

THE FAILED BOMBING OFFENSIVE: A REEXAMINATION OF THE
COMBINED BOMBER OFFENSIVE IN 1943

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For decades nations have debated how to successfully employ air power. In 1943 the United States and Great Britain launched a massive strategic bombing campaign against Germany. The two sides agreed to a flawed plan due to the fundamental differences on bombing doctrine. As a result, the campaign was fraught with issues that remained largely unresolved in 1943. Without a clearly defined plan, the Allies were unable to determine which commands or targets received priority throughout the offensive. This ultimately led to a confused and unfocused campaign. High losses and inconclusive results derailed the American bombing effort. By November, the two sides agreed that the entire bombing offensive was either behind schedule or had failed entirely.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
Chapters	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE ROOTS OF FAILURE: TORCH AND THE CASABLANCA CONFERENCE	9
3. WHEN POLICY MEETS STRATEGY: THE PLANNING OF THE CBO.....	30
4. FROM LIMITED SUCCESS TO FAILURE: THE OPENING BLOWS OF THE CBO	59
5. THE INCOMPLETE OFFENSIVE: THE END OF THE 1943 BOMBING CAMPAIGN	79
6. CONCLUSIONS.....	98
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	101

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1943, the United States strategic bomber forces launched their largest aerial offensive to date.¹ With the majority of the Allied forces conducting operations in the Mediterranean Theater, strategic bombing was the only method capable of directly attacking Western Europe and the German homeland. Prior to the Combined Bomber Offensive (C.B.O.) the Allies had launched a series of ineffective raids against Axis targets.² The reason behind the failure of these earlier raids lay in a lack of heavy bombers. Nevertheless, the raids did show leaders the steps they needed to take to gain a decisive advantage. After these first few months of limited operations the Combined British and American staffs met at Casablanca in January 1943 to discuss future plans for the prosecution of the war against Germany.

One of the major topics revolved around the possibility of launching a strategic bombing offensive. The arguments between the two staffs touched upon target selection, purpose of the future operations, and bombing method. While the two staffs failed to agree on most of these issues, they did agree on a compromise that allowed the C.B.O. to take place. Known as the Casablanca Directive, this document was open to a wide range of interpretations.³ Casablanca

¹ See, Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943 volume 5 of The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Chicago, Illinois: The University Press of Chicago, 1949); Stephen McFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton, *To Command the Sky: The Battle For Air Superiority Over Germany, 1942-1944*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991); Anthony Verrier, *The Bomber Offensive: The Exciting Saga of the American and British Strategic Bomber Offensive Against Germany from 1939-1945*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1968); Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *Endeavor, Part 4 The Combined Bomber Offensive: The Role of Bomber Command volume II of The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1961).

² For the origins of the Combined Bomber Offensive, see Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943 volume 5 of The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Chicago, Illinois: The University Press of Chicago), 348-369.

³ Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 215. Biddle argues that this agreement to disagree led to the two competing strategies incorporated by the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. that hampered the Combined Bomber Offensive throughout the war.

was responsible for creating the bombing policy that led the two nations down a path towards failure during the first year of the campaign.

In the planning stage for the upcoming offensive, General Ira Eaker, commanding officer of the United States 8th Air Force, developed an operational scheme designed to carry out the multiple objectives laid out in the Casablanca Directive. His plan called for an intense build up in aircraft and air crews during the spring and summer of 1943. In the midst of the buildup, U.S. airplanes flew deeper into Germany and with more frequency. By the summer and fall of 1943 the 8th Air Force intended to launch raids against key German industrial nodes and defeat the fighters that opposed them.⁴ Faith in the Boeing B-17's offensive and defensive capabilities created the illusion of bomber superiority. American planners hoped to gain command of the air and destroy German aircraft production simultaneously. The British took a tactically safer approach, which called for the targeting of civilians through night terror raids or morale bombing. Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, commander in chief of Bomber Command, hoped to bring about the collapse of Germany from within by subjecting German civilians to the full power of strategic bombing.⁵ These opposing strategies were written into the operational plan that became known as POINTBLANK. Like the Casablanca Directive, POINTBLANK's numerous objectives allowed for a wide range of interpretation by any air force commander in the E.T.O.

⁴ For details discussing the planning and intelligence, see Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943 volume 5 of The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Chicago, Illinois: The University Press of Chicago, 1949); John F. Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog: Intelligence and Army Air Forces Operations in World War II*, (Washington, D.C.:Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996); Robert S. Ehlers Jr., *Targeting the Third Reich: Air Intelligence and the Allied Bombing Campaigns*.(Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009).

⁵ For biographies on Sir Arthur Harris, see Dudley Saward, *Bomber Harris: The Story of Sir Arthur Harris* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985); For a war time analysis of Harris, see Tami Davis Biddle, "Bombing by the Square Yard: Sir Arthur Harris at War, 1941-1945," *The International History Review* vol. 21 no. 3 (Sept. 1999).

Throughout the summer of 1943 the U.S. began building up its bomber forces according to the plan laid out by Eaker. At the same time, American bombers began to shift their focus from Axis naval bases to the German aircraft industry. Change required airplanes to fly deeper into Germany in order to reach the factories. As a result, the Luftwaffe's resistance on the ground and in the air increased significantly.⁶ Coupled with a lack of long range escort fighters the American bombing effort was put at a great disadvantage. German fighters were allowed to attack unhindered against the large bomber formations. The intense air battles that ensued resulted in high losses for both sides.

