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The Historiography of the Allied Bombing Campaign of Germany

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
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Dr Stephen Fritz – Committee Chair
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Keywords: World War II, Strategic Bombing, Germany, Historiography

ABSTRACT

The Historiography of the Allied Bombing Campaign of Germany

by

Ryan Hopkins

This thesis is a historiographical study concerning the strategic bombing campaign of Germany during World War II. The study questions how effective the campaign was in comparing the prewar theories to wartime practices. Secondly, it questions the morality of the bombings and how and why bombing techniques changed throughout the course of the war. Lastly, the study looks at a recent topic in the historic community, which is the question of remembrance and Germans as victims of the war.

This study concludes that the strategic bombing campaign of Germany was a success but not in the sense that prewar planners had anticipated. The moral implications of the bombings were horrific, but given the severity of the war they were fighting, were a necessity. The question of Germans as victims will be open to debate for some time, especially because Germans and Americans have opposing viewpoints on the matter.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

World War II was the deadliest event in human history. It differed from previous conflicts by the fact that civilians were purposely singled out as important military targets. The morale and economy of civilians in combatant nations are equally as important as the soldiers who are fighting the enemy at the front. This has been the case for thousands of years. It was the introduction of the airplane, more specifically the bomber, that would change the way wars would be fought regarding civilian populations. Bombers are capable of hitting targets behind the enemy's lines, thus disrupting the morale and the economy at the same time. By the beginning of World War II, a theory of indiscriminate bombing was widely accepted in the military by most industrialized nations. Many aviation pioneers believed strategic bombing to be the next step in the evolution of the art of warfare. It was only after World War II that historians were able to analyze the catastrophic effects of the bombings in Germany and Japan. Since then, countless books and articles have been written debating whether or not such a deliberate attack on civilians was justified morally and of its effectiveness. In more recent years, the question of German civilians being victims of the bombing war has stirred even more controversy in the historical community. To understand why historians are still debating the necessity of the Allied bombing campaign, one must understand the history of air power and strategic bombing leading up to the allied destruction of Germany.

Many writers focus primarily on the European theatre of war. This is probably because Europe is the birthplace of strategic bombing.¹ In the fall of 1911, less than eight years after the Wright brothers' sustained flight, the Italians were the first to attack civilian targets. They had

designed biplanes to drop bombs in Tunisia and Tripoli during the final stages of the colonization of Africa. The attacks were on a very small scale and very ineffective. Shortly after, reports circulated through Europe and Italian actions were heavily criticized by the press.²

In the summer of 1914, World War I broke out in Europe. The Great War was different from every previous war in that new weapons and machines of modern industry presented new challenges to the nations involved. Heavy weaponry like the machine gun and more powerful artillery shredded infantry by the thousands, leading to a stalemate on the Western front. Initially, both sides used aircraft for reconnaissance. As the ferocity of the war intensified on the ground, the war in the air intensified to hit the enemy behind the front lines. The British were the first to conduct organized aerial attacks on military targets. As early as October, 1914, the Royal Naval Air Service began mounting raids on the Zeppelin bases in Friedrichshafen. Because the targets were large and flammable, small twenty pound bombs were successfully used in their missions.³

In January 1915, Germany became the first nation in the war to attack civilian targets by bombing eastern England. They would later attack civilian targets in Paris and other French cities.⁴ German Zeppelins had a better range, higher altitude, and heavier payload than the British or French planes, but the size and susceptibility of the massive airships made them impractical for any kind of strategic bombing. After a raid on England in September 1916, five Zeppelins were shot down and Germany decided to remove Zeppelins from combat roles and focus on their new Gotha aircraft.⁵ However, after these attacks, panic spread among the British population and its government. The psychological effect was high and remained that way for decades afterwards.⁶ By the beginning of 1918, the newly formed Royal Air Force had begun

strategic bombings of industrial targets in Germany. Major General Hugh Trenchard has been described

as the father of the Royal Air Force and saw sporadic combat throughout World War I. When he returned to France in the summer of 1918, he began developing new ideas for aerial warfare. First, he realized that air superiority and destruction of enemy air fields was crucial. The air units must work in conjunction with the ground units. After that, the enemy's railways and supply lines must be destroyed to ensure that men and material would be at a disadvantage to an advancing army. In addition, he also saw potential for bombing industrial targets such as chemical plants, iron mines, coal mines, gun foundries, and repair shops. He even insisted that the French and British combine air forces into a single service for long distance bombing.⁷

Trenchard's ideas came too late in the war for application. On November 11, 1918, World War I ended. Immediately after, each nation began cutting back on military spending. The war in Europe was over, but strategic bombing theory was only beginning.

Several more air power theorists emerged with new ideas about strategic bombing during the interwar period. Giulio Douhet was an Italian artillery officer during World War I. Douhet saw many flaws in the way the Italian army collaborated with its air force and suggested bomber fleets designed to bomb the enemy daily. His suggestion was ignored. After the war, he became one of the first theorists to lay out his ideas in published works.⁸ In 1921, in his most famous work, *Command of the Air*, he described the importance of airpower in the next (and inevitable) war involving Germany and France. He wrote Germany would use terror bombings to level cities before armies could be mobilized. He noted that even if cities were not completely destroyed, the morale of the people would break.⁹ Air power opened up a new dimension in warfare, and while the army and navy may fail, the bomber would always get through. Douhet

never wrote about combined arms warfare but did recognize the importance of an air force working together with other branches of the military with the air force being the senior branch.¹⁰

In the United States, the great air power theorist was Billy Mitchell. He, like Douhet and Trenchard, was a veteran of World War I. Mitchell worked closely with the British and French air forces, studying their tactics and forming new theories of his own. He and Trenchard met in France and discussed the importance of strategic air power.¹¹ Mitchell recognized the importance of air power for the United States. Britain and America, being maritime powers, needed to concentrate heavily on their air forces, because they had no immediate land enemies. Mitchell believed that the bomber would subsidize land armies and make the Navy obsolete.¹² In 1921, he arranged demonstrations proving that air craft could destroy naval vessels. Although the test was a success, the Army, Navy, and Congress denied any technical expansion or development of the U.S. Bomber fleet.¹³ Mitchell, like Douhet, wrote a series of articles and books such as *Our Air Force: the Keystone of National Defense* and *Winged Defense*. In his writings, Mitchell believed that in the next war bombers would strike targets of production, transportation, and agriculture and destroy the enemy's means of waging war.¹⁴ This was the fundamental idea of strategic bombing.

Arthur Harris, a member of the Royal Flying Corps during World War I, was another pioneer of strategic bombing in Britain during the interwar period. Following World War I, Harris was posted to the newly acquired British territory of Iraq. The instability in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East was escalating, so Harris ordered the conversion of British Victoria transports into the first postwar long range heavy bombers.¹⁵ By 1922, the bombers were used to quell several uprisings against British troops. The handful of bombers appeared to be achieving

more than what thousands of soldiers could do, and Harris was pleased with the results, adding to the belief that the bomber could single handedly win wars.¹⁶

When Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in 1933, one of the main goals of the Third Reich was rearmament. Enormous amounts of money went into rebuilding the German military. In March 1935 the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) was unveiled to the world and German conscription went into effect.¹⁷ By 1936 Germany had remilitarized the Rhineland and military expenditure soared. Herman Goering, commander of the Luftwaffe, was head of the Four-Year Plan, launched in 1936, to ensure that German economy would be prepared for total war within four years.¹⁸

Germany had no official doctrine for strategic bombing. Many in Germany felt that tactical bombing was better suited for the Luftwaffe. Germany's strategy was combined arms warfare, which would use bombers in coordination with land units.¹⁹ In 1936 Germany was still a neutral player in the world but wanted to aid the fascist revolt that was gaining momentum in Spain. Initially, Hitler was careful about what type of aid he would send to Spain, not wanting to breach international laws. However, once proof was found that Russian made bombs were being used against Franco's armies, Hitler ordered a full scale intervention. The Luftwaffe force sent to Spain was known as the "Condor Legion" and consisted of an all volunteer force.²⁰ Erhard Milch, State Secretary of the Reich's Aviation Ministry, observed the Luftwaffe's actions in Spain. The most famous incident of the Luftwaffe in Spain took place in April 1937 when the Luftwaffe obliterated the civilian population in the Spanish town of Guernica.²¹ The bombing of Guernica was a moral tragedy and the raid was not a great success. Milch had studied Douhet's writings and after putting the ideas into practice in Spain, Milch knew that the Luftwaffe could

never meet the demands of strategic bombing. Given the logistics and industrial needs for modern warfare, Milch urged Goering to use the Luftwaffe for tactical operations with the aim of the destruction of the enemy's air forces.

General Hugo Sperrle was the commander of the Condor Legion in Spain from November 1936 until November 1937. Sperrle learned valuable lessons from the Luftwaffe's experience there. He recognized that accidents, weather, and night flying proved to be deadlier than the enemy because Germany lost more planes to these circumstances than to the enemy.²² From Spain, Sperrle sent numerous reports on how to improve strategic and tactical bombings. He discussed every aspect of operational lessons including weather service, flight training, communications, command, and maintenance. These reports had much to do with the success of the Luftwaffe during the first few years of the World War II.²³

The Spanish Civil War was a war of ideas between communism and fascism. The British and Americans, along with the rest of the world, knew of the situation in Spain but remained largely indifferent. Air Marshall Trenchard paid little attention to the Luftwaffe's performance because he had secured his place as Chief of the Air Staff and remained focused on his own theories of strategic bombing.²⁴ The United States Army Air Corp made a greater effort to study the air war in Spain than Britain, but interest remained minimal. Henry Arnold, then Assistant Chief of the Air Corps, dismissed the air war in Spain as irrelevant to modern war.²⁵

On September 1st, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began in Europe. Hitler ordered that the Luftwaffe be used for tactical purposes as opposed to strategic bombings. The Luftwaffe's primary objective was to destroy the Polish airfields then aid the ground forces in close aerial cover.²⁶ On September 3rd, Britain and France declared war on Germany. The

United States was neutral, but President Roosevelt issued a statement requesting that all powers involved in the conflict avoid the use attacks on civilians as targets of aerial bombardments.²⁷

Chamberlain gladly agreed to Roosevelt's proclamation. At the outbreak of war, the Luftwaffe's strength was far greater than that of Britain. During the first month of the war, Germany had more fighter and bomber aircraft than Britain, a maritime power whose strength depended on her navy.²⁸

Throughout the Polish campaign, Germany did intentionally bomb civilian targets, especially in Warsaw. The problem was that there was heavy resistance from the Polish army in Warsaw. Germany gave the Polish government an advance warning and demanded surrender five times before bombing the city of Warsaw. The Germans did not consider this a war crime because Polish defenders were in operational zones and warnings were given in advance in accordance with the Hague Convention.²⁹ Germany had never developed any heavy bomber aircraft. The planes that hit Warsaw were modified Ju 52 transport planes carrying incendiary bombs that had to be shoveled out of the aircraft. This made the bombs even more inaccurate and resulted in even more civilian casualties.³⁰

After the Fall of Poland and later Denmark and Norway, Germany turned west for its attack on France and the Low Countries. The attack began May 10, 1940, with stunning success in Holland. However, severely outgunned and outmanned, the Dutch Army hunkered in cities and defended quite well, slowing the German advance. In Rotterdam, Dutch forces had pinned down German Paratroopers for days delaying their assault into Belgium and France.³¹ General Schmidt, commander of the newly arrived German forces, sent an ultimatum to the Dutch forces in Rotterdam. The ultimatum requested that the forces surrender or be bombed into submission.

The Dutch forces eventually agreed to surrender; however, German bombers had been dispatched and were already miles from their target in radio silence. Attempts were made to stop the bombers, but the first wave dropped their payload on Rotterdam killing 900 civilians.³² The other waves were called off but the damage had been done.

On May 15th, 1940, one day after the Rotterdam bombings, Churchill's War Cabinet authorized bombing raids east of the Rhine.³³ The bombing of Rotterdam changed the way the RAF would conduct its bombing campaign. Even though Warsaw had been bombed in the previous year, Rotterdam, being across the English Channel in Western Europe, hit closer to home. The RAF began bombing raids on German oil plants, steel foundries, and transport links, with the stipulation that civilian casualties should be minimized. RAF bomber command knew that civilians would be killed in strategic bombings; however, after Germany demonstrated its willingness to bomb civilians, Britain followed suit.

