fast, unarmed bomber. It was then rapidly modified into several specified roles, including photographic reconnaissance. Its speed, coupled with its high-altitude capability due to its pressurized cabin, made it an ideal candidate for penetrating deep into enemy territory undetected. This dissertation will examine how the technical modifications enabled improvements to the methods of intelligence and the extent to which the Mosquito altered British understanding of enemy movements, defences and infrastructure.

This question is important as it positions the Mosquito not merely as a technological success, but as a tool that shaped wider wartime strategy. The focus on the 1942-45 period allowed for thorough analysis whilst providing a proper base to analyse key developments and the changes to planning that followed as a result of improved aerial intelligence capabilities. Ultimately, this question invites reflection of how technology drove changes in war, not just in combat but in how wars are understood and fought through intelligence. It will contribute to ongoing historiographical debates about the role intelligence played in Allied victory, and how aerial improvements like the Mosquito played a central role in shaping success.

*To Answer This Question What Historiography Will You Need to Engage With?*

To answer my proposed question I will need to engage with a wide variety of historiography to properly unpack and approach this topic. Historiography is the study of how history is written and interpreted, and properly examining this historiography enable us to understand how other historians have approached the relationship between military technology and intelligence systems in the Second World War.

The most substantial body of literature concerns British wartime intelligence as a whole. Christopher Andrew’s “The defence of the Realm”[[1]](#footnote-2) and Michael Goodman’s “The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee”[[2]](#footnote-3) provide authoritative institutional histories of MI5 and the Joint Intelligence Committee. Both authors emphasise the increasing professionalisation and strategic influence of intelligence services during the war. Both authors focus largely on signals intelligence (SIGINT) and codebreaking, especially the operations at Bletchley Park, rather than imagery intelligence (IMINT) or aerial reconnaissance. John Keegan’s “Intelligence in War”[[3]](#footnote-4) is more sceptical about the utility of intelligence overall, arguing that it rarely determines victory on its own. Peter Hennessy’s “The British Secret State Old and New”[[4]](#footnote-5) is particularly valuable for understanding how intelligence became embedded within British governance structures. Howver, like Andrew and Goodman, his approach is top down and politically centered, offering more of a contextual input to build my understanding of intelligence as a whole.

In contrast, historians of aerial reconnaissance and air power have begun to restore the significance of photographic intelligence.

1. Christopher. M, Andrews, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5,* (Penguin, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Michael S, Goodman. *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee. Volume I, From the Approach of the Second World War to the Suez Crisis* (Routledge, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. John Keegan, *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy From Napoleon to Al-Qaeda,* (Random House, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Peter Hennessy, ‘The British Secret State Old and New’. *RUSI Journal*, 150.3 (2005), pp.16-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)