By the fall of 1943 these battles reached climactic proportions. Air raids in August and October 1943 ended decisive defeats for the Americans. The casualties sustained by the 8th Air Force forced the Americans to suspend operations in September, and again in November. By this time it became clear to several high ranking officers that the 1943 air offensive had been a failure. In fact, German production increased from 1943 to 1944 and the civilian population became reliant on the Nazi regime.⁷

The unsuccessful bombing offensive led to a shakeup of the command structure of the U.S.A.A.F. in the E.T.O. General Carl Spaatz took over all U.S.A.A.F. commands in Europe and the 8th Air Force's commander, Eaker, fired. His replacement, James H. Doolittle, worked with Spaatz and General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander Allied (Expeditionary)

⁶ Edward B. Westerman, *Flak: German Anti-Aircraft Defenses, 1914-1945*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 189. See also, Donald Caldwell and Richard Muller, *The Luftwaffe Over Germany: Defense of the Reich*, (St. Paul, MN: MBI Publishing Company, 2007), 103-106. Caldwell and Muller argue that the rapid expansion of the Luftwaffe's fighter defenses were aided by the American and British bombing of Hamburg that brought about a rapid change in air power policy within the Reich. See also, Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 316-319.

⁷ James J. Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe*, (New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), 131; Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp, and Richard Overy eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe, 1940-1945*, (New York, N.Y.: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 184-200.

Force of the North African Theater of Operations (NATOUSA), in the Mediterranean Theater during 1943. He was tasked with succeeding where Eaker failed, the destruction of the Luftwaffe. The 1944 campaign proved more successful when American bombers struck critical blows to the German fighter command and its economy in the following months.⁸

The failure of 1943 and success in 1944 has spawned multiple theories as to why the C.B.O. came up short under Eaker's supervision. The 1943 campaign is largely looked at from the perspective of 1944. However, this does not give a fair analysis as to what happened in 1943. By separating the first failed offensive against the Luftwaffe and German war economy we can see why the first year of the bombing campaign was doomed from the start. Why did the CBO completely fall apart months into operations?

One theory is that Eaker is to blame for the early failures of the CBO. Clearly, many of the high ranking officers held him responsible for the high losses and minimal results achieved early in the campaign. There is no doubt that the C.C.S. relieved Eaker from command after a year filled with questionable results. This is the first theory, that Eaker poorly managed the campaign. In *The Road to Big Week: The Struggle for Daylight Air Supremacy Over Western Europe, July 1942-February 1944*, Eric Hammel places the blame squarely on Eaker's shoulders. He states that Eaker was "somehow mired in old ways of thinking."⁹ Throughout the campaign, General Arnold's position was that Eaker and his command became stale and did not

⁸ Eric Hammel, *The Road to Big Week: The Struggle for Daylight Air Supremacy Over Western Europe, July 1942-February 1944*, (Pacifica, California: Pacifica Military History, 2009), 354-355; Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 324; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 662-663; Alfred C. Mierzejewski, *The Collapse of the German War Economy, 1944-1945: Allied Air Power and the German National Railways*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

⁹ Eric Hammel, *The Road to Big Week: The Struggle for Daylight Air Supremacy Over Western Europe, July 1942-February 1944*, (Pacifica, California: Pacifica Military History, 2009), 301; Alan J. Levin, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*. (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 117-118. While Levine does not outright blame Eaker for the 1943 failures, his praise for the changes Doolittle implemented show that the author was dissatisfied with Eaker's performance in 1943; Stephen McFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton, *To Command the Sky: The Battle For Air Superiority Over Germany, 1942-1944*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 148-149.

meet the deadlines that they had set. His stance shifted constantly throughout the whole campaign from backing Eaker to condemning him for the slow progress of the operation. A reason behind Arnold's belief in Eaker's shortcomings lay in his distance away from the fighting. Arnold was in Washington and only received reports from the two principal leaders who were in charge of U.S. strategic bomber forces operating out of England, General Jacob Devers and Eaker. This gave Arnold an unclear perception as to what was actually happening in England. The only thing Arnold was able to glean from his reports were the results of Eaker's campaign, but not why it was failing.

Another argument is that the strategic bomber forces did not have the resources to accomplish their mission.¹⁰ After the war General Curtis LeMay summed up the failure of the 1943 campaign in one word: numbers. "It was plain and simple numbers. There was no radical change in tactics or anything else. In the early days we didn't have enough airplanes to do the job."¹¹ More specifically, the 8th Air Force did not receive the number of airplanes that they requested when they planned for the C.B.O. This seems to one major line of argumentation for Eaker supporters.¹² The idea that the 8th Air Force did not receive adequate resources can be summed up in two words: escort fighters. Due to a lack of long range fighters, the 8th Air Force was incapable of accomplishing the main objectives of POINTBLANK. An author that falls into this group of historians is James Parton. He argued that Eaker was not relieved and he did not

¹⁰ Benjamin Franklin Cooling ed., *Case Studies in the Achievement of Air Superiority*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 283.

¹¹ Richard H. Kohn and Joseph P. Harahan eds, *Strategic Air Warfare: An Interview with Generals Curtis E. LeMay, Leon W. Johnson, David A. Burchinal, and Jack J. Catton*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1998), 40.

¹² Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 316-317; Donald Miller, "*Masters of the Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany*," (New York, New York: Simon and Schusters, 2006), 236-237. Miller argues that Germany and the Allies were fighting an attritional air war. He further states that Germany knew it was only a matter of time before they lost mastery of the air.

receive enough resources to accomplish his mission.¹³ As a former member of the general's staff, Parton takes the 8th Air Force point of view when it comes to his arguments on why the 1943 C.B.O. failed. He points out that Eaker did not receive the aircraft that he asked for in his pre-planning and was forced to divert resources to the Mediterranean Theater on multiple occasions. William R. Emerson argued that it was both the realization and development of the long range escort fighter that turned the tide in the air war.¹⁴ The arrival of the North American P-51 Mustang altered the balance in material quality during the war.¹⁵ It was the lack of the long range fighters and limited bombers in 1943 that led to the high losses suffered by the bomber crews.