On June 25th, 1940, France surrendered and Britain stood alone against Nazi Germany. This marked a turning point in the RAF's priorities. The RAF's two primary roles were to be the air defense of the United Kingdom and the strategic bombing offensive against Germany.³⁴ The Battle of Britain was unique in the fact that the battle was solely reliant on aircraft to break the enemies will to resist without the use of armies and navies.³⁵ Hitler issued Fuhrer Directive (No. 16) on preparations for a landing operation against England with the Luftwaffe making the preliminary arrangements for the invasion. The Luftwaffe had the daunting task of preventing air attacks, engaging naval vessels, destroying coastal defenses, and breaking the enemy's resistance for the upcoming land invasion of England, codenamed Operation Sea lion.³⁶

The Battle of Britain began July 10, 1940, with the first phase of the German attack. It was referred to as the Kanalkampf, or Channel Battle. This was the preliminary phase of the attack and a training ground for both sides in which Germany bombed English coastal towns and British convoys. By the end of the month, 180 German aircraft were shot down, 100 of which were bombers, while the British lost about seventy fighters.³⁷ Hitler, becoming impatient, ordered the Luftwaffe to attack radar installations and coastal airfields. This part of the operation was referred to as Adlertag (Eagle Day) and began on August 13. The attacks on the British radar stations were successful in hitting their targets, but the British were able to have their radar stations operational again in a matter of hours. Airfields were damaged but not destroyed. Aircraft factories were also heavily damaged, some hit several times in less than a week, killing valuable personnel.³⁸ German losses still remained higher than Britain, but the Luftwaffe was able to replenish its forces quicker than Britain.

The final phase of the battle of Britain began on September 7. Because Britain still refused to negotiate peace with Nazi Germany, Hitler ordered that the Luftwaffe once again switch its focus to bombing London. On the first day of the attack, 1,000 Londoners were killed by the raids.³⁹ As the ferocity of the Luftwaffe's attacks increased, the RAF remained determined to defend the isle. After several postponements and mounting losses in the sky, Hitler called off plans for the invasion of Britain. From August 12 until September 30, the Germans lost 1,100 aircraft and Britain lost 650.⁴⁰ Even though Germany called off plans for an invasion, the indiscriminate bombing of civilians and towns continued.

The London Blitz was arguably beneficial to Britain overall. It achieved several objectives for Britain and none for Germany. First, it allowed the RAF to get its second wind.

Second, it was a psychological victory in that Nazi Germany was not invincible and Churchill wanted America to recognize the importance of that. Third, it gave the RAF justification to use its only offensive weapon, the strategic bomber.⁴¹ After Germany intentionally killed British civilians, the RAF was authorized to use any means necessary to stop the German war machine.

The RAF bombed Berlin one day after the Luftwaffe bombed London. Although the material damage was minimal, morale was badly damaged in Germany. Goering had said that the RAF would never bomb the city and he was proven wrong.⁴² Britain made it a point to minimize civilian casualties initially, but as Germany disregarded civilian combatants, the RAF began to do the same. In October 1940, Sir Charles Portal was promoted to Chief of the Air Staff in Britain. At the same time Sir Richard Peirse was promoted to head of Bomber Command.⁴³ Throughout the rest of 1940 and 1941, Britain launched raids against Germany. Due to Britain's insufficient funds and minimal American involvement, raids in Germany were met with limited if any real success. Losses were high, sometimes as much as 12.5 percent.⁴⁴

1941 proved to be a crucial year for Britain's involvement in World War II. In the summer Hitler launched his offensive against the Soviet Union, devoting most of his war effort toward the Eastern Front. In December, the Japanese attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, giving America ample reason to fully mobilize its economy toward war production. The USA had been lightly involved in the Battle of Britain, but with an official declaration of war, the bombing campaign against Germany would have no limit. In February 1942, Peirse was relieved of his duties at Bomber Command. Sir Arthur Harris assumed role of Bomber Command and in the same month the American 8th Air Force began arriving in Britain. The nature of the air war was about to change significantly.

CHAPTER 2

EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of the Allied Bombing Campaign has been debated by historians for decades. Obviously, in the years of 1940 and 1941, the RAF had a difficult fight against Germany. In fact, the RAF dropped only 62,000 tons of bombs on Germany in 1940 and 1941 compared with the 676,000 tons that were dropped in 1944 alone.⁴⁵ However, 1942 was a pivotal year for the Allies. Historian Alan Levine believes that the attacks conducted by the RAF prior to 1942 were failures.⁴⁶ With Harris assuming control of Bomber Command and the 8th Air Force arriving in Britain, Bomber Command was reformed. A policy of “area attack” would be implemented, meaning that the primary objective would be to attack “the morale of the enemy’s civil population and in particular, the industrial workers.”⁴⁷ The British also upgraded their planes to Avro Lancaster bombers capable of carrying a massive bomb load of over five tons, twice that of the American bombers. Some modified Lancasters could carry an eleven ton bomb for special missions.⁴⁸ To go along with the new weapons came new electronic guidance systems to make the RAF’s attacks more accurate and effective.⁴⁹

As the 8th Air Force was preparing itself for the invasion of North Africa, Britain continued to carry out bombing missions against Germany on its own. With Bomber Command restructured, the RAF was ready to implement new ideas into the bombing campaign. In March 1942 Winston Churchill’s scientific advisor, Lord Cherwell, concluded that one ton of bombs made 100–200 people in Germany homeless. The idea was to conduct raids destroying Germany’s factories and surrounding residential areas. Such devastating attacks would force

Germany to reallocate resources, overwhelm the civilian sector, and eventually destroy the German war machine.⁵⁰

“On the night of March 29-30”, Harris wrote, “The first German city went up in flames.”⁵¹ The RAF had mustered 234 bombers to attack Lubeck with incendiary bombs, 191 of these bombers hit their target. Controversial author, A.C. Grayling, argues that the RAF was able to kill 1,000 civilians, destroy seventy percent of the city, and justify its actions by saying the raid was to destroy the Heinkel factory in the city’s southern suburbs.⁵² He also argues that it was this action that provoked Germany into launching Luftwaffe raids into England, bombing its civilian populations, which would lead into even larger retaliatory attacks against Germany by the RAF. It was these attacks that would lead Harris to implement a weapon he felt would destroy Germany and prove the strategic bomber’s importance, the 1,000 plane raid.

The first 1,000 plane raid was launched on May 31, 1942, consisting of no less than 1,050 bombers taking off from fifty-five separate air fields.⁵³ Historian Charles Messenger writes that the bombers were met with fairly light anti-aircraft fire; in fact after the raid was over, only forty aircraft were missing, while 890 claimed to have hit their targets. Even Winston Churchill and General Hap Arnold were impressed with the results of the bombings, each sending a personal letter of congratulations to Harris on a sound victory.⁵⁴ In less than seventy-five minutes, 2,000 tons of bombs had been dropped on Cologne, destroying 600 acres, 13,000 buildings, but surprisingly only killing 469 people.⁵⁵

The attack on Cologne was considered a success by the British and the thousand bomber raid proved to be a powerful tool in their arsenal. However, given the sheer magnitude of the raid and American involvement in North Africa, the RAF was only able to conduct two more

large attacks in the summer of 1942. The raids were on Essen and Bremen, and due to poor weather conditions, produced meager results.⁵⁶ Harris wanted to conduct four separate 1,000 plane raids a month, but given the logistics of the raids, the RAF would have to wait until the Americans could devote more time and resources to a combined bomber offensive.

The 8th Air Force had begun arriving in Britain in early 1942 under the command of Major General Carl Spaatz. The buildup of the American Air Force in Britain was a gradual process throughout the first months of 1942. The initial use of the air force was to provide tactical cover to America's army offensive in North Africa.⁵⁷ By the summer of 1942, combined bombing operations against Germany were finally ready to get underway. The B-17 was the bomber of choice for the Americans. It had a lighter payload than the Lancaster, typically around 6,000 pounds, but carried thirteen heavy caliber machine guns.⁵⁸ The first major raids took place on August 17, 1942, led by Col. Paul Tibbets, later the pilot of the Enola Gay. The raid consisted of eighteen B-17 bombers striking the marshalling yards at Rouen in North-West France.⁵⁹ The raid took place during the day using the new Norden Bombsight to increase accuracy. Under RAF Spitfire escort, the bombers hit Rouen with little success; however, this raid marked a milestone in the bombing campaign. For the first time, the United States and Great Britain worked together to bomb a German infrastructure that was producing war goods.

The fall and winter months of 1942 were slow for the combined bomber offensive. The majority of RAF and USAAF forces were being used in support of Operation Torch in North Africa.⁶⁰ Late historian Robin Neillands writes that throughout 1942, Chief of the Air Staff, Charles Portal, called for a rapid buildup of an Allied Bomber force. His proposal was a combined force of 3,000 bombers to be ready by the end of 1943 and between 4,000 and 6,000 in

1944. With a force that large the Allies could drop 95,000 tons of explosives every month.⁶¹ The 8th Air Force was joined by other units throughout the fall of 1942 but could rarely muster more than 100 aircraft for any mission.⁶²

The Casablanca Conference was the turning point for the Allied bombing campaign. It took place at the beginning of 1943 and one subject that was discussed was the issue of a combined bomber offensive. Historian Roger Beaumont writes that at this point in the war it was becoming clear that Germany could not win the war. However, the Soviet Union was putting pressure on the Allies to open up a second front in the West because the Soviets lost about a division per day in 1942.⁶³ Operation POINTBLANK was the name given to the Combined Bomber Offensive. The offensive intended, “round the clock bombing”, which meant the RAF would bomb by night and the USAAF by day. The main objective was “The progressive destruction of the German military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their armed resistance is fatally weakened.”⁶⁴ The initial priorities were;

- a) German submarine construction yards
- b) The German aircraft industry
- c) Transportation
- d) Oil Plants
- e) Other targets in the enemy war industry.⁶⁵

The German U-Boat menace had taken a toll on Allied shipping, especially late in 1942 and early 1943. Plans for an invasion of continental Europe could not take place until the Atlantic was free of U-Boats. In March 1943 alone, U-Boats sank 500,000 tons of shipping.⁶⁶

Long range bombers equipped with radar were called into action. Allied bombers and naval craft managed to subdue the U-Boat threat in a matter of months, before the Combined Bomber Offensive commenced.⁶⁷ When the Combined Bomber Offensive was begun on June 10, 1943, German submarines were no longer a threat and the priorities switched to German aircraft and ball bearing industries.⁶⁸

In the weeks following the Casablanca Conference, the Allied Air Forces began gaining experience. Harris began sending bombers to hit industrial targets in the Ruhr pocket. The first city to be hit in the Ruhr was Essen. Essen was hit several times over the course of a month and half. The last attack was so devastating that the Germans reported “total” gas works damage.⁶⁹ The next sizeable attack was Duisburg, which received 5,157 tons of bombs over the course of five raids.⁷⁰ One of the most remarkable attacks was delivered on Wuppertal-Barman, in which ninety percent of the buildup area attacked was destroyed, leaving 2,450 dead and 118,000 homeless.⁷¹ On June 24 and 25, 630 bombers hit Elbefeld, killing 1,800 people. A week later, Cologne was hit with a similar sized force, killing 4,400 people. Author A.C. Grayling writes that this is proof of Bomber Command’s increasing attack power because the smaller raid did more damage than the previous year’s 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne. Five days later, Cologne was hit again, leaving a combined total of 350,000 Germans without homes.⁷² By the end of June, the RAF alone had dropped 34,705 tons of bombs on the Ruhr area with the loss of 628 aircraft, totals that do not include minor combat operations.⁷³

“Operation Gomorrah” was the code name for the Allied bombing of Hamburg. The British were to attack by night during the last week of July and first week of August, while the American forces would bomb during the day on July 25 and 26.⁷⁴ The attacks began on July 24

by the RAF and the 25th by the Americans. The majority of bombs used were incendiary bombs designed to create small fires that would spread causing a firestorm. The Allied attack was relentless and brutal. The RAF attacks were far more inaccurate than the Americans, hitting mostly civilian areas.⁷⁵ Over half of the city was reduced to rubble, with roughly 30,480 buildings completely destroyed. There is no way of knowing how many died, estimates vary between 60,000 and 100,000, while 45,000 corpses were found in the ruins of the bombings.⁷⁶ The attack on Hamburg devastated German morale and Hitler himself thought that similar attacks would force Germany out of the war.⁷⁷ The attacks were only the first of sixty-nine raids that the allies would launch against Hamburg alone.

The attacks on Hamburg were regarded as a success by the Allies. On August 1, 1943, the Allies' luck began to change. Operation Tidal Wave was an exclusive AAF operation involving the 8th and 9th Air Forces flying into occupied Romania to hit oil fields deep inside enemy territory. The American attacks came with disastrous results. According to historian Kenneth Werrel, many of the pilots were inexperienced and used to flying over the friendly, cloudless skies of Texas; not cloudy, hostile territory.⁷⁸ The American forces also encountered the same problems that the RAF and Luftwaffe had during their daylight raids, which proved costly in casualties and had limited effectiveness. Of the 178 B-24s involved in the Raid, 54 were lost.⁷⁹ The low level attacks were highly ineffective. Oil production eventually resumed as normal and success of the attacks was questionable.⁸⁰

Following the costly attacks on the oil fields in Ploesti, the American forces turned to the Luftwaffe's aircraft industry for the next mission. The Schweinfurt-Regensburg mission was to be a two-part strike that was supposed to cripple Germany's aircraft industry. The mission was a

combined effort by the Americans and British which began on August 17, 1943.⁸¹ The plan was for 375 bombers to raid factories in two cities at once, then follow up with another two-part strike shortly after. In Schweinfurt alone, 12,000 tons of bombs were dropped on factories with devastating results. After the war, Albert Speer, German Minister of Armaments, admitted that the raids were so costly September aircraft production was 35% of the preraid level.⁸² Bomber crews and escorts shot down forty-seven German planes during the raid. Regensburg had similar bombing results as Schweinfurt, but with the success came a price. Of the attacking bombers, sixty were lost, and eleven more were scrapped. Over 600 men were either killed, missing, evading capture, or captured as a result of the raid, along with severe damage to numerous bombers.⁸³ The raids left the bomber crews and planes so badly damaged that the follow up mission would have to wait.

