

## Naval War College Review

---

Volume 34  
Number 5 *September-October*

Article 19

---

1981

### "The Ethics of War," and "Humanity in Warfare"

W. Hays Parks

Barrie Paskins

Michael Dockrill

Geoffrey Best

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Parks, W. Hays; Paskins, Barrie; Dockrill, Michael; and Best, Geoffrey (1981) ""The Ethics of War," and "Humanity in Warfare"," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 34 : No. 5 , Article 19.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol34/iss5/19>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

the Russian contribution to the air war. Russia, like Germany, concentrated on the use of aircraft in close support of its army, but this did not mean that air warfare on the eastern front was only of local importance. Of the world's aircraft economies in 1939, Russia's was the largest in terms of current production, with massive plant expansion taking place in Siberia in time, as it proved, for the German invasion. By concentrating upon quantity production of a few types, at some sacrifice of quality, the Russians were able to enjoy an overwhelming numerical superiority over the *Luftwaffe* by 1943. It was the hope of hitting long-distance targets in Russia, rather than in Western Europe, that revived interest in Germany in strategic bombing; but the technical shortcomings of the chosen instrument—the Heinkel He 177—undermined every attempt to fulfill this ambition. Even before 1943 Russian resistance had forced the *Luftwaffe* to concentrate on tactical air warfare in the east, giving the Western allies a long breathing-space in which to build up and deploy large air forces without interference, and from this Overy concludes that the Western Powers benefited more from the Russians' efforts than vice versa.

The Western Powers' strategic air offensive against Germany is also put in perspective by comparison of the effects of bombing with other reasons for Germany's failure to keep pace with Allied aircraft production. Overy, who is no stranger to the history of German aircraft production, points out that poor production planning at three major firms—Messerschmitt, Junkers and Heinkel—resulted in a greater loss of output than the loss caused by bombing down to the end of 1944. The strength of the book is, in fact, Overy's masterly discussion of the economic problems of sustaining air forces in war and of hitting the right balance between quantity production of current models and diversion of resources to research

and technical innovation. Overy's comparison of the various aircraft economies shows up facism in a poor light, in that Germany made less efficient use of her human and technical resources than the United States, Britain or Russia. One word of caution here, though: Overy has used official, confidential records for Germany, but only official, published histories for the Allied powers, and it may be that as a result he has a clearer idea of the shortcomings of the Germans than of the others. Even so, the production figures of the various powers show clearly enough Germany's (and Italy's and Japan's) failure to keep pace in 1941-43, and a great increase in German (and Japanese) production came too late in the war to alter the result. The country with the worst interservice disputes was Japan, where rival research programs resulted in the navy and army producing separate radar aids to the identification of friendly aircraft and thus being unable to distinguish each other's aircraft from those of the enemy!

Truly this is a book that deserves attention from all those who wish to study, and learn from, the history of warfare.

G.C. PEDEN

University of Bristol

Paskins, Barrie, and Dockrill, Michael. *The Ethics of War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979. 332pp.

Best, Geoffrey. *Humanity in Warfare*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980. 400pp.

The two books offer alternative academic theories regarding man's conduct in warfare. Paskins and Dockrill have produced "an experiment in practical philosophy by a philosopher and historian," while Geoffrey Best, also a historian, has written a history of the law of war.

## 122 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

The former is a self-professed restatement of some parts of the so-called Just War tradition. In responding to the abstract question, "What sense does it make to think of applying moral ideas to war?", the authors have chosen to examine three issues from recent history and contemporary politics in detail: the planting of bombs by terrorists; area bombing; and nuclear deterrence.

There is an unevenness in their effort. In the section on area bombing, for example, the authors quite validly put paid to the canard that Italian Gen. Giulio Douhet (1868-1930) influenced the bombing philosophy of the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command in World War II, but curiously conclude that because Douhet's *Command of the Air* was translated in the United States toward the end of 1942 it became available to the USAAF "in time to be used as one of the theoretical justifications for the bombing of Germany." In fact, the USAAF was a little past that basic type of theoretical thinking by that time. Maj. Gen. Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., in his excellent *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler* (1972), makes it quite clear that the planning for the strategic bombing offensive against Germany preceded U.S. entry into World War II, while showing that AWPD-1—the air plan that defeated Hitler—far preceded the translation (much less the reading) of Douhet. Craven and Cate, in their official history of the USAAF in World War II, dismiss Douhet as of far less influence USAAF thinking than Billy Mitchell, while aviation historian Robin Higham is of the opinion that Douhet's writings, once translated, did little more than reinforce already-extant American thinking.