In fact, the reason the C.B.O. failed in 1943 isn't as simple as a lack of resources, escort fighters, or Eaker blundering. These were merely symptoms of a deeper problem that the Allies themselves had created. No one knew what the C.B.O. was supposed to accomplish. Arnold saw the bomber offensive as a method capable of accomplishing a swift victory through the employment of air power. His view had emerged from the pre-war notion that air forces could now win wars all by themselves. Air power proponents such as Giulio Douhet and William "Billy" Mitchell influenced Arnold and Eaker.¹⁶ To all involved, the 1943 offensive was meant to prove these pre-war notions that air power was supreme. When the campaign did not achieve

¹³ James Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here" General Ira Eaker & the Command of the Air*. (Bethesda, Maryland: Adler & Adler Publishers Inc., 1986), 336-337. James Parton argues that had Arnold been considerate enough to let Eaker know that this promotion came about, because of his accomplishments, then Eaker would have accepted the orders and not assumed he was being relieved. However, this is pretty questionable considering the fact that the 15th Air Force, based in Italy, would be placed under Carl Spaatz's control in England. Ibid, 322-323. The author argues that as the campaign neared its end the 8th Air Force's build up was restricted by the continual transfer of airplanes to other theaters.

¹⁴ William R. Emerson, "Operation Pointblank: A Tale of Bombers and Fighters." (lecture at the annual Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, United States Air Force Academy, 1962), 27. See also, Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, and Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States, 1907-1960*, vol 1., (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, December 1989), 152-153.

¹⁵ John Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War*. (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 149-150.

¹⁶ Phillip S. Meilinger ed., *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Air Power Theory*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1997), 1-114; see also, Roger Anthony Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996); Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987).

the success that Arnold anticipated, he began to look for the roots of its failure. To him, it appeared that Eaker had not put enough pressure on the Germans or his own men.¹⁷

Like Arnold, Eaker believed he was the main air effort in the E.T.O., but realized that he was not capable of delivering the massive blows Arnold envisioned without adequate resources. One of the biggest misunderstandings of the C.B.O. was that Eaker, and others in the 8th Air Force, believed they did not need long range escort fighters. Although initially Eaker did argue that his B-17s could get the job done, he did realize later that long range fighters were a crucial piece to the puzzle. Throughout the end of 1943, Eaker sent requests to both Spaatz and Arnold for more combat crews, fighters, and bombers. Without these, he did not believe he was going to be able to accomplish the objectives in the plan he laid out that spring.

A third perspective seems to be forgotten. Carl Spaatz was in charge of all U.S. air commands in the Mediterranean.¹⁸ His job included providing air cover and support for the main British and American ground offensives in 1943. To Eaker, operations in the Mediterranean seemed to be a diversion from his main air effort. However, Spaatz, and more importantly Eisenhower, won nearly every debate over the allocation of aircraft between the 8th Air Force and the Mediterranean Theater. For ground pounders like Eisenhower, the purpose of the C.B.O. was to gain air superiority and possibly air supremacy over parts of Western Europe.

This was the greatest dilemma for U.S. air forces in the E.T.O. in 1943. What was the C.B.O. ultimately supposed to accomplish? What role was the 8th Air Force to play in the larger picture of the air war in Europe? The fact of the matter is that no one truly knew the answer to those questions. They were taken on a case by case scenario. Since none of these questions were

¹⁷ Benjamin Franklin Cooling ed., 283.

¹⁸ Richard G. Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force history, 1993).

answered at Casablanca, as they should have been, everybody planned and coordinated their own separate air strategies in their own theater of operations.¹⁹

The grand plan was no plan. By producing such a weak document at Casablanca the Allies had little or no direction in 1943. While everyone had their own expectations of what the C.B.O. was supposed to accomplish, in the end, the 1943 campaign was doomed. Casablanca, long hailed as a success by the Americans, was in fact an utter failure. The Americans did win a major tactical victory by securing daylight bombing, but in the process they created a bombing policy that guaranteed failure and inefficiency. This policy of separate and independent strategies not only created a rift between the Americans and British, but also between Eaker and Spaatz, who were commanding American air forces in two separate theaters.

This thesis is largely based on the Ira C. Eaker papers. The Eaker Papers are located at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. This thesis intends to reexamine Eaker's role in the 1943 Combined Bomber Offensive and explore the roots of its failure. An analysis of the Combined Bomber Offensive primarily from the perspective of Eaker has not been done in several decades.²⁰ The major issues that will be reviewed are the command structure of the Allied air forces, bombing policy, and air operations over Europe in 1943.

¹⁹ See Robin Neillands, *The Bomber War: The Allied Air Offensive Against Nazi Germany*, (New York: The Overlook Press, 2001), 204-227. Neillands argues that the Americans and British failed to work together successfully and that this hampered the Combined Bomber Offensive throughout the 1943 campaign. He focuses on the relationship between Bomber Command and the 8th Air Force.

²⁰ See James Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here" General Ira Eaker & the Command of the Air*. (Bethesda, Maryland: Adler & Adler Publishers Inc., 1986).

CHAPTER 2

THE ROOTS OF FAILURE: TORCH AND THE CASALBANCA CONFERENCE

In 1943, the Combined Chiefs of Staff (C.C.S.) met at Casablanca to discuss numerous strategic issues regarding the course of the wars in Europe and Asia. For generations, historians have held the conference as a victory for American air power. The U.S. preference for daylight bombing survived its greatest challenge at Casablanca, but more importantly, the overall Combined Bomber Offensive (C.B.O) suffered as a result of the decisions or indecisions made at the conference. Between the British and Americans there was little doubt amongst themselves that they needed to launch a bombing offensive against the German homeland. The British felt obligated to launch a bomber offensive as retaliation for setbacks in ground campaigns and to open up another front to support the Russians.²¹ It was the quickest way to strike Germany without committing to a ground campaign. There was one problem, however, no one at the conference could agree on how best to proceed. Lack of consensus was evident in the Casablanca Directive. The main objective was the “progressive destruction and dislocation of the German, military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened.”²² This directive placed all strategic air forces in Europe under the Combined Bomber Offensive umbrella.