While the USAAF was recovering from the Schweinfurt-Regensburg raid, the RAF continued smaller raids throughout August and September, with the Luftwaffe refusing to give up air space to the allies. On the RAF's mission to Nuremburg on the night of August 27/28, the RAF lost thirty-three out of 674 bombers and three days later in Munchen-Gladbach, twenty-five out of 660 bombers were lost.⁸⁴ Harris began sending small missions into Berlin to hit aircraft industries along with residential areas. On the night of September 1, the RAF lost forty-seven out of 612 aircraft and three days later, twenty-two out of 316 bombers were lost.⁸⁵ Germany's aircraft production of the Me-109 dropped from 725 in July to 536 in September. Additionally, Luftwaffe losses in the sky were mounting, so Germany developed more elaborate ways of manufacturing planes and engines to increase production to counter mounting losses by strategic bombings and air defenses.⁸⁶

Once the Allies had recovered from the Schweinfurt-Regensburg raid, General Curtis LeMay and other allied commanders wanted to deliver another damaging raid to Germany, this time to the ball bearing factories. The 291 B-17s took off on October 14 with Spitfire escort. The Germans had learned the limited range of the Spitfires and waited until the bombers were alone without escort and launched well executed strikes on the American formations. Historian Tami Biddle notes that 198 bombers were either shot down or crippled.⁸⁷ This event would later be known as “Black Thursday.”⁸⁸ This eye opening attack proved to American commanders that no matter how well armed the bombers were, they were no match for the Luftwaffe’s fighter planes.⁸⁹ The attacks were not highly effective, especially at the price paid by American bomber crews. The USAAF decided to temporarily suspend all further deep penetration missions because losses of that magnitude were unacceptable.⁹⁰ Arthur Harris condemned the attacks, stating that the Americans needed to give up their “disastrous diversions” and help the RAF in bombing Berlin.⁹¹

Arthur Harris felt the key to defeating the Germans was to destroy Berlin, thus crumbling Berlin’s industry and economy and decimating the morale of Berliners. “The Battle of Berlin”, as Harris referred to it, began on the night of November 18.⁹² By this time in the war, Harris had a daily average of 800 bombers at his disposal, allowing him to create diversionary attacks to stir confusion among the Luftwaffe. In a memo sent to Churchill, Harris wrote, “We can wreck Berlin from end to end....it will cost us between 400-500 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war.”⁹³ From November until March 1944, the RAF conducted heavy attacks on the German capital. In the first two nights alone 9,000 Berliners were killed, but the RAF suffered heavy casualties.⁹⁴ Six thousand acres of Berlin had been damaged, but no matter how much damage the RAF inflicted upon Berlin, the city would not burn into a firestorm. Berlin was too spread out

and the Berliners were too resistant and would rebuild and nullify much of what the RAF had done. Harris had underestimated the will of the Germans to resist aerial attacks.

Historian Kenneth Werrell believes that if the war had ended late in 1943, the evidence would have supported the view that strategic bombing had failed.⁹⁵ He suggests that the prewar theories and practices had been disproven. The first assumption that the bomber would always get through was incorrect. Introduction of radar gave defenders an advantage by knowing where the enemy was and fighter planes were far superior in aerial combat to the bomber. Secondly, industrial targets could be hit and damaged but could rarely be put out of commission entirely. German workers found ways of adapting to the damaged bombings and production actually began increasing as the German economy began to mobilize fully for total war. Lastly, intelligence became a problem when bomber crews would release their payload on a target and claim the target as destroyed. In all actuality, few targets were ever completely destroyed prior to 1944 because only 22% of bombs actually fell within five miles of their intended targets.⁹⁶

During the months following, “Black Thursday”, the Allies began rethinking their strategy for bombing missions into Germany. Historian Richard Overy believes that several important changes helped turn the tide of war in favor of the Allies. First, they developed a new P-51 Mustang with an external, detachable fuel tank that would allow the fighters to protect the bombers from takeoff until landing. The Mustangs were better suited to dogfight with the Luftwaffe’s Me-109s than the bombers were, thus allowing more bombers to get through to deliver their payloads.⁹⁷ The Allies, especially the RAF, began using more incendiary bombs rather than high explosive bombs to ensure the maximum amount of damage that could be delivered per sortie.⁹⁸ Finally, by the end of 1943, the Allied war production was at unheard of

levels. In 1942, Britain and America produced 18,880 bombers, but by the end of 1943 that number had nearly doubled to 37,083. As the bomber production increased, so did the bombs. In 1942, the Allies dropped 53,755 tons of bombs on Axis controlled Europe and by 1943, that figure had increased to 226,513.⁹⁹ During the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 the Allied leaders had called for a round the clock bombing of Germany. After a year of waiting, Harris and Spaatz could finally make the Combined Bomber Offensive possible.

On January 1, 1944, General Carl Spaatz became commander of the newly established USSTAF (United States Strategic Air Force) consisting of 8th and 15th Air Forces with some authority over the 9th Air Force.¹⁰⁰ The Americans returned to the skies with a spectacular vengeance. “The Big Week” began on February 20th with the 8th Air Force launching thousands of bombers against a dozen airplane factories in Germany with escorts following the entire mission all week long. In Leipzig, Me-109 factories accounted for 32% of all Me-109 production during the war.¹⁰¹ The factories withstood the RAF’s attacks but the American saturation bombings proved too much. Over 10,000 tons of bombs were dropped on German aircraft factories; 90% of the Luftwaffe’s total industry.¹⁰² The Allies lost about 300 bombers but the Germans paid dearly for the raids. Over 700 Me-109s had been destroyed in the air or in factories, almost all twin engine fighters were gone, production of Ju 88s was cut by 50%, and 75% of the factories had been damaged or destroyed.¹⁰³ The Big Week marked a turning point in the air war. America became the power in the air, outnumbering RAF and Bomber Command and Britain would also take a more subordinate role in the Allied Order of Battle.

The German Luftwaffe was the last barrier to the Allied invasion of Europe. Throughout the months of March and April, vicious aerial combat was fought between the Luftwaffe and the

fighters escorting the bombers. Historian Alan Levine argues that it was not bombers hitting the factories that gained air supremacy; it was the loss of experienced Luftwaffe pilots during these missions that cost the Luftwaffe dearly. In March 1944, the Luftwaffe lost 511 pilots killed, roughly 21.7% of their available force; most were veterans. In April, another 447 pilots were killed, eliminating another 20.1% of its force.¹⁰⁴ By the end of April, the Luftwaffe had ceased to be effective and the Allies had clear control of the skies.

On April 1, 1944, General Eisenhower declared that all allied air force priorities were to focus on one common objective, Operation OVERLORD. The combined bomber offensive would temporarily be suspended and Air Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder would serve as Deputy Supreme Commander of the Allied Air Forces in preparation for D-Day.¹⁰⁵ All aircraft would be used to support the beach landings by eliminating the remaining Luftwaffe, disrupting transportation, damaging oil production, and weakening beach defenses.¹⁰⁶ With the Luftwaffe posing virtually no threat to the landings, the Allies began focusing on the tedious task of prepping the Normandy area for the largest amphibious invasion in human history.

The Allies began bombing Germany's oil refineries again in April. The attacks were devastating to the German war machine. Production from every major synthetic plant steadily decreased as attacks became more frequent with no Luftwaffe aircraft to defend the plants. These plants were producing 316,000 tons per month when the attacks began in late April. The production rate fell to 107,000 tons by June. Aviation gasoline from synthetic plants dropped from 175,000 tons in April to 30,000 tons by June.¹⁰⁷ The attacks were so frequent that the workers engaged in rebuilding these plants would say, "Today we finished rebuilding the plants and tomorrow the bombers will come again."¹⁰⁸

During the bombings of German transportation lines, 71,000 tons of bombs were dropped on rail centers by bombers and modified P-51 fighters. Forty-one out of eighty rail centers were declared useless for German reinforcement.¹⁰⁹ By the end of the Normandy preparation, only two bridges over the Seine River below Paris remained intact. After the invasion on June 6, 1944, it took the German 275th division a week to travel 150 miles from Fougères to the front lines. Two Panzer Divisions made it from Poland to France in less time than it took them to travel from Eastern France to Normandy. Many other personnel could not make it to the German front lines until July 3, nearly one month later.¹¹⁰ The Luftwaffe was so badly damaged that it could only muster 80 operational aircraft to oppose the American forces on D-Day.¹¹¹ The air power used for the initial landings at Normandy had helped make the invasion a success and the Americans had officially opened up the much anticipated Western Front.

Throughout the summer of 1944, the USSTAF and RAF were being used primarily for tactical missions in support of land units in the West. The first large scale bombing in support of ground troops in Normandy was at Cherbourg on June 22 from the 9th Air Force. The confusion of the battle and heavy smoke and debris caused serious problems for the bombers, many bombs fell short hitting friendly targets and missing most of the Germans providing no breakthrough for the land units.¹¹² A month later the 8th Air Force encountered a similar problem while trying to help land units break through at St. Lo, hitting several friendly battalions by mistake. The RAF made the same error at Caen a week earlier as well.¹¹³ Both General Spaatz and Air Marshall Harris disagreed with using bombers for such close tactical support, realizing the bombers true potential was strategic strikes, not tactical.¹¹⁴ However, toward the end of the Normandy campaign, tactical bombers had better success in support of armored units, especially Patton's Third Army.¹¹⁵

As early as 1941, American commanders wanted strategic bombing to be aimed at precision targets while the RAF and Harris firmly believed morale bombing would win the war. Many in the USAAF wanted to show that precise strategic bombing could help win the war with fewer civilian casualties. This would help guarantee an independent Air Force established after the war.¹¹⁶ As Arnold told Eaker in 1943, “We want the people to understand and have faith in our way of making war.”¹¹⁷ However, in August 1944, the Allies were stalled on the Western Front. On August 28, Eisenhower told General Spaatz, “While I have always insisted that the U.S. Strategic Air Forces be directed against precision targets, I am always prepared to take part in anything that gives real promise to ending the war quickly.”¹¹⁸ The bombing campaign of Germany was ready to reach new levels of destruction on an unimaginable scale.

In mid-September, General Eisenhower returned control of the Allied air forces to the newly combined Bomber Command. The Allies now had the capacity to destroy any city they wanted, and that is exactly what the bombers achieved. In fact, 72% of all bombs dropped on Germany fell after July 1, 1944¹¹⁹. Targeted cities were ones that were producing some sort of war material. The new order of operations were:

- 1) Oil
- 2) Transportation
- 3) Tank production and ordnance depots

If weather or tactical conditions made these targets unsuitable, industrial areas were to be attacked using blind bombing techniques as necessary.¹²⁰

Oil was possibly the most important factor to the German war machine. Without it, armies could not efficiently operate. The RAF and USSTAF had been attacking refineries for

months, but with strategic operations back underway the Allies knew that the knockout blow to the German oil supply was possible. One of the most productive synthetic oil plants was Leuna. The heavily guarded plant was hit twenty-two times by the Allies in eight months. Each time the plant's production dropped and the plant had to be rebuilt to meet Germany's demand for oil. 6,552 sorties were flown against the plant dropping a total of 18,328 tons of bombs on the factory. Comparing production preraid and postraid, the plant's production was reduced by 91%.¹²¹ German fuel production decreased quickly as the Allies bombed plants in Budapest, Bremen, and Odertal.¹²² Nitrogen and methanol production relied for their syntheses process on synthetic oil as well. Nitrogen production fell from 75,000 tons in early 1944 to 20,000 tons by the end of the year.¹²³ Rubber was also synthesized in refineries relying on oil. When the oil production fell in the summer/fall 1944, rubber production dropped drastically. The preraid level of rubber production was 12,000 tons a month, but by the end of 1944 synthetic rubber production was operating at 2,000 tons a month. Although oil production rose to 337,000 tons in November, much of the oil was reserved for the upcoming German offensive in the West in December.¹²⁴ The Battle of the Bulge was Germany's last desperate gamble to force the Western Allies into negotiations or at least buy more time against the invading Soviets from the East. The attack failed, due mainly to a lack of fuel supply.¹²⁵

On November 1, Spaatz and others agreed to drop tank production from the initial list of targets. The German transportation systems would take precedent instead. The success of the Normandy campaign led Harris and others to believe that disrupting the flow of goods and resources throughout the Reich would further hinder the German's war efforts. The Allies dropped 35,000 tons of bombs on the German railways alone.¹²⁶ During the months of September and October, the German transportation system began collapsing under the weight of

Allied bombing attacks. Freight car loadings went from 900,000 cars per week during the last week of August 1944 to less than 500,000 per week in December.¹²⁷

With the destruction of the German railways underway, the Allies began bombing canals and waterways to disrupt transportation by canals and rivers. On November 2, 172 B-24s damaged the Beilefeld Viaduct so badly it closed for nine days. More B-24s hit the target again, closing the viaduct for eleven more days. On the same day, 144 B-24s hit the Altenbecken Viaduct so badly it shut down until February.¹²⁸ One-hundred fifty-seven B-24s bombed the Mittelland Canal so badly that it was shut down for the remainder of the war. Coal movement by waterway systems fell from 2.2 million tons in August to 454,000 tons in November.¹²⁹

After the success of the attacks against German oil and transportation, secondary targets began to feel the effects of Allied bombs as well. In the last half of 1944, the German truck industry was attacked. One attack on Opel in Brandenburg was so devastating that it knocked the factory out of commission indefinitely. Daimler Benz was hit multiple times but not completely destroyed. By December, truck production was 35% of the average for the first half of 1944.¹³⁰ The Germans tried to rebuild new shipping yards, but Allied bombs would hit targets while they were being built and five of Germany's major shipping yards had to be closed for the remainder of the war.¹³¹ Ironically, after switching bombing priorities, tank production increased from 1,600 tanks in August to 1,800 in December.¹³² The problem was that without oil and transportation, German tanks became nothing more than stationary targets for Allied planes.

