

## **ALLIED BOMBING OF GERMAN CITIES IN WW2, WAS IT WORTH THE MORAL FAILURE?**

As I was watching a well done doc on 1940 I heard Winston in his Voice for democracies, version against German air terror in 1940. I kept thinking: "Man why did not you stay on course?" It reminded me of this article in Armchair general and my itch to answer to it.

This article is biased in several ways and true in many others. Biased because by being so general that the answer cannot be but yes, of course allied air power was decisive just as allied infantry was or navy or capacity to give hot meals to the soldiers. By putting all aspects of air power into the same basket it does little credit to the very controversial aspects of air war Europe. The main and most important issue is the mass bombing of German cities.

1) Main point morally impossible to justify: the slaughter of civilians, in full knowledge, for no palatable strategic results but some form of "reaped what they sowed" revenge, unworthy of the reasons for this fight.

2) Purely military use: soundness, options and waste of manpower and industrial power.

### **THE MORAL ISSUE**

Don't tell me this was war and this has nothing to do with it, collateral damages et all. This war was first of all a war about and for ideas, democracies against Nazis. That is why so many fought, those who thought about it at least. Refer to those movie theater programs: "why we fight" and policy statements by Roosevelt, Churchill and the creation of the United Nations, the universal human rights etc.

They had already said these things:

"PROTECTION OF CIVILIAN POPULATIONS AGAINST BOMBING FROM THE AIR IN CASE OF WAR

Unanimous resolution of the League of Nations Assembly, September 30, 1938.

The Assembly,

Considering that on numerous occasions public opinion has expressed through the most authoritative channels its horror of the bombing of civilian populations;

Considering that this practice, for which there is no military necessity and which, as experience shows, only causes needless suffering, is condemned under the recognised principles of international law;

Considering further that, though this principle ought to be respected by all States and does not require further reaffirmation, it urgently needs to be made the subject of regulations specially adapted to air warfare and taking account of the lessons of experience;

Considering that the solution of this problem, which is of concern to all States, whether Members of the League of Nations or not, calls for technical investigation and thorough consideration;

Considering that the Bureau of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments is to meet in the near future and that it is for the Bureau to consider practical means of undertaking the necessary work under conditions most likely to lead to as general an agreement as possible:

I. Recognizes the following principles as a necessary basis for any subsequent regulations:

- 1) The intentional bombing of civilian populations is illegal;
- 2) Objectives aimed at from the air must be legitimate military objectives and must be identifiable;
- 3) Any attack on legitimate military objectives must be carried out in such a way that civilian populations in the neighbourhood are not bombed through negligence;

II. Also takes the opportunity to reaffirm that the use of chemical or bacterial methods in the conduct of war is contrary to international law, as recalled more particularly in the resolution of the General Commission of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments of July 23rd 1932, and the resolution of the Council of May 14th, 1938."

"Appeal of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on Aerial Bombardment of Civilian Populations, September 1, 1939

The President of the United States to the Governments of France, Germany, Italy, Poland and His Britannic Majesty, September 1, 1939

The ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centers of population during the course of the hostilities which have raged in various quarters of the earth during the past few years, which has resulted in the maiming and in the death of thousands of defenseless men, women, and children, has sickened the hearts of every civilized man and woman, and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.

If resort is had to this form of inhuman barbarism during the period of the tragic conflagration with which the world is now confronted, hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings who have no responsibility for, and who are not even remotely participating in, the hostilities which have now broken out, will lose their lives. I am therefore addressing this urgent appeal to every government which may be engaged in hostilities publicly to affirm its determination that its armed forces shall in no event, and under no circumstances, undertake the bombardment from the air of civilian populations or of unfortified cities, upon the understanding that these same rules of warfare will be scrupulously observed by all of their opponents. I request an immediate reply."

Then in 1940 the Germans bombed Rotterdam, Warsaw, later Coventry, London. Yes Hitler could and would have done worse, he was limited...by his war machine. Get in your mind Picasso's Guernica. Retaliations? To me, this kind of policy was against the war aims. Acting like those, barbarians you mean to fight (and this is valid today too) is debasing yourself to their level.

Please don't bring me the relative statistics of death. Yes overall the allies did inflict, less pain than the others did, and yes they did fight for the right reasons. But there is only one ball game of senseless horror and dancing in it even with another tune is still in the same room. Don't give medals of honor, having less than the other side is then so much better.

Did they, please act as said? No.

Now read that: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing\\_of\\_Hamburg\\_in\\_World\\_War\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing_of_Hamburg_in_World_War_II) interesting tactics! (when you read firefighters, just add ambulances to have the right picture).