How did the two sides create such a flawed document? Unlike most of the arguments that took place during the conference, code named SYMBOL, the air war debates were unique, because the issues dealt with doctrine. While target selection was important, the biggest argument between the British and Americans revolved around the daylight bombing debate. The

²¹ M.W. Kirby, *Operational Research in War and Peace: The British Experience From the 1930s to the 1970s*, (London: Imperial College Press, 2003), 142.

²² USA *The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943*, Fredrick Aandahl, William M .Franklin, and William Slany, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968), 781.

British flew at night in order to decrease casualties and strike at the morale of the German population. The Americans started their own bombing campaign, but advocated “daylight precision bombing.” This clashed with British theories about employment of air power. As a result, there had been little coordination between the R.A.F. and the U.S.A.A.F. prior to the 1943 conference.

General Henry H. Arnold, Chief of the U.S.A.A.F., was caught off guard at the Casablanca Conference by the preparation of his British counterparts. He called in General Ira C. Eaker to make the daylight pitch to Winston Churchill. In the end, the C.C.S. came to the conclusion that both air forces could adopt their own doctrines. They ordered each command to synchronize their efforts to increase the effectiveness of the raids.

While the disagreements over bombing doctrine gained more headlines, the debate over target selection had grave implications on the future of the 1943 campaign. As the two allies debated doctrine, they did agree to give the Luftwaffe more attention. In spite of this, other economic nodes were pushed forward as primary objectives. The Allies couldn’t be expected to attack all economic and military systems at one time. However, that is exactly what the Casablanca Directive told its air force leaders to do.

In the end, the Casablanca Conference served two significant purposes for the C.B.O. First, it ended the daylight bombing debate. Leading up to the conference the two sides had been trending towards implementing two separate bombing doctrines. At Casablanca, the two staffs officially put to paper the separate, but combined strategies the two sides had been operating from. It seems quite evident that discussion over bombing doctrine was not settled at this meeting, but agreed upon in the months leading up to the event. The idea that each air force should go its own separate way was already in place. Multiple circles supported this approach.

The R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. squabbled over the topic before the Americans began their campaign. Once the 8th Air Force flew its first missions, American officers disregarded the R.A.F.'s warnings and attacked German targets by day.

Secondly, the conference became the blueprint for the strategic bombing of Axis held Europe during World War II. British and American interpretations of these plans showed that little had changed in the way that both countries planned to prosecute the air war. The target priority list in the Casablanca Directive was meant more for the 8th Air Force than it was for Britain's Bomber Command, which was conducting city bombing. The two sides agreed to a loose command structure for the very reason of avoiding these issues. Neither side wanted to reignite the endless air power debate. Instead, they agreed to a flawed directive that was highly interpretive amongst the three principal air theater commanders: Carl Spaatz, Ira Eaker, and Arthur Harris.

The first disagreement that took place between the two Allies was over bombing doctrine. Both sides became entrenched in their beliefs. It was this first series of arguments that the two nations compromised on. The employment of two polarizing doctrines were instrumental in concluding the Casablanca Conference.

British night bombing developed from several factors. First, city bombing revolved partly around B.H. Liddell Hart's book, *Paris, or the Future of War*. He argued that due to the development of aircraft and more powerful bombs, air forces could land a decisive blow against an enemy's economic "nerve system" at the outset of the next war. Hart believed this nerve system was a nation's capital city.²³ This book and Douhet's *Command of the Air* ignited the belief that air power should be directed at civilian populations. Douhet believed that airpower

²³ Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 105.

could break the people's will to fight by attacking a country's vital nerve centers. These included: industry, transportation, infrastructure, communication nodes, government buildings, and the will of the people.²⁴ British ideas were born from Hugh Trenchard's assessment of Germany's reaction to strategic bombing during the Great War. According to Trenchard, constant attacks against the German population had a devastating effect on morale. He advocated that the R.A.F.'s main target should be the German populace.²⁵ The results of the blockade and limited bombing in Germany during World War I created the precedent for Britain to target German civilians as a means to break morale and avoid a direct confrontation on the battlefield.²⁶

Another proponent of area bombing was Air Chief Marshall Edgar R. Ludlow-Hewitt. He proved that Bomber Command could not achieve precision bombing during exercises conducted in the 1930s.²⁷ The R.A.F. simply did not believe that they had the capability to bomb a target from high altitude successfully. One historian argues that this was the main reason most countries in Europe did not adopt a precision bombing stance. Most nations did not believe they possessed the technical means to carry out such an ambitious strategy.²⁸ British air operations in 1941 proved these pre war assessments. Bomber Command could not bomb a specific target.²⁹

The war forced the R.A.F. to focus heavily on night bombing. Setbacks in 1940 and 1941 forced the R.A.F. to take a defensive posture. During the inter-war period, air forces faced massive budget constraints. These extended to all air forces worldwide. The R.A.F. decided to

²⁴ Phillip S. Meilinger ed., *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Air Power Theory*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1997), 11; See also, Giulio Douhet, *Command of the Air*. Translated by Dino Ferrari, (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1998).

²⁵ Tami Davis Biddle, 194.

²⁶ Roger Anthony Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 60-61.

²⁷ Stephen L. McFarland, *America's Pursuit of Precision Bombing, 1910-1945* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1995.), 80.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 81.

²⁹ Max Hastings, *Bomber Command: The Myths and Reality of the Strategic Bombing Offensive 1939-1945* (New York, New York: The Dial Press/James Wade, 1979), 39.

push forward with fighter production. By the time World War II started, Bomber Command was not prepared to launch the offensive envisioned by its advocates prior to the war. After being driven out of France, the British were left with only one method of striking back at Germany. By 1941 pressure from the Soviets forced Bomber Command to launch an offensive for which it was ill prepared.³⁰ Under Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, Bomber Command simply decided to deploy heavy bombers to force Germany to its knees through city bombing. Harris did not believe that precision bombing against industrial and military targets could be achieved.³¹ While Britain accepted poorer bombing results, Bomber Command took an approach that preserved its strength rather than waste its bombers.