1945 proved to be the pivotal year in the total destruction of German cities. Civilian targets would take the brunt of the city bombings. The main objective was to break the will of the civilians to continue to wage war. Ever since the Ardennes Offensive, the Germans were

showing no sign of surrender. Priorities switched again. Oil remained a top priority, but heavily populated civilian cities would be targeted to cause great confusion among the populace and hamper reinforcements.¹³³ Harris was thrilled with this because by 1945, the Allied bomber force had reached the peak of its power. Over the next four months, over 180,000 tons of bombs would be dropped against poorly defended cities.¹³⁴

Berlin was one of the first cities that Harris wanted to bomb into the ground. General Doolittle was opposed to beating an enemy who was already in ruins, but after some hesitation, General Spaatz carried out the attack anyway.¹³⁵ Codenamed Operation THUNDERCLAP, the raid took place on February 3rd, 1945, with nearly a thousand B - 17s committed to the bombing. The initial raid killed about 2,500 people and left 120,000 homeless. American bombers flew nearly unopposed and dropped an accurate payload on the defeated city numerous times throughout the month of February until the Red Army was close enough for the raids to be called off. Total estimates of the death toll from Allied bombs are around 25,000 civilians, with around 6,000 acres of city destroyed.¹³⁶

One of the most controversial topics in World War II is the bombing of Dresden. Dresden had been relatively unscathed by the bombings, except for a small attack in October, 1944. Many refugees had made their way to Dresden and it was almost an entirely civilian population, including 20,000 POWs. Most of the city was made of wood and therefore was very flammable.¹³⁷ On February 13, the British hit the city first, with over 700 bombers, the next day the Americans followed up with 400 more. The majority of bombs dropped on Dresden were 250,000 incendiary sticks.¹³⁸ A firestorm erupted and the city became a blazing inferno,

destroying 13 square miles. Estimates vary for the total killed by the bombings, the most accurate probably being around 35,000.¹³⁹

Operation CLARION was the Allied plan of breaking the enemy's morale by destroying what was left of Germany's infrastructure. The attacks turned cities and towns that were already damaged into ruins. What little transportation that existed in Germany was further damaged.¹⁴⁰ When the refugees of Berlin evacuated to other cities like Munich, Chief of Staff Marshall ordered Munich be bombed too, in a display of power showing the Germans there was no hope.¹⁴¹ Almost no town or city in Germany was spared. Larger cities were hit multiple times. Author A.C. Grayling describes the multiple attacks on Cologne in which over 2,000 bombers hit the city so many times in three days that it turned rubble into powder.¹⁴² By the final raid on Cologne, 2,000 acres of the city were destroyed.¹⁴³ On March 15, 1945, Speer addressed a report to Hitler in which he stated, "The German economy is heading for inevitable collapse within 4-8 weeks."¹⁴⁴ Four days later, Hitler ordered a scorched earth policy on the Western Front, but few followed orders. By the beginning of April, the RAF ceased area bombings because much of Germany had been destroyed.¹⁴⁵ On April 16, 1945, Spaatz declared the strategic air war in Germany over.¹⁴⁶

In terms of effectiveness, the strategic bombing campaign of Germany can be considered both a success and a failure. The campaign was a failure in the sense that the bombings did not live up to prewar expectations by the aviation theorists who believed the war could be won by bombing alone. Secondly, the bombs dropped on Germany were terribly inaccurate, with few hitting their exact mark. Third, the bombings of civilians in order to break their morale did not work. In fact, it angered the populace, possibly explaining why the Germans continued to fight

on for months, even as it became increasingly obvious that the Germans were going to lose the war. Fourth, the destruction left in the wake of the bombings made it difficult and slow for the German people's reconstruction effort following the war. The damage caused by the bombings destroyed everything that made Germany a "nation state". Lastly, the death toll from the bombing campaign was staggering. Somewhere around 600,000 German civilians were killed, 70,000 of whom were children. Combined Allied casualties reach somewhere around 140,000.¹⁴⁷

The successes of the strategic bombing of Germany should be recognized as well. Its greatest achievement was probably the destruction of the Luftwaffe, which would have made numerous sea and land operations impossible had the Luftwaffe retained controls of the skies over Europe. Another very important achievement was that the Combined Bomber Offensive opened up a second front of the war. The Soviet losses on the Eastern front were so severe during the war that resources diverted by the bomber offensive from the Eastern front proved vital to the survival of the Soviet Union. Historian Roger Beaumont writes that by 1944, 800,000 Germans were engaged in the air defenses against the Allies. To go with that was 14,000 heavy and 40,000 light anti-aircraft guns. Another one million Luftwaffe troops were on cleanup duty and hundreds of thousands civilians were involved in the rebuilding process, plus the Germans transferred the bulk of the fighter force back to Germany.¹⁴⁸

CHAPTER 3

MORALITY

Richard Preston, historian at Duke University, describes Total War in the most complete sense as, “fighting with all resources and all kinds of weapons without any restrictions imposed by humanity or by expediency, killing all prisoners and civilians without respect for age or sex, disregarding completely the rights of neutrals, and using psychological techniques to wipe out individual personality and to obliterate all standards.”¹⁴⁹ Military philosopher, Carl Von Clausewitz, claimed that total war of this nature existed only in theory. Although Clausewitz never mentioned the term, “total war”, he did write, “Absolute totality in warfare could only mean chaos and a return to barbarism.”¹⁵⁰ Given the definition of total war, Nazi Germany is the closest an industrialized nation has come to total war.

When questioning the morality of the Allied bombing campaign, it is important to remember that it was the Nazis who first implemented indiscriminate bombings of civilians during World War II. During the invasion of Poland in 1939, it was the Luftwaffe that attacked industrial sections in Polish cities, most notably Warsaw¹⁵¹. Neville Chamberlain reacted to this by addressing the House of Commons, stating the British government would never permit the bombing of women, children, and civilians for terroristic purposes.¹⁵² The problem was the Rotterdam attacks of May 15 and the London attacks on August 24, 1940, that struck a nerve with the British.¹⁵³ Both attacks were accidental to an extent. The Rotterdam attacks were meant to be called off at the last minute and the London attacks were navigational errors.¹⁵⁴ However, because Nazi Germany drew the first blood on civilians and Chamberlain was no longer in

office, Britain immediately followed up with similar attacks with little regard for civilian casualties.

The British concept of strategic bombing differed from that of the Americans. During 1940 and 1941, Britain suffered a series of bombings and attacks on its civilian populace. The Germans made no distinction between combatant and noncombatants and began bombing London by day and night. The Germans were hoping the attacks would break the morale of the British people; instead, it had the opposite effect. Most citizens who lived in rural areas were intrigued by the air war.¹⁵⁵ During the daylight raids, many British citizens enjoyed watching a good dogfight during an afternoon picnic or luncheon at a friend's house.¹⁵⁶ Many damaged planes made emergency landings near or on golf courses due to favorable landing conditions, with bystanders giving beer to British pilots who made it out of the damaged planes. If the pilot who made it out alive was German, people would run from all directions, eager to give the downed pilot a hostile reception.¹⁵⁷

As Luftwaffe losses mounted during daylight raids, the Germans started intensifying their attacks and began bombing cities at night, making it more difficult for the British air defenses to hit their targets. More importantly, night time bombings were horribly inaccurate and caused great damage to suburban areas of cities, housing mostly civilians of importance.¹⁵⁸ Many began questioning the motives of the Germans, calling these attacks, "terror bombings". During October 1940, the Luftwaffe launched numerous attacks nearly every night, killing hundreds of men, women, and children per mission.¹⁵⁹ The German attacks grew more intense every night, killing more civilians. The attacks culminated in December when on one attack in London 3,000 civilians were killed. Instead of frightening the Londoners, the attacks caused anger toward

Germany. When Churchill visited the ruined homes, people cheered, shouting for Churchill to send bombers back to Germany.¹⁶⁰ Civilian morale did not break, the British economy did not collapse, and war production actually increased.¹⁶¹ As Luftwaffe casualties mounted, Hitler decided not to waste his resources on the Battle of Britain and instead turned to the East for his upcoming invasion of the Soviet Union.

Historian Michael Bess believes that it was the terror attacks on British civilians that helped gain support for the RAF's area bombings in Germany. The leadership in Britain continued to insist that the RAF aim their bombs at military targets but frankly admitted that bombing operations would take considerable toll on the enemy noncombatants.¹⁶² Like the Luftwaffe, the RAF began conducting daylight bombing raids from 1940 through early 1941. Bess believes that two facts were becoming painfully obvious to the RAF. First, just like the Luftwaffe, daylight operations produced unacceptable losses in aircraft and personnel. Second, and again similarly to the Luftwaffe's experience, the bombings were horribly inaccurate and had minimal results.¹⁶³ While the initial goal of the RAF was to hit precise targets like factories, bridges, and munitions plants, night time area bombings were the safest way to achieve the most damage to a target.

When America entered the air war in early 1942, the AAF had its own war plan for strategic bombing. The plan was similar to that of Britain in that American bombers would hit precise targets during daylight raids because precision bombsights only worked if the target could be seen, and even then it was still inaccurate.¹⁶⁴ However, both Commander of the USAAF, Henry Arnold, and General of the USAAF, Ira Eaker, knew as early as 1941 that once bombers became more abundant and German industry began to crumble, bombers could be used

to break the noncombatant morale if necessary.¹⁶⁵ The problem with the AAF's war plan was exactly what the RAF and Luftwaffe had learned from personal experience. Daylight raids left the bombers vulnerable to flak and especially enemy fighters. Regardless of these difficulties, the USSAF combined with the RAF began their bomber offensive.

The bombs used by the Allies were designed to create as much damage as possible. The preparatory task of a raid usually started off with a blockbuster heavy bomb. The bomb weighed about 4,000 pounds and could level an entire block of apartments. The blast wave was strong enough to compress the surrounding air into a massive shock wave that could rip roofs off of buildings and shatter windows. The RAF dropped 68,000 of these during the war.¹⁶⁶ The medium bombs were typically used to hit railroads, canals, viaducts, and concrete constructions. These usually weighed about 500 pounds and were fragmentation bombs. The Allies dropped about 750,000 of these during the war.¹⁶⁷ The general purpose anti-personnel bombs were high explosive shrapnel bombs, not typically preferred by bomber crews because they were usually aimed at trenches or army groups. 800,000 of these were dropped by the end of the war.¹⁶⁸ The favorite weapon of the RAF was the cluster bomb, which would release dozens of smaller two-pound incendiary devices. Millions of these sticks would be dropped all over Germany throughout the war. The thermite and magnesium mixture that when dropped in large enough quantities would ignite small fires that would cause larger more damaging fires.¹⁶⁹

The first large scale display of destructive fire power occurred on May 30, 1942, during Operation MILLENNIUM, the 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne. Author A.C. Grayling says the damage done to human life in Cologne was minimal given the grand scale of the bomber fleet. 13,000 buildings were destroyed, 45,000 Germans were left homeless, but only 469 people were

killed.¹⁷⁰ From a moral standpoint, this raid seemed to follow the guidelines of humane warfare, by which the buildings, industry, factories, and housing developments take the damage while the civilian casualties remained low.

Grayling writes that there were several reasons the body count was so low in the 1942 raid. First, of the 2,500 tons of explosives dropped on Cologne most were not incendiaries. Second, the raid was conducted over the course of seventy-five minutes, giving the Germans ample time to put out the fires and start repairing immediately afterwards. Last, by May, the city had constructed public shelters for 75,000 people, 7,500 bunkers, and 42,000 air raid shelters.¹⁷¹ This was typical for most cities in Germany, which is why body counts remained relatively low and structural damage medium throughout 1941, 1942, and into 1943.