Between 300000 and 600000 German civilians were killed (add occupied countries to it); maybe those were the lucky ones; think about the hundred thousands of maimed, in their mind and limbs, for life. Let us not fight about statistics: a great humanist, Mussolini had something like this about statistics: kill one, it is murder, kill ten this is a massacre, seven thousands is statistics.

Be imaginative, think of a 4 year's old little girl with dimples and blonde hair in a pony tail, with a huge smile and... Now face half burned, one leg less and what 70 more years to live, live?

Yes war is horrible, yes casualties are not avoidable, yes this unlucky girl could have been caught in a village held by the remnants of a SS company in February 1945 (3 months to go!) under a US army artillery barrage. Tough luck. What about the systematic killing of 80000 German children by terror bombing? Maybe some of them were Hitlerjungen like Gunter Grass had to be. To be cynical for half of them, well, it could have been unavoidable as the instruments of war, these bombers were so inaccurate. Yes the allies had to bomb German infrastructure, industry etc. and then yes, civilians would get killed. Yes the allies did inflict damage, far less than they thought, yes they had too.

Think that the greatest slaughter began when the war was close to an end, there was no doubt about the issue, whatever remnants of German power that was, did not matter that much.

On 14 February, 1942, Directive No. 22 was issued to Bomber Command. Bombing was to be "focused on the morale of the enemy civil population and in particular of the industrial workers." Translate: kill civilians in great enough numbers that fear of death by bombs will overcome fear of death from "defeatism" by the SS. Why? Because they knew their attacks on the industry was not doing it.

Think about:

Dresden, (air raid by UK & US: 13-14 Feb. 1945): 35 000 to 50000 dead

Berlin, (air raid by US: 3 Feb. 1945): 25 000.

Think about Clausewitz, as this war as politics (democracy, freedom, human rights?) by other means. Any dead that is useless, any large amount of dead that have no military means in war is a war crime. Sometimes the limits are blurred sometimes not.

3) Ok, was it worth it? Was it sound tactics?

If you read the (often partial, dimmed) analysis after the war and what few internal reports from the top brass during the war: the answer is NO!

Why? Because on a purely cynical, practical, military, strategic analysis, the results have to be balanced with the means used for them, the alternate use that could have been.

Airmen losses 160000 (US+UK) or equivalent of almost half total US war death? For what?

Allied personnel needed for that: 1.3 millions!!!! Dozens of thousands of planes, and mostly 4 engine big ones, those that needed the most material to build.

How many tactical planes they could have instead, together with let's say a dozen more armoured divisions. Imagine ten more armoured divisions around Caen in 44, at Bastogne?

Read (on the net for free please do it) ^ Crook, Paul (2003.). "Chapter 10 "The case against Area Bombing"". in Peter Hore. Patrick Blackett: Sailor, Scientist, and Socialist. Routledge. p. 176.

And <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dehousing>

(Ok I know many of you will freak out because in the title it says "socialists" but even these cannot always be wrong especially when not really talking about economy, even with that kind of author's name...remember the US cavalry in 1876, then it will help.) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic\\_Bombing\\_Survey\\_Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_Bombing_Survey_Europe)

Instead of senseless, costly raids in Germany in 1942 many more long range bombers could have been transferred to Coastal Command. Only by late 42 did they do it against the will of the bomber leaders.

By 43 these had already won the battle of the Atlantic. They could have done it six months earlier, saving thousands of merchant mariners. When I say that, think, we talk about a few dozen planes!

Carpet bombing: Cobra? Why not several others? And Italy and bases? And.... German training areas, deployment zones in France to force utter dispersal and great use of fuel for training. What about the Liri valley and elsewhere. Why the Luftwaffe systematic attack of RAF bases was a sound tactic in 1940 and the Allied air power not be the same in 43-44?

Mining the long Hamburg's exit to the sea and keeping doing it, attacking those flimsy minesweepers, would have rendered the port, the Uboat pens etc. just as useless or even more. The intense air interdiction (the most efficient use of air power in WW2) of post Normandy landings might have been

sustained with say a couple thousand more long range fighter bombers instead of a thousand B24. I like the B24 (a nice plane btw), Liberator? When bombing civilians it sound a bit like a Catholic priest in South America in the 16th century liberating Indians from their sins.

Only by 1943 did the German industry go to full war production (crazy Adolf did not war to alienate the workers by forcing them to work on 3 shifts! You know the socialist part of national socialist...) in 44 despite the allied effort they produced more of everything than before.Ok if you read about it, with an open mind you'll see.

On a half lighter side, think of all the cultural places that were destroyed, as I am a wargamer too, I would have liked the info on 1815 Hanoverian flags and 1866-70 Saxon flags that was lost in fire raids. (wargamers/historian article hey?)

I will honour Patton and the dead and survivors of Bedford VA, for example but not so Bomber Harris, Carl Spaatz or the 1943 version of Churchill.