

## In Defense of Strategic Bombing

by Anthony M. Fabrizio

*Mr. Fabrizio replies to Prof. Pournelle's "Indispensable for the Historian" article dealing with Luftwaffe which appeared in the Nov.-Dec, '71 issue.*

In 1946 Senator Elbert D. Thomas of Utah wrote an article which had as its basic premise the exposing of the "Hoax of Precision Bombing." In the Nov.-Dec. '71 issue of the "General," there appeared Dr. Pournelle's article on Luftwaffe in which he describes strategic bombing in World War II as a "costly failure." The Purpose of my article is one of rebuttal against Dr. Pournelle's thesis.

Dr. Pournelle's main points against the use of "strategic bombing" are: (1) The greatest myth of World War II is that strategic bombing was effective; (2) Goebbels figured U.S. attacks on civilian populations were worth several panzer divisions; (3) German war production increased from 1939 to 1944; (4) Interdiction of transport and oil nearly crippled the Reich.

The basic concept upon which the American Bomber Force of World War II was committed to action was "Daylight Precision Bombardment." Others felt that the word "Unescorted" should have been added to this concept, but the use of unescorted bombers was proven to be unfeasible after Ploesti, Schweinfurt and Regensburg. The question must be raised whether it was a direct policy of the United States Air Force to bomb cities or industries.

The RAF and GAF had learned through experience that for them daylight bombardment had proven too costly. The RAF turned to night area bombing, to which industry was to be attacked by the saturation of the area in which it was located by bombardment. As the war progressed this area bombing concept was supplemented by all effort to destroy the German will to victory by attacking cities. The Americans entering the war with youthful enthusiasm clung to the concept of precision daylight bombardment.

In 1943 after much discussion and politicking by Eaker, Arnold et al, the Americans were allowed to continue daylight bombardment. However this was coupled to the RAF effort in what was called the Combined Bombing Offensive (CBO), the purpose of which was the "progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system and the undermining of the morale of the German people."

The six prime targets of CBO were sub yards and bases, aircraft industry, ball bearings, oil, synthetic rubber and tires and military transport vehicles. The intermediate objective was an offensive against German fighter strength.

Although Americans were committed to undermining the morale of the Germans it never truly fitted into American planning to use this concept. Our variation was to dislocate morale by destroying German industry and air force. Of Course when tile weather was bad radar and blind bombing were used and Dresden did occur, but these were exceptions rather than the prime policy of precision bombardment.

Dr. Pournelle feels that the attacking of civilians added to his morale. This is true, however, if a few panzer divisions were worth the price of morale bombing, the fact remains that because of the "failure" of strategic bombing at the end of 1943, Germany and vicinity were protected by 70% of all Falk personnel (900,000 men) 75% of the total Heavy AA guns and 55% of all automatic AA guns. Granted that the war effort increased the total number of guns produced but where would 900,000 men be conjured from to defend the land frontiers of "Das Reich." I will concede to Dr. Pournelle the fact that German war production increased from 1939 to 1944.

The prime and intermediate targets of CBO must be now placed in some sort of grading:

- A. Submarine yards and bases; never truly achieved the effects that were warranted by the original optimism of the directive.
- B. Ball bearings; because of the quick dispersal of this industry following the damaging raid on Schweinfurt of Oct. 14, 1943, the project of attacking this product never made the Germans want for bearings during the war.
- C. Oil; During World War II the U.S. dropped 126,191 tons and the RAF 109,664 tons on oil targets. The small tonnage dropped on this industry came closest to the concept of complete strategic destruction of industry through the air. Since Dr. Pournelle admits oil loss nearly crippled the Reich and he should have remembered that oil was one of the prime targets of CBO.
- D. Synthetic rubber and tires; had some effect but it was "Accidental damage, to methanol and nitrogen plants proved harmful to German production of synthetic rubber and explosives."
- E. Transport; the Germans were crippled to a dog's pace by the regular bombing of this system by the strategic and tactical air forces.
- F. Aircraft Industry and German Fighter Strength; I combine these two because of the close inter-relationship between them. Did we fail to destroy the aircraft industry? Answer -YES! Because of one man Albert Speer, the bombing of the industry did at a crucial time, February, 1944, force the dispersal of that industry, the estimated production loss of 2 months was due to the bombing and dispersal. A drop in the bucket you say, "Well not really!"

By the time the industry was producing at a high level in May, 1944 one important item had been lost, experienced pilots to train recruits. Adolf Galland in April, 1944, "the day fighters have lost more than 1,000 aircraft during the last four months, among them our best officers." In this we succeeded through the operation of "Big Week," 200-600 enemy aircraft destroyed a production lag due to bombing and dispersal of two months and the killing of many air officers who were not available later to train and lead the Luftwaffe with its increase of fighter strength.

This industry in early 1944 and later oil were besides Berlin the item that depleted the Luftwaffe. These targets had to be defended. You can bury all aircraft factory underground, but

where do you put synthetic oil factories and the industry of Berlin (Erkner and Politz among others) and Hitler's pride. The Luftwaffe fought and was literally bled to death by the USSTAF. The USSBS felt that "Allied air power was decisive in the war in Western Europe." Herman Goering said in 1945 "Without the U.S. Air Force the war would still be going on elsewhere but certainly not **on** German soil."

There you have my rebuttal arguments for those young Americans (and British) who lived and died over the thin air of Europe, to defeat a scourge (Hitler) and win a "costly" success, proving that strategic bombardment was indeed decisive. Well in any case enjoy the best air war game in history and remember strategic bombardment was once decisive, it can be resurrected by your skill. BOMBS AWAY!

### **Bibliography:**

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