Nuremberg was another example of the Allies' attempt at relatively humane warfare with the bombing campaign. Historian Neil Gregor writes that Nuremberg was a major industrial center as well as the center of the annual party rallies. During 1941, sporadic raids on the city caused some industrial damage but almost no cost to human life.¹⁷² The raids slightly increased in 1942, killing around one hundred people, but morale was never really affected and most Nuremberg residents went about business as usual. The attacks were even viewed as a necessary part of war by many Germans who understood that bombers would attack their war production industry. The city authorities were able to cope with the losses sustained in 1942 but were becoming stretched to their limit on how much damage they could adequately repair.¹⁷³

In mid 1943, the RAF was gaining the logistical support from the Americans to increase their bombing campaign against Germany. Thus far in the strategic bombing effort, results were minimal and morale was unscathed. The Allies began producing larger number of aircraft and

weapons to aid in the bombing campaign. The RAF would start relying heavily on incendiaries to spread larger fires and would attack targets multiple times over the course of days or weeks to ensure fire, and damage control could not restore stability in the bombed out areas.¹⁷⁴ The Americans would bomb by day while the British would bomb at night in accordance with the plans of the Casablanca Conference of 1943.¹⁷⁵

The RAF and USSAF would implement this new strategy in the summer of 1943. Historian and World War II veteran, Peter Calvocoressi, writes the first Allied firestorm started on July 27-28, 1943, in the city of Hamburg.¹⁷⁶ Hamburg was a thousand year old city with origins dating back to Emperor Charlemagne. The city contained 3,000 industrial establishments and 5,000 commercial industries. It had a million and a half inhabitants and most of the urban areas were wooden structured buildings.¹⁷⁷ The city had been bombed 130 times already and had a civil defense organization that made speedy recovery efforts following each attack.¹⁷⁸ Operation GOMORRAH would be different. The aerial attack began July 24 with a series of bombing raids that lasted until August 3. By the evening of the 27th a firestorm had erupted from the intense bombing. An average of 250,000 incendiary sticks and 7,000 liquid incendiary bombs were dropped per square mile.¹⁷⁹ The Germans who were living in Hamburg at the time were shown what hell on earth was really like.

Given the amount of firepower dropped in Hamburg, the heat from thousands of fires began superheating the air above. The heat became so intense from above that it began sucking the oxygen from the surrounding area creating violent updrafts that produced gale force winds at ground level. These winds were so intense that they carried more combustible material to the inferno's core, thus increasing the size and temperature of the fire.¹⁸⁰ Air was sucked out of the

surrounding area, including cellars and shelters, forcing two billion tons of fresh air four miles above ground at 170 miles per hour in an air chimney. Some citizens were sucked into the furnace, some trees even snapped in half by the force of the winds.¹⁸¹ Calvocosresi puts the death toll at about 45,000, though it is difficult to say because the fire's temperature reached 1,000 degrees centigrade, so many of the bodies were disintegrated. Half the city's houses were destroyed and the other half damaged, leaving one million Germans civilians retreating from the city to tell their stories of what had happened.¹⁸²

One survivor, Hans Nossack, wrote in great detail the unimaginable carnage left in the wake of the bombings. Armed guards stood around the heavily damaged areas of the cities. Forced laborers had the job of incinerating dead bodies with flamethrowers. The workers had difficulty reaching the bodies because enormous flies filled cellars and maggots the size of human fingers were making the cellar grounds too slick to walk on. He also added that the rats and flies were enormous. The smell of burnt flesh was heavily nauseating. The amount of dead rotting flesh was abundant and the creatures fed for weeks, many rats ate so much they couldn't move any longer. Nossack said this didn't stop until the beginning of October, nearly two and half months later.¹⁸³

The second firestorm to ignite in a German city occurred in Kassel, shortly after the USSAF's disastrous "Black Thursday" raid in Schweinfurt. On October 3, 1943, the RAF began a preliminary raid to disrupt the Henschel locomotive works and ammunition depot west of Ihringshausen but missed their target and instead hit an air raid shelter in a children's hospital. The initial raid killed 90 children, 14 nurses, and a doctor.¹⁸⁴ This raid paled in comparison to the firebombing that occurred days later on October 22. The 416,000 incendiaries dropped on

Kassel fell at a ratio of two per square yard. The stream of bombers extended 90 miles with their main target being the city's old town. Because Kassel was a thousand years old, it did not take long for the incendiaries to accelerate the flames throughout the city. A firestorm erupted after only forty-five minutes of bombings. Six firefighting teams tried to quench the flames but to no avail. No aid could be sent from other fire departments because the nearest major city was 100 miles away. One in ten people in the city's center were killed, 10,000 total, a loss rate of 4.4 percent compared to Hamburg which was 2.7 percent.¹⁸⁵

Following the raids at Kassel and Schweinfurt, the strategic bombing campaign was halted due to mounting losses of planes and crews over German skies and to prepare for the upcoming Allied invasion of Europe. Command temporarily shifted to Eisenhower to use the Allied Air Forces in preparation for the Normandy landings. Eisenhower and Churchill both feared French and Belgian civilian casualties would be high during the preparations for the landings. The original estimates of likely civilian deaths caused by the allied preparatory attacks were put at 80,000-160,000.¹⁸⁶ Air Marshall Tedder then modified the plan and removed targets in densely populated areas from the list. Chief of Air Staff Portal then put estimates at 10,500 likely to be killed, a figure Churchill still did not agree with.¹⁸⁷ Churchill sent a memo to President Roosevelt warning that such bombing deaths might cause the French to have hostile feelings toward the Allies during the liberation process. Roosevelt then replied that the decision was a military, not a political one.¹⁸⁸ From April 1 until June 5, 10,000 French and Belgian civilians were killed by the Anglo-American bombings during the D-Day preparations. Historian Henry Lytton agrees that the French and Belgian casualties were justified given the importance of the mission. The bombings isolated the Normandy battlefields, keeping six out of seven German Panzer divisions from crossing French rivers to mass a beachhead assault, thus

possibly turning the invasion back into the water. The civilian deaths were considered a low cost for such high benefits.¹⁸⁹

During the Normandy campaign, Churchill received news of a horrifying discovery in Germany occupied Poland. Four Jewish prisoners from the Auschwitz extermination camp had managed to escape to Slovakia.¹⁹⁰ The Jewish community sent a request to Switzerland and from there, London and Washington. The transmitted letter explained what was taking place at Auschwitz, along with details on how to bomb twenty railroad lines leading into the camps. Churchill gave all authority of the mission to John J. McCloy in the Pentagon. Four appeals were made to destroy the lines of transportation in order to stop the mass killings of Jewish civilians. McCloy's deputy noted that his answer was to "kill this" proposal. There would be no raids on Auschwitz transportation lines and the case was closed.¹⁹¹

During the summer of 1944, Hitler launched a series of terror attacks against England and other Allied areas using his V-1 and V-2 rockets. During the war, 32,000 V-1s and nearly 6,000 V-2s were produced.¹⁹² The V-1 attacks began on June 12, with ten rockets being launched, four of which arrived in England. V-2 attacks began in September, hitting targets in London.¹⁹³ Given the complicated guidance systems of the day, many of these weapons were horribly inaccurate, some didn't detonate and the ill conceived idea was a waste of precious German resources. The rocket attacks came too late in the war to make a difference but the V-1 and V-2 attacks had another purpose, to kill civilians. In total, almost 9,000 civilians were killed with about 25,000 injured.¹⁹⁴ The rocket attacks only angered the British citizens who were becoming increasingly tired of the war and were looking for a quick end and the destruction of Germany.

By late August, the Allied armies were stalled on the Western Front. Reluctantly, Eisenhower gave Spaatz the approval to use area bombings to destroy the morale of the German people, seeing as how the German land armies were refusing to give up. FDR never approved the use of indiscriminate bombings against civilians; however, he was aware of the attacks and never *disapproved* the application.¹⁹⁵ In August, Churchill gave Harris the support he needed to do what was necessary and this was music to Harris's ears.¹⁹⁶ From August, 1944 until April, 1945, German cities would be bombed until they were unrecognizable.

The Combined Bomber Offensive resumed and attacks became more intense than they had been during the pre-Normandy campaign. On August 18, 1944, the town of Bremen was bombed again, for the twelfth time¹⁹⁷. This time was different in the fact that the damage was more extensive and almost all of the town would be destroyed. The Allies dropped sixty-eight blockbusters, 10,800 phosphorus bombs, and 108,000 incendiary sticks on the remaining city. Another firestorm erupted, this time taking only thirty-four minutes to engulf the city. 59,000 were left homeless by the attacks and over 1,000 were killed.¹⁹⁸ On September 30, 1944, Munster was hit for the fifth time, and by October 22 it had been attacked again.¹⁹⁹ The bombers dropped 5,000 high explosives and 200,000 incendiary bombs on the city. Two high explosives landed at the St. Rochus Hospital, killing 150 patients. Munster lost 1,294 civilians killed during the raid and 90% of its historic old town was razed.²⁰⁰

By October, the Allies were anticipating a quick breakthrough across the Rhine into Germany. The Allies wanted to show the Germans that the choice was no longer between victory or defeat, it was between defeat or annihilation.²⁰¹ Operation HURRICANE took place on October 14 and 15 consisting of two separate operations. The RAF would bomb Duisburg and

the USSTAF would destroy what was left of Cologne. The RAF hit Duisburg with 9,000 tons of bombs in just twenty hours. Duisburg suffered 5,570 casualties during the raids.²⁰² To continue the Allies “shock and awe” campaign, Cologne was hit shortly after Duisburg with 9,000 more tons of explosives.²⁰³ Throughout October, 1944, twenty-eight missions were flown over Germany, making it the most devastating month since the war had started.

Historian Neil Gregor writes that during the first couple years of the Allied strategic bombing campaign, Nuremberg had been able to withstand the aerial attacks and city functions went on as normal. By the beginning of 1945, the city was in utter ruin. The multiple raids of 1944 had left the city without most of its women and children, as they had evacuated to safer areas. Armament factories were barely functioning and government officials were trying to give some illusion of bureaucratic control over a rapidly decaying situation.²⁰⁴ The governmental structure completely deteriorated after a massive raid on January 2, 1945. The attack left the city without electricity, gas, water, and public transportation. The mayor, realizing all hope was lost, gave up efforts of keeping order and stability and abandoned the city.²⁰⁵ In 1939, Nuremberg’s population was 420,000. Even by the end of 1942 the city’s population was 361,000. By May, 1945, the population of Nuremberg was 180,000.²⁰⁶ Gregor writes that Nuremberg was one of the few the cities in Germany capable of withstanding multiple aerial bombardments from an enemy and did so quite well until the end of 1942. However, with so much destructive capability like that presented by the allies in 1945, no city could have kept a normal prewar infrastructure.

Since the beginning of the war, Harris had wanted to pull off a raid against Berlin that would cause a similar firestorm like the one that erupted in Hamburg in 1943.²⁰⁷ From November 1943-March 1944, heavy attacks were conducted on Berlin. Resistance from the

Luftwaffe and ground defenses resulted in high losses for allies, especially the RAF. Eisenhower pulled the RAF from the battle in order to consolidate air forces for the Normandy invasion and Harris's, "Battle of Berlin" was considered a failure.²⁰⁸ On February 3, 1945, the USSTAF hit Berlin again, this time with over 1,500 aircraft attacking the city, killing or wounding 25,000 Berliners.²⁰⁹ (Many German historians argue the accuracy of this number). The bombers dropped a proportional amount of incendiaries on Berlin as they did Hamburg, yet a firestorm never erupted over Berlin during these raids.²¹⁰ U.S. fire protection engineer James McElroy says that this was because Berlin was honeycombed with parapeted firewalls and lacked the inner city structures that existed in medieval fortification walls.²¹¹ This explains why firestorms occurred in some German cities and not others.

The name Dresden sparks immediate controversy on Allied morality during World War II. On one hand, Dresden can be considered a war crime by the Allies, but on the other hand, it has been justified as a ruthless show of military force.²¹² Dresden had been relatively unscathed by Allied attacks during the war. The city was not a completely civilian target; it did have war producing industry vital to the Nazi war machine, especially marshalling yards.²¹³ Many cities were being bombed into submission by this point in the war, but Dresden was different. Jorg Friedrich believes that the city was intentionally firebombed. Dozens of cities were firebombed during World War II, but until September 1944, a firestorm could not deliberately be produced, which is why the firestorms in cities like Hamburg and Kassel were accidents. However, given certain atmospheric conditions, weather patterns, and more powerful incendiary devices, the British quickly began to determine a mathematical formula for producing a firestorm.²¹⁴ By February 1945 the British realized that with enough incendiary firepower, almost any German city could be turned into a firestorm.