The development of area bombing paralleled the rise of night bombing inside Bomber Command. Some felt that daylight bombing was not only suicidal, but also ineffective. While the British focused on morale bombing, desperation forced them to launch a night area bombing campaign for three reasons. First, the British suffered high losses during the short amount of time they spent day bombing. In one case the R.A.F. suffered fifty percent casualties after attacking Wilhelmshaven on December 18, 1939.³² Secondly night bombing was highly inaccurate. This made precision bombing unrealistic for the R.A.F. Finally, the only way to strike back at Germany was through morale bombing. Many felt it was the only way to strike at both the German workers and industry. By targeting industrial residents they felt they could kill two birds with one stone.³³ In a letter to Air Vice-Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, Harris argued that the only way to employ strategic bombing was through night attacks.

³⁰ Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 136.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² A.C. Grayling, *Among the Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the World War II Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan*, (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2006), 28.

³³ Phillip S. Meilinger, *Air War: Theory and Practice* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003.), 57.

I think everybody is agreed that the métier of the heavy bomber is night bombing, and that any idea of using them by daylight is now a ‘busted flush’, even amongst those who were not seized of this childish obvious fact before the war started. It is therefore essential that all heavy bomber armament should be oriented towards night defense...³⁴

Leading up to Casablanca, the Americans clung to their belief in daylight precision bombing. The American strategy called for high altitude bombings of military industrial targets. American bomber advocates argued that attacking Axis economic systems through strategic bombing could bring about an end to the war.

The American doctrine contradicted British night raids. They believed it was possible to attack industrial systems with precision bombing. American air strategists, Arnold and Eaker, believed precision bombing took strategic attacks from simply targeting a city to the isolation and destruction of an economy. They argued, an “amateur strategist may conclude that the sure way to overcome an enemy by the employment of air power is to burn his towns, his villages, his mills, his workshops, his highways, and all his chattels until he realizes the futility of opposition and begs that the lash be stayed.”³⁵ Arnold and Eaker argued that an air strategist must identify the vital nerve centers. These pre-determined nodes would be the objectives for future air offensives. The list of vital targets that these two leaders identified were “munitions factories, the oil supply, the rail and communications systems, the power plants, and lastly the people, the workers.”³⁶

It is clear from the way Arnold and Eaker prioritized their targets that they did not believe in area or morale bombing like their British counterparts. In *Army Flyer*, they devoted several sections to employing air power against industrial centers and not civilians. During the Ethiopian

³⁴ Dudley Saward, *Bomber Harris: The Story of Sir Arthur Harris* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 83.

³⁵ H.H. Arnold and Ira C. Eaker, *Army Flyer* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1942) 263.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 264. The focus on military industrial nodes did not extend to just the factories, but also to the civilians employed by the factories. See Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 45.

War the Italians attacked civilians in terror raids to great success. Eaker and Arnold believed these attacks were effective, because of the primitive nature of the Italians' adversary.³⁷ How did the Americans come to different conclusions about their ability to conduct daylight operations?

One argument is that the Americans benefited from a superior bombsight than the those employed by European nations. Prior to World War II, advancements in bombsights gave U.S.A.A.F. planners the notion that accuracy could be achieved from high altitudes. The Norden bombsights gave American theorists the notion that precision bombing was now possible.³⁸ Carl Norden created a number of bombsights prior to and during the war for both the Navy and the U.S. Army Air Corps. These advancements in targeting technology were considered far ahead of the curve and the United States valued them as one of its secret weapons. At the time of their development Eaker was studying at the Air Corps Tactical School (A.C.T.S.), which was the birth place of the daylight precision bombing doctrine.³⁹ Throughout the 1930s bombers, and in particular the B-17, proved to be faster than the pursuit planes currently available. As a result, many Americans put their faith in bomber superiority. This can be seen in Eaker's course load at the A.C.T.S. He took forty-three hours on "bombardment aviation" while "pursuit aviation" only accounted for ten hours.⁴⁰

With the belief that "the bomber would always get through," and the dramatic improvements in targeting technology, American air theorists believed that daylight precision bombing was now achievable. The theory of bomber superiority was pushed forward by many in the air power community. They believed that these new planes could out fly fighters, stay above ground fire, and with the coming of the B-17 "Flying Fortress", defend themselves. During the

³⁷ Ibid, 263.

³⁸ Stephen L. McFarland, *America's Pursuit of Precision Bombing, 1910-1945*, 81.

³⁹ James Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here" General Ira Eaker & the Command of the Air*. (Bethesda, Maryland: Adler & Adler Publishers Inc., 1986), 98.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 99.

pre-war years Lieutenant Kenneth Walker said, “Military airmen of all nations agree that a determined air attack, once launched, is the most difficult, if not impossible, to stop.”⁴¹ Most of these ideas were dispelled during the bombing campaigns by the R.A.F. and Luftwaffe from 1939-1942. What the air power and bomber advocates did not take into consideration was the dramatic improvements in pursuit fighters, anti-aircraft artillery, and, radar. Early use of radar in World War II took away the surprise of bomber raids, which air theorists hung their hats on.

Before the 1943 conference, the 8th Air Force did very little to convince their allies of the feasibility of precision bombing over France. In 1942, the American 8th Air Force began its first bombing campaign against the Axis. This phase of the bombing campaign took place from August 1942 and ended shortly after the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. This proved to both sides that they were right in their assessments before the air battles began above Europe.