Similar discrepancies pervade the discussion. No distinction is made between strategic bombing, area bombing, and indiscriminate bombing, nor between target area bombing (area attacks of legitimate objectives) and attacks against enemy cities undertaken

solely for psychological purposes—something no nation did during World War II, but something that the authors suggest they did. Similarly, the authors decline to define their principal term—area bombing—"because definitions are impossible," simultaneously (and curiously) referring the reader to the very comprehensive discussion of the term in Webster and Franklin's *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-1945*. Their declination is equally curious given that their book was written 2 years after the nations of the world had arrived at a draft law of war treaty containing rules that define both "area" and "indiscriminate" bombing.

Similar errors mar the sections on terrorism and nuclear deterrence. *The Ethics of War* uses an interesting approach for esoteric thinking on the subject of morality and war. Unfortunately, incomplete research by the authors and what appears to be a basic discomfort with their three issues lead them to a rather simplistic and frequently inaccurate discussion of these very complex issues, limiting the value of the book.

In marked (and very pleasant) contrast to Paskins and Dockrill, Professor Geoffrey Best has taken on the difficult task of writing a history of the law of war and has come just about as close as possible to pitching a perfect game. While there is an obvious thoroughness in his research, he has been careful to prevent detail from overwhelming the reader. Indeed, he has taken an extremely complex and frequently controversial subject and produced a highly readable discourse on its development in modern times.

The author prefaces his account with a very able chapter in which he distinguishes between discussions of the theory of "Just War" (which he largely eschews) and the law of war, as well as between the law relating to when one may go to war as opposed to the law

## PROFESSIONAL READING 123

relating to the conduct of hostilities, the latter being his intended subject. He next offers some rationale for the efficacy of the law of war. He concludes the chapter with a few words to each of three groups, aware that each would approach the book from a different perspective: international lawyers, military professionals, and his fellow historians. That he felt it necessary to offer admonitions to each manifests his appreciation for the complexity of his subject.

Best writes in a controversial style that avoids the normally stilted tones associated with international law, guiding the reader along a path leading through the evolution of modern warfare, the legislative foundations of the law of war, the trials of total war, and the difficulties of the law of war in our modern world of "co-existence." He addresses all aspects of the subject, and is not reticent in identifying those parts that have worked better than others.

If *Humanity in Warfare* falls short at any point, it is in the chapter on the law of war as it relates to aerial bombardment. The subject is complex and has defied codification into agreed rules of law that will assure universal respect. The rules applied in World Wars I and II, Korea and Vietnam were based on interpretation and paraphrasing of two treaties written at the Hague in 1907, or before aerial warfare had left the cradle. New rules drafted in 1977 have not yet been adopted by any military power, small or large, and even without the "fog of war" reveal substantial weaknesses. Yet Best, in his eagerness to condemn Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, wartime leader of the RAF's Bomber Command, and fellow British historian H. Montgomery Hyde, in some measure loses his objectivity as a historian. This is particularly true in his criticism of Harris, whom he appears to wish to try by what he *believes* the law to be today and by standards of modern

bombing capabilities, rather than by the even less clear standards and equally less-accurate capabilities that existed during Harris' tenure 40 years ago. Moreover, he lays all blame at Harris' feet to the neglect of myriad factors beyond Harris' control. He would have done well to heed the admonition of another British historian, Martin Middlebrook (author of books on the aerial raids on Hamburg and Nuremberg), who wisely counseled that "The wartime actions of Bomber Command . . . should not be judged out of the context of the period."

This brief lapse should not detract from an otherwise excellent book, however. Indeed, the book's overall quality and the controversial nature of Professor Best's discussion of the strategic air offensive over Europe during World War II make *Humanity in Warfare* an excellent vehicle for academic discussion within our service schools. That is no easy accomplishment, and the author is to be commended for it.

W. HAYS PARKS

Paterson, Thomas G. *On Every Front: The Making of the Cold War*. New York: Norton, 1979. 173pp.

This is a coherent, condensed, scholarly essay that attempts to describe just how America became involved in that global effort to hold back Communist expansionism, the cold war. The author, a historian at the University of Connecticut who has specialized in the "origins" of the cold war during the years 1945-1950, provides a useful, sweeping historical portrait of the post-World War II American-Soviet bipolar power structure of international politics.

The book contains eight chapters describing the events that generated this new bipolar world, one that arose in response to the devastation of Europe and the resulting collapse of European colonial empires leaving a power