The RAF raids began on the night of February 13-14, 1945. The RAF dropped 404,000, four pound incendiary bombs on Dresden and 2,099 incendiary clusters; a combined total of over 2,600 tons of explosives, which immediately started a firestorm.²¹⁵ On the nights of February 14-15, the Americans then dropped their payload of 1,235 tons of explosives on top of the firestorm, causing meteorological conditions that the Allied planners did not know could happen. The internal temperature reached around 1,500 degrees Celsius (2,700 F), causing smoke to reach 13,000 feet into the atmosphere.²¹⁶ Many of the Americans didn't need their instruments to find Dresden because the fires could be seen from over one hundred miles away.²¹⁷

The Dresden firestorm was probably worse than others that erupted in Europe from Allied bombers. The heat was so intense that the tar from the streets melted, turning the streets into molten rivers draining into shelters. Material around the firestorm would combust from extreme temperature exposure without coming in contact with the actual flames. As the fire grew larger, it consumed all the oxygen from surrounding areas, feeding the massive firestorm. Because the oxygen was being drawn out of the city, many civilians died because the burnt oxygen was being replaced by carbon monoxide.²¹⁸ Many tried to seek refuge in the city's great water reservoir but no protection was found. The air became so hot and unbreathable that those in the reservoir tried to flee but could not scale the reservoir's smooth cement walls.²¹⁹

The attacks on Dresden were so horrific it was impossible to get an exact body count on how many Germans were killed. Historian Tami Biddle thinks the body count could be as low as 10,000, but this is unlikely because that represents only the count of recognizable bodies within the eight square mile city centre.²²⁰ Dresden was overcrowded at the time of the raids and had a major refugee problem. Historian Robert Palter thinks the death toll could be as high as

150,000.²²¹ At the height of the Cold War, East German accounts put the number of dead at 35,000.²²² Sixty years after the event, given enough time to really examine the records, the best estimate is probably 60,000 noncombatants were killed during the February raids on Dresden.²²³

Once the news of Dresden spread, many on both sides of the Atlantic were outraged. The Associated Press immediately received word by a censor in the SHAEF that the United States had resorted to terror bombing. Eisenhower dismissed this claim and stated that:

A) That there had been no change in the bombing policy.

B) The USSTAF have always directed their attacks against military objectives and will continue to do so.

C) The story was erroneously passed by a censor.²²⁴

Harris was less concerned with British public opinion. When asked why Dresden was targeted so severely, Harris replied, “Actually Dresden was a mass of munitions works, an intact government centre and key transportation centre to the East. It is now none of these things.”²²⁵

Operation CLARION was the codename given to the final destruction of German transportation lines, but, in reality, CLARION was largely aimed at breaking civilian morale and showing the Germans there was no chance of winning.²²⁶ Many in the USSTAF opposed this plan, for it was nothing more than destroying a defeated enemy. General Doolittle warned against this for fear of retaliation against American POWs. General Eaker opposed it by saying it will convince the Germans, “We are the barbarians they say we are, for it would be perfectly obvious of them that is a primarily large scale attack on civilians, as, in fact, it of course will be.”²²⁷ General Spaatz was hesitant about the attacks as well, but Chief of Staff George C.

Marshall wanted the attacks done and Eisenhower gave the approval to proceed with CLARION on February 22, 1945.²²⁸

One day after CLARION was approved, the Allies bombed the small city of Pforzheim, creating another firestorm. Pforzheim had no real war making industry. The main production of the city was jewelry and clock producing material.²²⁹ On the night of February 23, 1,151 tons of bombs hit the city creating one of the hottest firestorm of the war. Because Pforzheim was so small and by the beginning of 1945, the RAF had firebombing down to a science, the bombers could carry out the attack in laboratory like conditions.²³⁰ The bombardment lasted twenty-two minutes, producing a firestorm with typhoon-like winds. Because the attack was concentrated on such a small area, the temperature of the blaze reached an unbelievable 3,100 degrees Fahrenheit, roughly the temperature required to melt titanium.²³¹ The blaze burned so much oxygen, survivors recalled feeling air being pulled from their lungs. The damage was beyond catastrophic: 20,277 dead, roughly one out of every three people living in Pforzheim.²³²

On March 12, the port town of Swinemunde was hit by the Allies. What is so significant about the raid on Swinemunde is that most of the inhabitants there were refugees from East and West Prussia.²³³ 1,100 aircraft bombed the town, killing 23,000 people. During the body cleanup, not a single soldier was found among the dead bodies, they were all women, children, and a few old men. The 8th Air Force had no knowledge the inhabitants were mostly refugees and the attack was never referred to as a tragedy or massacre. In fact, the U.S. Air Force listed the attack as nothing more than a transportation raid on enemy marshalling yards.²³⁴

On March 16, Wurzburg, a city with no military importance was targeted by 225 Lancaster bombers dropping 397,650 incendiary and 256 high explosive bombs on a city with no

defensive capability.²³⁵ A firestorm erupted and 90% of the city was engulfed in one giant flame in only seventeen minutes. There were no bunkers, only seventeenth century fortifications that had been used during religious wars. The city was destroyed, killing 5,000 of its residents. Ironically, less than three weeks later, a unit of 3,500 German soldiers took up a garrison in the ruins putting up a stiff resistance against the U.S. 7th army. Thanks to the large amount of debris caused by the bombers a bitter six-day urban conflict erupted throughout the ruins.²³⁶

Hildesheim, a German city with a history that extended back to 815, was also demolished during CLARION. The city had been hit strategically earlier with great success to knock out the city's transportation depot. However, on March 22, Bomber Command hit the remaining rubble with 446 tons of bombs, liquidating the remainder of the city in only eighteen minutes.²³⁷ Eight-five percent of the historic buildings were destroyed, and 1,736 civilians were killed in the single raid alone. The death toll would have been far more extensive, but a 12,000 pound tall boy that hit the city's hospital did not detonate on impact and was dismantled before it could explode.²³⁸ The city was so badly destroyed that most of the historic buildings were not rebuilt until the 1980s.

Throughout March, other cities were indiscriminately hit by the Allied bombers. In east central Germany, Chemnitz was hit on March 5 by 720 planes carrying over 1,000 tons of bombs. One-third of the city area was burned down. Two days later on March 7, 84% of Dessau, including the old Royal Residence, was destroyed. On March 31, 1,100 tons of bombs were dropped on Halle, destroying one-fifth of the remaining houses.²³⁹ City by city, the Allies were determined to break the will of the German people by destroying their cities. Given the

extent of the damage taken by the civilian population, it is remarkable that the German war machine was able to continue for as long as it did.

As Bomber Command continued its search for more undestroyed cities, it was coming painfully clear to the Germans that they could not win the war. However, they refused to surrender and were fighting fanatically even as the Allies were advancing on both sides. On April 5, Harris complained that, “It was already extremely difficult to find suitable targets.”²⁴⁰ Two days later, the U.S First Army had reached the Weser River. To scare the populations in the area, German propaganda told civilians that all males between the ages of 14 and 65 were to be locked up in camps guarded by Jews and Negroes. All women would be taken to Negro brothels. This probably would have been preferred by the civilians of Nordhausen, who instead were hit by Allied bombers in early April, killing 6,000; 1,300 of whom were concentration camp prisoners.²⁴¹

On April 8, 1945, one of the last bombing operations of the war took place in Halberstadt. The Allies had been bombing the train station on the outskirts of the town since January, but by April, much of the city was destroyed, and many refugees were living in bombed out areas in the city. 65,000 people were in Halberstadt, 5,000 of whom were hospitalized in military hospitals.²⁴² Many in the German military wrote, “We will never surrender,” on the walls of the city, knowing the American land forces were only forty miles away. However, the American bombers came in destroying 50% of the structures of the city, including a munitions train that exploded with so much intensity that it left a 120 acre crater outside the city. Three quarters of the city was destroyed along with somewhere between 1,800 and 3,000 inhabitants.

The exact number of dead is hard to determine because those persons near the munitions train were disintegrated when it exploded.²⁴³

The Allied bombing campaign ended shortly after the last raid on Halberstadt. The Germans had fought fanatically until the bitter end when Russian troops were meters away from the Fuhrer bunker in Berlin. The bombing campaign has raised issues concerning the moral implications of the Allies' actions during World War II. The strategic bombing of Germany was supposed to break civilian morale and end the war quickly. Instead, it caused billions of dollars in damage to German cities and killed 600,000 Germans, mostly civilians, without really breaking the morale of the populace. Historian A.C. Grayling in his book, *Among the Dead Cities* questions whether or not the bombings should be considered a crime. Ironically, the last raid on Nuremburg in March of 1945 was codenamed, "Grayling", and after the war the Allies decided that the war crime trials were to be held in Nuremburg, which they referred to as being, "among the dead cities."²⁴⁴

While some of the strategic bombing targets were morally justified, especially those in preparation for D-Day and oil attacks, many were not. Most of the attacks that Grayling and other authors consider to be immoral were the bombings that took place in the last eight months of the war. It is important to note that as the tonnage of bombs dropped by the Allies increased in 1943 and 1944, so did German war production in virtually every category identified as a target by Bomber Command.²⁴⁵ It was only in the last few months of the war when the bombing campaign intensified that the German economy finally began slowing down. The majority of bombs that were dropped on Germany during the war fell in this time frame, yet the targets were mostly civilian. The 1943 attacks on Hamburg are almost justifiable in the fact that an Allied

victory was far from secured and Hamburg was a legitimate military target. However, given the circumstances of the war and the brutality of the Nazis, extreme measures are sometimes necessary to defeat a greater evil. Hitler did not condemn the Luftwaffe bombings of civilian cities; in fact, given the proper equipment and material, Hitler would have easily approved a firebombing of New York or London if he thought it would help the German war effort.

The strategic bombings are not considered a war crime because during World War II there were no set laws for conducting aerial warfare on civilian populations. The 1949 Geneva conventions protect civilians from this type of warfare, but these laws came four years too late. While the RAF's firebombing techniques may have been extreme and immoral, they were not illegal from an international standpoint. During the Nuremberg trials, the Holocaust overshadowed any wrong doing from the allies, even the rape and pillage from the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front was widely ignored. The trials were nothing more than victor's justice against a humiliated and defeated enemy. Had the Allies lost the war, then the Allies would have no doubt been convicted of war crimes by German prosecutors for bombing civilians. However, the Allies won the war, and because it is the victors who write the history, Westerners tend to look at World War II through the eyes of the winners, not the losers.

CHAPTER 4

GERMANS AS VICTIMS?

In Europe, World War II ended on May 8th, 1945. General Jodl signed the unconditional surrender of Germany and was allowed to speak. “With this signature, the German people and the German Armed Forces are, for better or worse, delivered into the hands of the victors...In this hour I only express the hope that the victors will treat them with generosity.”²⁴⁶ The speech fell on deaf ears. The destruction that Nazi Germany had inflicted upon the world was unprecedented. The civilians killed in Warsaw, in the Rotterdam raids, in the Battle of Britain, in the Soviet Union, and the Holocaust showed the Western nations that Germany had no regard for human life. On the Eastern Front, German occupiers killed as many as twenty million civilians as a result of their occupation of Poland and the Soviet Union.²⁴⁷ As the tides of war turned against the Nazis, it was the German civilians who now had to deal with the cruel realities created by modern war and by their political leaders.

Few nations have ever had to experience the humiliation and extreme defeat presented by “unconditional surrender”. Although the Confederate States of America, Japan, and Italy had to face this harsh reality, Germany probably suffered the greatest. Never before had a nation’s infrastructure been as badly destroyed as that of Germany during World War II. Immediately following the war, Germans faced a series of crises. They had to deal with foreign occupation, war guilt, ethnic German expulsion from the East, division into East and West, and rebuilding the nation. As a result, the notion of German civilian deaths was pushed to the background. The topic of Germans as victims of the war gained recognition in the historical community only in the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany. On the

50th anniversary of the war's end, Germany held commemorations that both condemned Nazism and condoned, the idea of "Germans as victims of the war and regime."²⁴⁸ It was only when Germany was reunited as one nation that the process of understanding and interpreting what happened during World War II could finally come to pass.

Immediately following the war, Germans had to deal with the harsh realities of defeat. Five million German men in uniform were killed during the war, or as a result of being sent to the Soviet Union as POWs. Fifteen million Germans were expelled from Eastern Europe, while one million died in the process of migrating back to Germany. At least one million German women, if not more, were raped by the Soviet forces.²⁴⁹ The bombing campaign left 600,000 civilians dead and 7.5 million homeless. 3.6 million personal dwellings were destroyed and 131 towns in Germany had been hit by Allied bombs.²⁵⁰ The Allies destroyed at least 600 acres in 21 different cities, roughly the same amount of damage the Luftwaffe caused in London alone. In cities like Hamburg and Berlin, over 6,000 acres of the cities were destroyed.²⁵¹ Not only did the Third Reich cease to exist, but Germany ceased to exist as a nation state. The German economy was destroyed, there was no government at any level, all military personnel were prisoners of war in their own land, and the millions of civilians in towns and villages were completely and utterly dependent on their former enemies for food, fuel, shelter, law, and order.²⁵²

The issue of German suffering and Germans as victims of the war is thought to be a recent topic; however, Germans themselves have always been fully aware of the cruelty they suffered at the hands of Allied bombers. Historian Mary Nolan suggests that Germans, in private, have questioned the morality of Allied attacks and Nazi crimes for decades.²⁵³ In the West, the victims of World War II were considered to be Jews or other targets of Nazi brutality.

There was immense pressure from the Jewish communities in major Western cities to put all emphasis on Germans to take responsibility for their actions. Cases of German suffering were largely ignored because the Holocaust was still fresh in everyone's memories.²⁵⁴ Nolan believes that the issue of German suffering must be viewed through the lens of the Cold War, and it was the struggle between communism and democracy that shaped the idea of Germans being victims of the air war, especially in East Germany.