The early stages of the American air effort were characterized by the inexperience of the 8th Air Force and the lack of resources allocated to it. Eaker faced the daunting task of building an air force, while at the same time, conducting missions against German occupied cities. He acted aggressively to form an effective command. During the summer of 1942 the 97th Bomb Group, which was the first to arrive in England, was poorly trained and ill prepared to fly combat missions. The group’s commander, Colonel Cornelius W. Cousland, was fired. In practice missions alone, the 97th Bomb Group performed poorly. Gunners were not even experienced in target practice at high altitudes when they arrived for combat. In his place Eaker assigned the 8th Air Force’s trouble shooter Colonel Frank Armstrong to take charge. He told Armstrong to

⁴¹ Thomas Alexander Hughes, *Overlord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II*, (New York, NY: The Free Press), 54.

“complete the training of our new heavy bomb group and fight them in 16 days.”⁴² In one instance, inexperienced gunners shot the training aircraft that was pulling their target.⁴³

Combat claims was another issue that displayed the youth of the American bomber crews. They inaccurately reported higher grossly exaggerated the number of fighters that they had shot down. For U.S.A.A.F. officials, this served as proof of the success of the day bombing campaign. Eaker wrote, “It is not surprising that our claims seem high until the critic appreciates this great volume of fire our bombers possess.”⁴⁴ Colonel Curtis LeMay, of the 305th Bomb Group, said that the exaggerated claims headquarters made about the number of German fighters they shot down were “bullshit.”⁴⁵ In one such claim, Eaker wrote to Arnold that “the G.A.F. [German Air Force] has passed its peak and is now on the way downhill.”⁴⁶ The fighters claimed by the combat crews quickly made their way into the 8th Air Force’s reports and it appeared that the Luftwaffe was being dealt a severe blow, but it was soon discovered that most of these claims overlapped each other.⁴⁷

This was an important phase for both allies heading into the strategic conference. For the Americans and Germans, this period of operations was characterized by light fighting and sizing each other up before the larger air battles began. The British felt that the American air offensive in 1942 provided concrete evidence about the ineffectiveness of daylight bombing. According to one of Eaker’s wing commanders, General Haywood S. Hansell, “the British were so sure that bombers could not survive German fighter attacks by day that they that they repeatedly tried to convince the Americans that the basic doctrine of high altitude, precision bombing in daylight

⁴² James Parton, 169.

⁴³ Ralph Nutter, *With the Possum and the Eagle: The Memoir of a Navigator’s War over Germany and Japan*, (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2005), 24.

⁴⁴ Ira C. Eaker, “The Case for Day Bombing,” January 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Washington, D.C., 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, January 11, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁷ Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon*, 148.

would fail.”⁴⁸ The Americans felt that they had not been given a real opportunity to prove themselves.

The Americans blamed their poor results on the lack of aircraft provided to the 8th Air Force. Eaker and others in the U.S.A.A.F. argued that the TORCH landings played a critical role in holding back the 8th Air Force. The loss of several of their most experienced bomb groups crippled the young air force. They envisioned a larger and more aggressive campaign. During TORCH, Eisenhower requested two heavy bomb groups. He planned to assign them to the 12th Air Force under the command of Major General James Doolittle. These units were allocated to support the TORCH landings and future operations in North Africa. Eaker transferred the 97th and 301st Bomb Groups to Doolittle’s new command.⁴⁹ Eaker made it abundantly clear that he opposed operations in North Africa.

Since the African campaign is not directly aimed at Germany or her munitions industry, it must be classed as a diversion. All agree on this score when the definition of diversion is made clear to them. If the allies by a force of 1,000 aircraft and 100,000 men, can pre-occupy, pin down and engage a force of 300,000 or more Germans, it is a profitable diversion from the allied point of view. If, on the other hand, the Germans, with a force of 30,000 men and two or three hundred airplanes can pin down, pre-occupy and engage a much larger allied force, this is a profitable diversion from the point of view of the Germans.⁵⁰

In reaction to losing his two most experienced bomb groups Eaker reassigned Armstrong from the 97th Bomb Group to his 8th Air Force headquarters.⁵¹ There were two reasons for Armstrong’s removal, which reflect his abilities as a commander. First, he was a proven combat leader whom Eaker could ill afford to lose. Secondly, he was Eaker’s trouble shooter for bomb groups that needed a new commanding officer. If the leader of the 8th Air

⁴⁸ Haywood Hansell, *The Strategic Air War against Germany and Japan: A Memoir*. (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History United States Air Force, 1986),77-78.

⁴⁹ James Parton, 183.

⁵⁰ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, January 11, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁵¹ James Parton, 184.

Force was going to lose his two most experienced groups, then he was going to retain one of his proven subordinates for future missions.

The loss of these two groups seriously hampered the 8th Air Force's efforts to continue its campaign during 1942 and early 1943. Many crews questioned how the other groups were supposed to make up for the losses in numbers. After hearing of the transfer, Colonel LeMay's group navigator, Ralph Nutter, asked Hansell, "Can we protect ourselves or do any real damage with such a small force against hundreds of German fighters?"⁵² This appeared to be a major problem for Eaker as he attempted to carry out raids with a diminished force. His strategic bombing offensive in 1942 was more conservative because of the formations lost due to TORCH. It was for this reason that he and daylight bombing came under such harsh criticism from Churchill. Eaker was caught in a tough spot in 1942. He needed to prove daylight bombing without possession of enough bombers to push deep into Axis occupied Europe. As a result, his air offensive in 1942 was viewed as a failure by the British.

Some R.A.F. officials viewed the American bombing effort as somewhat successful, but since Germany had not been attacked, Churchill and other British leaders still held certain reservations about the Americans' ability to carry out a daylight raids into Germany. Air Chief Marshal Charles Portal, who was still on the fence on night versus day bombing, decided to let the Americans go ahead with daylight bombing, while he spent the majority of his time restraining Churchill from crippling the American plan.⁵³ Portal was not without his doubts about the American offensive. He pointed out in a letter to Churchill that "the Americans will find that they cannot bomb Germany by day this year without prohibitive losses."⁵⁴ Since Portal believed

⁵² Ralph Nutter, *With the Possum and the Eagle: The Memoir of a Navigator's War over Germany and Japan*, 26.