After World War II ended, Dresden fell within the Soviet Union's occupation zone. On February 13, 1946, the one-year anniversary of the bombing of Dresden, the mayor of the city, Walter Weidauer, placed the bombing in a narrative of fascism and antifascism. He said the bombing of Dresden was avoidable, the suffering meaningless, and that Germany should be held responsible for the war because too few Germans had resisted Hitler. Three years later, as the Cold War intensified and the GDR had been established, the same mayor blamed the British and Americans for terror bombing the city, which had no military justification and took place when Germany was heading toward defeat. On the five-year anniversary, a pro-communist flyer was handed out declaring that the imperialists of the United States knew the city would fall into the hands of the Soviet Union. It said the Americans turned the city into a heap of rubble to show the Soviet Union the destructive capability of the American military. Nolan writes that it was on this anniversary that the East German government considered Dresden a "Victim" of an anti-Soviet campaign conducted by the Americans. By the tenth anniversary, the attack was officially declared a war crime.²⁵⁵ So in East Germany, the notion that Germans were, in fact, victims of the air war was always present but hidden behind the Iron Curtain.

While the Soviets put pressure on the citizens of East Germany to remember the bombing campaign as a criminal act, the Americans put pressure on West Germany to remember the atrocities committed by the Red Army as they raped and pillaged their way to Berlin. It was becoming apparent that Germany was on the front lines of the Cold War. The Western powers began to accept West Germany as a valued ally and focused their attention on Soviet crimes against their own population, against Central Europe, and against the German Army at the end of the war when many were sent to prison camps in Siberia. The Americans reinforced the notion that the Soviet crimes of World War II were reminders of German humiliation and suffering. Nolan writes that the Western Allies took the focus off the Allied bombing war and put in on Russian barbarism.²⁵⁶

Nolan believes that public silence about the bombing campaign can be attributed to the extraordinary trauma experienced during area bombings. She believes that postwar Germans, numb and unable to mourn, preferred to look forward, not back, devoting all their focus to the reconstruction of their shattered nation. Germans more willing to acknowledge the magnitude of Germany's war time actions regarded the aerial bombardments as payback -- unpleasant, but inevitable and not to be dwelt on.²⁵⁷ Nolan believes that it was easier for Germans to *not* want to know about it and preferred to go on about their lives and continue to focus on the future of Germany.²⁵⁸

Historian Thomas Childers writes that the air war and the notion of German suffering is a taboo subject to many in Germany, similar to a "shameful family secret".²⁵⁹ Childers writes in his article, *Facilis descensus averni est*, that amateur war historians have been writing about the issue of German suffering for years, but these were outsider interpretations. During the

economic miracle of the 1950s, Germany was thought by observers to be a place of well being, but on the contrary, Germany experienced much suffering during the 50s due to the severe destruction of its cities and infrastructure. The only thing that kept Germans going was the realization that they were suffering together.²⁶⁰ Childers also notes that the bombing of German cities was, sadly, not the most destructive act of the war by any means. The losses suffered by German civilians amounted roughly 5% of their prewar population. When compared to Poland who lost most of its Jewish population, or the twenty-two million Soviets on the Eastern Front who perished, the issue of German suffering takes on a different perspective. The German infrastructure was destroyed, but cities all over Eastern Europe suffered a similar fate, not by bombers but by ground fire.²⁶¹

Childers' makes interesting points about air war doctrine before and during the war. He makes the point to define the object of strategic bombing. Officially, the objective was, "destroying the capacity of the enemy to make war."²⁶² The Allies knew this and so did the Germans. During the Battle of Britain, Hitler, at a dinner at the Reich's Chancellery in 1940 made the statement, "Goering wants to use incendiary bombs of an altogether new type to create sources of fire in all parts of London. Fires everywhere. Thousands of them. Then they'll unite in one gigantic area conflagration. Goering has the right idea. Explosive bombs don't work, but it can be done with incendiary bombs-total destruction of London."²⁶³ Of course, the Luftwaffe did not have the capability or the resources to conduct such devastating attacks, but if they had, it is safe to assume they probably would have firebombed London to the ground, along with other heavily populated cities. That is the doctrine of strategic bombing. Just because the Allies did have the capability of doing so and the Germans did not, doesn't make the Allies war criminals for firebombing German cities nor render Germans innocent victims. As the war progressed,

Germany refused to surrender and the Allies had to bomb more indiscriminately in order to destroy Germany's economy and to ensure a victory. The Allied military forces were not there to make friends; they were there to fight a war, a war Germany started.

Childers closes his article by saying that Germans are not victims of the war, only of their regime. He believes that the Allies did not pursue a policy of annihilation against the Germans. The air war and strategic bombing was a new experience for everyone involved, from the pre-war theorists, to the bomber crews, to those hiding from the bombs; it was a new dimension of war. There were no guidelines for the planners and no preparations for the bombed. No one on the ground or in the bombers was prepared for what air war meant. Strategic bombing involved attacking military targets, most of these targets lay in cities, and these cities were heavily populated. Civilians lived in these cities and planners and bombers knew that civilians would become casualties. In Childers' opinion, strategic bombing, more than any other form of combat, captures the horrors, complexity, and moral ambiguity of modern warfare.²⁶⁴

Robert Moeller, a historian from the University of California, Irvine, has written several articles that deal with the issue of German suffering and Germans as victims. In one of his articles, *Germans as Victims? Thoughts on a post-Cold War history of World War II legacies*, Moeller makes similar points as Childers. Moeller uses the same quote as Childers to describe the German air war as a, "shameful family secret".²⁶⁵ He too, like Nolan, views the problem of remembrance through the politics of the Cold War. Dresden, immediately following the war, was a symbol of British and American imperialism. The official Soviet version was that the civilians of Dresden fell victim to the Western weapons of mass destruction.²⁶⁶ The Soviet Union declared itself the great liberator of Germany, blaming the Western allies for the East German's

misfortunes. However, in private discussions around the dinner table, most survivors in East Germany passed on stories to their kids about Soviet atrocities. This did not mesh with the framework of the Red Army being the great liberators.²⁶⁷ In West Germany, remembrance of the air war and the Nazi regime was heavily influenced by the Cold War. By the 1950s, West Germany's main priority was to rebuild and forget about their past. Instead of alienating the West Germans, the Western Allies were quick to agree that it was Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party who were responsible for the destruction throughout Europe, not the German army and certainly not the German civilians. The goal for the Western Powers was to rebuild and forget so they could all concentrate on the new enemy, the Soviet Union.²⁶⁸ Moeller, like Childers, is convinced that in the GDR, the idea was not to forget but to remind the citizens of Western atrocities to stir hatred toward the Western Allies and democracy. However, in the FRG, the goal was to forget the past and focus on the present. The Allies wanted West Germany to be rebuilt, restructured, and reinforced with democratic ideas because the Western allies realized the importance that West Germany was going to have during the Cold War.

On the History of man-made destruction: Loss, Death, Memory, and Germany in the Bombing War is another article by Robert Moeller concerning remembrance and victimization in West Germany. This article reinforces what Moeller argued in "Germans as Victims", which is that the Cold War presented new challenges faced by West Germany to come to terms with the air war and its Nazi past. The point of Moeller's article is to pinpoint exactly when Germans stopped becoming the perpetrators of the Holocaust and became the victims of the Allied bombing campaign. He explains that this was a gradual process. During the 1950s and into the 1960s, the German civilians who experienced the bombing campaign first hand tried to forget

their Nazi past, rebuild their country, and look to the future. During the economic miracle in Germany during the 1950s, this idea seemed like it worked.

During the late 1960s and the 1970s, the radical German youth, who were too young to remember the air war or any direct Nazi experiences broke the silence of Germany's dark past. In West Germany, tales of the air war were confined to private settings, as the "68ers" made public acknowledgement that their parents were, in one way or another, willing participants in the National Socialist regime.²⁶⁹ Just like the American generation of the late 1960s, the German youth rebelled against their parents and wanted change. They blamed their parents for doing nothing to stop the Third Reich from committing unspeakable acts and criticized their parents' behavior after the war for wanting to rebuild their nation and forget the past. The destruction caused by the air war and the German loss of life was the price that had to be paid for the atrocities of National Socialism.²⁷⁰ This generation made no mention of moral suffering of their parents, for that would be seen as an apologia of a sort.

West and East Germany were unified in 1990 after almost 45 years of separation. Moeller believes that this was the third and most important phase of German remembrance because it was only after Germany could be one again that the wounds of World War II could be healed. As one German newspaper wrote following the collapse of the Soviet Union, "Only now is the war over".²⁷¹ Not only Germany, but all countries behind the Iron Curtain, could now come to terms with everything from the Holocaust to Soviet oppression. Since 1990, the Holocaust has remained the center point in Germany's focus on remembrance as both East and West Germans began building monuments and memorials dedicated to the Jews who lost their lives during World War II.²⁷² However, as a unified Germany began to come to terms with its

past, Moeller believes that one man began shifting the German mentality of victimization, a former 68er named Jorg Friedrich.

Friedrich's book, *Der Brand* (The Fire), was released in Germany in 2002. Moeller believes this book sparked interest in the air war in Germany again. The book recounts in painful detail the horrors that German civilians experienced during the bombing raids. The book was a huge success in Germany, and was later translated in to English in 2006. In the fifth chapter of the book, Friedrich has a segment entitled, "Bombing victims".²⁷³ Many believe that Friedrich is responsible for breaking the taboo that Germans have kept silent about for decades, which is that Germans are victims, not of their regime, but of war crimes.²⁷⁴ Following *Der Brand*, a documentary was aired in Germany that showed the destruction of Germany created by the bombing campaign and the air war became a hot topic in the historical community. Moeller insists that Friedrich did not break the taboo of the air war in Germany. He believes that people have had knowledge of the devastation and unfairness that the air war created. The taboo for Friedrich was not one of speaking; rather, it was one of listening.²⁷⁵ Once people began listening and understanding what German civilians endured under the bombs, many started questioning the difference between the victims of Germans and the German victims. Moeller is critical of Friedrich, however, especially Friedrich's comparison of the bomber squadrons to the Einsatzgruppen (German death squads on the Eastern Front).²⁷⁶ He also criticizes Friedrich for only telling one side of the story, the story of German suffering from allied bombers. He also notes that there is too much involved with the bombing campaign for a lone historian to make the assessments that Friedrich made against the Allies.²⁷⁷

Omer Bartov, a European historian of Jewish ancestry, is a historian at Rutgers University. He writes that Germans cannot be viewed through the same lens as Holocaust survivors in using the term victim. Bartov raises an interesting point in that both the Germans and the Holocaust survivors tend to present themselves as victims.²⁷⁸ The distinguishing factor in victimization is that the Germans were either neutral or willing participants in Hitler's regime. If they had been outwardly opposed, they might have been killed for speaking out against their government. In the case of Jews, they were singled out and exterminated no matter what their beliefs were. Allied bombers bombed indiscriminately, with no intent on exterminating the German race. As far as victimization, Germans tend to believe that they had little in common with Jewish suffering at the end of the war, but they naturally felt their own suffering very keenly.²⁷⁹

Many historians believe that the East Germans suffered far greater than those in the West, the logic being that the government established after World War II was nothing more than replacing one dictatorial regime with another, Nazism and Hitler with Communism and Stalin. Thus, East Germans were victims of the Nazi regime and of the Soviet regime. Bartov disagrees with this concept. While violence was important to both regimes, the Soviets never had a task of the total annihilation of a particular group like the Nazi attempt at Jewish genocide.²⁸⁰ There was never any instance that the Soviets during, before, or after World War II ever engaged in industrialized killing. The Soviets viewed extermination as means to a goal, unlike the Nazis who viewed it as the goal itself.²⁸¹ So while things in West Germany were better for the average German, Eastern Germans still cannot be considered any more of a victim than a West German during the Cold War years.

There are those historians who do not believe that Germans can be defined as victims of the air war or of the Nazi regime. However, as more research is conducted, many historians are beginning to sympathize with the German civilians who endured the aerial bombings and Soviet atrocities committed during the Second World War. With the Cold War finally over, all dimensions of World War II are being analyzed more and more, especially the issue of Germans as victims. As Moeller noted, the topic of the air war over Germany has gained notoriety after Friedrich's publication of *Der Brand* in 2002, and it was Friedrich's opinions that have helped fuel the controversy of strategic bombing and the issue of German suffering during and after World War II.

Jorg Friedrich was born in Germany on August 17, 1944, right as the bombing campaign was intensifying. Friedrich is a historian, having written several books on World War II, especially the cruelty of the air war and the unfair treatment of Germans after the war. Friedrich acknowledges that his book, *Der Brand*, is biased, and so is he.²⁸² Friedrich thinks that the American and British readers of his book already have their own opinions of World War II and the German people, so a Western perspective will differ from a German reader's perspective. Because the Anglo-American forces won the war, most British and Americans view the air war as a necessity to destroy the evil Nazi regime that systematically murdered millions of Jews and spread oppression across Europe.