⁵³ Denis Richards, *Portal of Hungerford: The Life of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Portal of Hungerford KG, GCB, OM, SO, MC*. (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1977), 309.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 309.

that he couldn't stop the Americans from conducting raids, it was best to allow them to experience the same painful lessons Bomber Command learned earlier in the war. The air marshal argued that it was best not to discourage the U.S.A.A.F., because in his opinion, the Americans were going to conduct daylight operations whether the British liked it or not.⁵⁵

Churchill didn't think too highly of the American air effort in 1942. It was his opinions that reignited the daylight bombing debate. Most military leaders present at Casablanca agreed that Churchill was the chief instigator behind the air power debate. At the conference, the British leader was extremely upset by the fact that, despite being in the war for a whole year, the Americans had yet to drop one bomb on Germany.⁵⁶ The Prime Minister argued that for six months the American strategic bombing campaign accomplished absolutely had nothing despite the massive amount of resources it drained.⁵⁷ In a letter to Sir Arthur Harris, Churchill stated that the newly arrived American squadrons should be trained for night fighting, because Arnold's day bombing campaign was only operating "on a very petty scale."⁵⁸

Going into the major Allied meeting, Arnold was under the impression that he was adequately prepared. This was the case for the entire Joint Chiefs of Staff, according to Colonel Jacob Smart, one of Arnold's advisors. Smart pointed to the fact that the Americans were under the impression that this was mainly a meeting between the Prime Minister and the President.⁵⁹ Some have argued that Arnold was either ambushed or sniffed out an ambush by the British. This gives the impression that Arnold was not ready for a confrontation on the subject of day versus night attacks. However, it does appear that Arnold had some idea that he was indeed

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Winston Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*. Volume 4 of the Second World War. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1950), 679.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Dudley Seward, *Bomber Harris: The Story of Sir Arthur Harris*, 174.

⁵⁹ Dik Alan Daso, *Hap Arnold and the Evolution of American Airpower*. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 179.

going to come under attack from the British on the issue of daylight bombing prior to going to the conference. According to Arnold he “knew the British had taken the matter up with the Prime Minister, and were determined that the Americans should not do daylight bombing, but should join their own night bombardment effort.”⁶⁰ Instead of seeing this as an ambush, it seems that he saw this as an opportunity to end the doctrinal disagreement. His actions alone show that he was ready for these meetings. In his memoirs, Arnold stated that “I thought that with the aid I could get from Spaatz and Andrews, who were already at Casablanca, and from Eaker, I could stop further controversy on the subject.”⁶¹ While it appears that Churchill intended to convince Roosevelt to switch the Americans over to night bombing, Arnold saw this as his chance to win a final battle over daylight and night bombing. In fact, Arnold did receive a warning from Harry Hopkins and Averell Harriman about Churchill’s intentions. He knew the road ahead of him at Casablanca was going to be a difficult one.⁶² After learning of Churchill’s intentions, the general countered with a full court press of his own bombing experts: Generals Frank Andrews, Carl Spaatz, Eaker, and himself. Eaker was to play the most important role in this debate. When Eaker arrived at Casablanca he was greeted by Arnold who said, “Churchill has got an agreement from President Roosevelt that your Eighth Air Force will stop daylight bombing and join the R.A.F. in night bombing.”⁶³

After months of debate prior to the Casablanca Conference it seems clear that the U.S.A.A.F. was prepared to handle this dispute even if they were caught off guard at Casablanca. Arnold could not have chosen a better person to talk to Churchill than Eaker. During his time spent as commander of the 8th Air Force, Eaker had become well known amongst his British

⁶⁰ Henry H. Arnold, *Global Mission*. (Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1989), 393.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 395.

⁶³ Ira C. Eaker, “Some Memories of Winston Churchill.” *The Aerospace Historian* (September 1972): 121.

colleagues in the R.A.F. No one else amongst the Americans had more firsthand knowledge of the problems plaguing the American offensive than Eaker. His handling of the 8th Air Force and defense of daylight bombing prepared him for this moment. Eaker reacted to Arnold's warning by calling a transfer from daylight to night bombing "absurd" and that it represented a "complete disaster."⁶⁴

The day before Eaker met with the Prime Minister, Arnold had his own meeting with the British leader. According to Arnold, he outlined improvements the Americans made in throughout the 1942 campaign. These included new combat configurations and ordering pilots to stop avoiding flak to maintain formation. It appeared to Arnold that Churchill was about to let the matter drop after his visit with him. He then took his case before Roosevelt and Marshall, who told him to go forward with daylight bombing despite the objections of Churchill. According to Arnold, he was told by everyone involved, "Go ahead with your daylight precision bombing!"⁶⁵

When Eaker arrived at Churchill's villa, the British leader told him that he understood that the general was mad about his attempt to convince Roosevelt to switch the 8th Air Force to night bombing. Churchill went on, "Young man, I am half American, my mother was a U.S. citizen. The tragic losses of so many of your gallant crews tears my heart. Marshal Harris tells me that his losses average 2 percent while yours are at least double that and sometimes higher."⁶⁶ Eaker now asked for permission to make his point and provided Churchill with a memo explaining the reasons for daylight bombing.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Henry H. Arnold, *Global Mission*, 396-397.

⁶⁶ Ira C. Eaker, "Some Memories of Winston Churchill," 121.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 122-123.