Friedrich makes numerous valid points about German victimization. His book doesn't go into World War II politics, Nazi brutality, or Cold War enemies, instead, he writes a 500-page book on how horrible and destructive the bombings in Germany were. He writes about the senseless murder of German civilians and the destruction of irreplaceable buildings, monuments,

cathedrals, etc. that were destroyed by allied bombs. The target audience is obviously German readers.²⁸³ Because American and British authors have been writing hundreds of books that are concentrated on Allied themes in multiple theatres of war, Friedrich wanted to add another theme to the list, the German civilians who lived under the bombs. The feel of *Der Brand* is harshly critical of the Anglo-American conduct of the air war, especially the RAF's involvement.

Friedrich condones Allied involvement in Germany after the war's end, when many Germans were prosecuted as war criminals during the Nuremberg trials. The Allies never convicted any German officer for the blitz against London or V-1 or V-2 attacks, which all totaled killed 43,000 British civilians. Had the Allies made any conviction on these attacks, the Allies would have appeared hypocrites, which is why they convicted those in the German air forces of other crimes that would favor the Allied conduct of strategic bombing.²⁸⁴ Friedrich has brought up the fact that many Wehrmacht generals who were charged with killing civilians defended themselves by saying it was necessary, and so was the death of German civilians because it was a legitimate means to wage total war. In total war, the battle is waged on all fronts and civilian populations cannot be spared, and in any case those generals felt as they had done nothing different from the Allies during the war. They were not critical of the Allied strategic bombing campaign, for they knew consequences of waging total war and knew the repercussions for their actions.²⁸⁵

Historian Michael Bess questions the case of Germans as victims in the bombing war during World War II. He says the bombing campaign is a double edged sword and must be viewed from both sides, Allied and German. He asks, "If killing hundreds of thousands of noncombatants played a key role in securing Allied victory, did this taint the victory with an

indelible stain of innocent blood?”²⁸⁶ When viewing the air war from an Allied perspective, three factors must be taken into account. The first is that the Allies were engaged in a desperate war in which their very survival was at stake. Second, the enemy was using barbaric forms of warfare, and if the Allies had not adopted the enemy’s methods then they might not have prevailed. Last, the technology was growing and developing swiftly and in all out warfare, if a weapon exists that will save lives on your own side and hasten the demise of the enemy, you will most likely use it.²⁸⁷

Strategic bombing, from Bess’ point of view, played a crucial part in securing an Allied victory. He also believes that many of the Anglo-American bombing practices can be justified by the importance of the targets being destroyed.²⁸⁸ To say that all forms of strategic bombing are morally wrong is to lose sight of the reality of total war. He says that trying to imagine World War II without strategic bombing reveals just how crucial a part this campaign played in an overall Allied victory. Without the air war, the Germans could have relocated valuable war assets from the air defense to the Eastern Front. Just as importantly, the Allied victory could never have been secured without the air war as a second front and the superiority of the skies over Europe.²⁸⁹

From a German perspective, Bess concludes, there was no excuse at the war’s end for the large scale area bombing and firebombing of the cities; they were atrocities pure and simple. They were atrocities because the Anglo-Americans could have won the war without resorting to them. By mid-1944, the Allies had the technology and knowledge to conduct a different kind of aerial warfare: far more precise, measured, and controlled. Instead, the Allies chose to bake and boil tens of thousands of noncombatants at a time on an ever escalating scale.²⁹⁰ No amount of

collateral damage can obscure the fact that the bombings and firebombing of German cities amounted to little more than indiscriminate butchery – a form of warfare in which the military benefit of the operation was outweighed by the colossal human cost.²⁹¹ So from Bess' perspective, the Germans were victims of Allied atrocities only because the firebombing of German cities after mid-1944 were avoidable acts of mass murder. Prior to the summer of 1944, the outcome of the war was uncertain and some acts of the bombing campaign could be noted as necessity.

Historian Michael Geyer writes in his article, "*The Place of the Second World War in German Memory and History*", that Germans are not only victims of the Second World War, but victims of the 20th century. The issue of German suffering and death has become Germany's signature. He says for the first time since World War I, a generation in Germany is growing up that has confronted the experience of wholesale death only indirectly-precisely through history.²⁹² This cannot be said of any generation born in German from 1900-1989, although the latter generation experience war trauma indirectly, through their parents or grandparents.

Geyer believes that German society has repeatedly gone through the death zone, from the battlefields and blockades of World War I to the battlefields and bombings of World War II and lastly through surviving the threat of being on the front lines of the Cold War and facing the very possibility of nuclear annihilation. The problem with Germany is that its people are always going to have to accept and reflect upon the experience of mass death and suffering they experienced. The present generation is left to separate those Germans who killed and those Germans who were killed.²⁹³ Geyer compares the civilians and the killers to the biblical Cain and Abel in

which no matter what the German civilians do to kill their Nazi past, they will always be held responsible for it.²⁹⁴

Author A.C. Grayling opens his book, *Among the Dead Cities*, with a quote from a member of the U.S. State department to the British Ambassador in Washington, on 18 October, 1945, saying, “The term, ‘war crimes’...includes...murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population before or during the war.”²⁹⁵ Given the definition of a war crime by the U.S. State Department, this means that the strategic bombing of Germany was a war crime. This also leaves the German civilian population a victim of war crimes committed by the United States and Great Britain.

Grayling, like Bess, believes that not all strategic bombings during World War II were criminal acts. He too believes that some of the raids conducted prior to mid-1944 were justified by their military significance. Bombing of oil targets, V-weapon launch sites, railway lines, U-Boat pens all killed people but they were necessary casualties of war.²⁹⁶ However, it cannot be said that dropping thousands of tons of explosives remorselessly on civilian targets is a side effect of war, especially when victory is clearly at hand.²⁹⁷

Grayling makes an interesting comparison on moral implications of strategic bombing and victimization during war. Pearl Harbor, for example, was a preemptive military strike on the United States during World War II. While it was a military strike, many civilians were killed as a direct result of the attack, yet nobody considers them “victims” because it was a legitimate military strike. However, on September 11, 2001, when terrorists flew planes into the Twin Towers, this constituted a deliberate terrorist attack on a civilian population with no military justifications.²⁹⁸ After 9/11, the dead and wounded are considered by many to be victims because

they were unwilling participants in a deliberate civilian attack. They suffered only because they were in the Twin Towers in the United States on the morning of September 11.²⁹⁹ Grayling asks how the attacks on Hamburg differed from those on September 11, 2001. They were both aimed at civilian populations with the center piece being to inflict the maximum hurt, shock, disruption, and terror. He believes that whether or not these attacks are in the midst of war or not, they are both moral atrocities.³⁰⁰ While Grayling admits that this is not the best comparison, it still raises valid arguments. Why are the casualties of 9/11 considered victims and those of Hamburg and other destroyed civilian cities not? Grayling believes that we as the victors of World War II do not pretend to have clean hands ourselves, instead we claim that our hands are far cleaner than those of the people who plunged the world into war and carried out horrible crimes under its cover, and it is that explanation, not excuse, that we allow our own hands to get dirty.³⁰¹

The question of whether Germans can be considered victims is one of the most problematic questions involving the strategic bombing of Germany. There seems to be a divide in the historic community, with some saying yes, while others say no. No matter how hard they try, Germans will never be able to lose their Nazi past. There is no amount of reparations to pay, monuments to build, and cities to rebuild that can hide what Nazi Germany unleashed on the world. Many view the bombing campaign as a necessity of winning the war, while others view it as an aerial holocaust against the German people whose only crime was living in Germany under a brutal dictatorship. So, were Germans victims of the air war? Or just of their regime? Or are Germans victims of the failed Weimar Republic established by the West, which ultimately led to the Nazi Party rise to power? Maybe one day Germans can be viewed as victims of the war, in the same sense Holocaust survivors are, but maybe Hans Frank was right. Before he was hanged

at Nuremburg, he said, “A thousand years will pass and the guilt of Germany will not be erased.”³⁰²

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The bombing campaign had been debated by historians, philosophers, and scholars since World War II ended over sixty years ago. There have been hundreds, if not thousands, of books written about World War II in the past several decades; this is because World War II was the most important event of the 20th century and one of the most important events in human history. There are multiple dimensions of the war, but one of the most highly debated areas of the war remains the strategic bombing campaign. I chose to research the bombing of Germany because there are so many different opinions by historians questioning the effectiveness, morality and German victimization, that in order to form an accurate analysis, a historiography must be done to try to absorb all the information and make a fair assessment.

The effectiveness of the bombing campaign is most apparent. It is safe to assume that without the bombing campaign, victory would have been impossible or extremely difficult. Prewar planners and theorist believed that aerial bombing would effectively shut down war production and destroy valuable military targets. This was not exactly true. Although the bombing of German cities damaged war production and slowed down the German war machine, it failed to bring the German economy to a halt. The fact that German production remained high until 1944 showed that it takes indiscriminate round the clock bombing of cities to slow the German economy down enough to begin to see results, even then, production never came to complete standstill.

The bombing of German cities was highly ineffective in breaking German morale as well. This part backfired as Germans became more and more enraged and fought harder to repair their

factories and industry in the face of Allied attacks. This was a lesson that should have been learned by the Allies, especially the British, during the Battle of Britain. The Germans remained very defiant until the bitter end because they knew they faced Allied occupation if they gave in to the unconditional surrender that was demanded by the Allies. They knew that the Allies were trying to break their will to fight which is what fueled their anger and their will to resist more, even as the attacks intensified.

Although the strategic bombing doctrine did not live up to its prewar expectations, it was still a deciding factor in the Allied victory in Europe. The German army was forced to divert much needed planes, anti-aircraft guns, and soldiers to the air war over Europe. If the Allies had not conducted the bombing campaign, these resources could have been used on the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union, which by 1942 the outcome was still in question. Because the Allies were not ready to open up a second front on the ground in Europe in 1942, they were able to open one up in the sky, which took some pressure off of the Soviet Union until the invasion of Normandy in 1944.

The morality of the bombing campaign is not as clear as the effectiveness. The intentional bombing of civilians is obviously tragic. When civilians get caught in the cross fire of warfare, bullets and bombs do not distinguish between those willing participants or those who opposed the regime. It is certainly most tragic when the casualties of the bombings were kids, who were impartial to the war and the politics of their government. However, what authors like Grayling, Friedrich, Bess, and others neglect to write about, are the horrible atrocities committed by the Nazis. Twenty million Soviets, ten million Jews and other unwanted peoples, and

hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers were killed as a result of Nazi Germany and the war it started.

Firestorms were inhumane acts of war, but strategic bombing was a new weapon of war and when a nation has a new weapon during wartime it uses it. There were no set rules to follow for strategic bombing, so the Allied commanders had to make the best decisions they could and hope the decisions they made were the right ones. If Nazi Germany had the means to conduct aerial bombings on the same scale that the Allies did, it would not have hesitated to use the bombers to wage warfare on an unimaginable scale. World War II presented cruelty and barbarity on a level never thought possible. If the United States and Britain did not use the weapons they had at their disposal, the war could have lasted longer or turned in the favor of the Axis. When confronted with evil, one must do whatever is necessary to defeat that evil and insure that it never happens again.

The question of Germans as victims is a touchy subject with no definitive answer. After reading *The Fire* it was difficult not to feel sympathy for the German civilians caught in the midst of war. As badly as I feel for the German people who withstood the bombings, I still cannot consider them “victims” of the Allied bombing campaign or Soviet reprisals. The survivors of concentration camps or atrocities on the Eastern front are victims because they were murdered for being born Jewish or Slavic. The German civilians who were bombed or experienced Soviet reprisals are casualties of war, not victims, because their fate was an outcome of a war their nation started.

The Allies did not go into the bombing campaign with the intention of systematically destroying the entire race of Germanic people. The goal established by the Allies was to destroy

the German's capability to wage war and by 1945 that goal was accomplished. While many Germans died during bombings, that was an unfortunate but understood side effect of total war. The experience of the bombed was no doubt a terrifying experience. The mass rapes committed by the Soviet Union in Germany were an awful consequence of being conquered as well. However, Hitler and his high ranking Nazis went into the war with the intention of murdering all the Jews in Europe. The majority of German people basked in the glory of their early victories and it was only after the tides of war had turned against them that their attitudes began to change.

In another sense, Germans are victims. They are victims of circumstance. The British and French forced the German government into signing the humiliating Treaty of Versailles following World War I. This led to a collapse of the German social, political, and economic structure throughout the 1920s. With the country in turmoil, the Nazis came to power and began solving the problems that plagued Germany for years. The people of Germany were vulnerable and the Nazis were able to make Germany great again. Out of sheer desperation, the people of Germany blindly followed a government that had helped them out when nobody else would. It was this obedience that would ultimately lead to disastrous consequences for the people of Germany.

As the years pass on, the way we remember past events takes on a new perspective. Perhaps one day Germans can be viewed as victims and World War II will be a reminder of the last great conflict the world has ever seen. With veterans and survivors of the air war dying off quickly, it is important to remember the sacrifices they made and the experiences they endured. Historians need to keep arguing the importance of the air war and questioning the effectiveness,

morality, and victimization. It's these arguments that keep the memories of World War II alive in hope that history won't repeat itself.

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