The memo had seven major points. They followed two basic themes. The first goal of the memo was to argue that day bombing was more effective than night bombing. Eaker pointed out that over the past three months R.A.F. losses totaled 4.7%, while in 1614 sorties the 8th Air Force lost 2.54%.⁶⁸ Added to that, he believed his force of bombers had the capabilities of defeating the Luftwaffe, while in the process of destroying vital economic nodes. “He [the German] will not fight our fighters when we go over in over-powering numbers, but he has to fight our bombers when we hit his vital targets.”⁶⁹ Eaker argued that without the ability to carry on with daylight missions, then the 8th Air Force would lose an opportunity to attrite Germany’s air force. “One of the most important things we would lose if we went to night bombing would be the destruction of the German day fighters.”⁷⁰

The other main theme that Eaker hammered home was that the British and Americans should bomb around-the-clock, and not concentrate at one specific time. The arguments in favor of this were the fact that the German fighters would not receive any rest, it prevented air space congestion, and day bombing could illuminate targets for British night bombers.⁷¹ While these are sound reasons, they ignore one of the main rules of war, force concentration. According to Clausewitz, “If a segment of one’s force is located where it is not sufficiently busy with the enemy, or if troops are on the march—that is, idle-while the enemy is fighting, then these forces are being managed uneconomically.”⁷² That is exactly what Eaker proposed to Churchill in this document. Instead of trying to overwhelm the Luftwaffe, the two Allies decided to split their forces and wear down the German fighters. This made it impossible for either the British or the Americans to properly support one another in the coming air campaign.

⁶⁸ Ira C. Eaker, “The Case for Day Bombing,” January 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Washington, D.C., 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 5.

⁷¹ Ibid, 1.

⁷² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1993), 250.

After reading the memo Churchill replied, “Young man you have not convinced me you are right, but you have persuaded me that you should have further opportunity to prove your contention... When I see your President at lunch today, I shall tell him that I withdraw my suggestion that U.S. bombers join the R.A.F. in night bombing and that I now recommend that our joint effort, day and night bombing, be continued for a time.”⁷³

One air power historian argues that Eaker’s account of the meeting was more accurate than the British leader’s memoirs. Churchill wanted to see more evidence from the Americans before approving of the day bombing campaign.⁷⁴ There were two reasons that Churchill dropped his objections. First, his own air staff told him that the Americans were not going to drop an issue that they felt so strongly about. Secondly, Churchill angered the U.S. Army at Casablanca, and more importantly its Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall. According to one author, “the British knew it would be folly to risk the good will of the A.A.F. and create hard feelings over a matter that would prove itself one way or the other in a few months.”⁷⁵ This ended the day bombing debate and resulted in a minor victory for the Americans.

The big debate that was not resolved centered on what the bombing offensive was supposed to accomplish. No one was able to agree on what industrial system or strategic objective should be the focus of the C.B.O. Too many factions felt that the system they advocated must be destroyed first. As a result, they made all of these systems priorities. This resulted in the Casablanca Directive, (C.C.S. 166/1/D). The C.C.S. came up with a list of targets that would receive priority during the bombing offensive by the 8th Air Force. They included in order of priority:

⁷³ Ira C. Eaker, “Some Memories of Winston Churchill,” 123-124.

⁷⁴ Richard G. Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, (Washington, D.C.:Center for Air Force History, 1993), 162-163.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 163.

- (a) German submarine construction yards.
- (b) The German aircraft industry.
- (c) Transportation.
- (d) Oil plants.
- (e) Other targets in enemy war industry.⁷⁶

Another series of reports that Eaker presented to the British focused directly on these issues. The document titled, “Why Not Give Our Bombers and RAF Bombers the Same Strategic Objective-The Same Targets?” had grave implications on the future of the C.B.O. In it, Eaker laid the groundwork for many of the future problems that plagued the C.B.O. in 1943. Like his previous memo, “The Case for Day Bombing,” Eaker sought to create a command independent of the R.A.F. and Eisenhower’s influence. He argued that since Operation TORCH now had its own air force, his command could now become independent of Eisenhower and focus strictly on strategic bombing.⁷⁷ He further proposed that he should get his orders from Portal. “We have not the slightest objection to getting our bombing directives from the Chief of the Air Staff, RAF as long as we operate from UK bases.”⁷⁸ This is important, because it unofficially nominated Portal to become the commander in charge of the C.B.O. While it may seem that Eaker was trying to work with the R.A.F., Portal had so far shown little ability or desire to stop the Americans from conducting a daylight air campaign. Throughout the course of the war, he rarely reigned in his subordinates, making him an ideal candidate for Harris and Eaker. Eaker even pointed out that the reason he nominated Portal was, because Portal’s orders “left sufficient latitude to the Commander for the selection of individual targets.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶USA *The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943*, Fredrick Aandahl, William M .Franklin, and William Slany, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968), 781-782.

⁷⁷ Ira C. Eaker, “Why Not Give Our Bombers and RAF Bombers the Same Strategic Objective-The Same Targets?,” January 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

The U-boat threat greatly concerned the C.C.S. With an increase in amphibious operations, both navies felt they needed to concentrate part of the air offensive against U-boat bases. Admirals Ernest King and Dudley Pound worried about the lack of escort vessels left to support convoys. They proposed that bombing the submarine bases could make up for the lack of escorts.⁸⁰ However, Air Marshal Portal felt that too much attention was being paid by the Americans towards the submarine bases already. He was worried that the Americans might forget to bomb the big industrial targets inside of Germany.⁸¹ Portal and Arnold were both in agreement that the real target was the German industry. Arnold said that the Americans didn't have enough aircraft to launch attacks into Germany. Arnold told the C.C.S. that Eisenhower needed the 8th Air Force to carry out raids against the submarine bases to support TORCH.⁸²

A major criticism leveled against the American bombing effort was the inability of the 8th Air Force to launch an attack against Germany. Eaker explained the conservative bombing approach taken by his air force. The first reason that he gave was that their primary focus for the past few months was the submarine pens.⁸³ The second reason was that he needed a force large enough to undertake such a dangerous mission.⁸⁴ This he attributed largely to the TORCH operation. "Had it not been for the TORCH operation we should have had a force in being and adequately trained for the bombing of German installations long since."⁸⁵ Finally, Eaker blamed poor weather on his inability to launch missions against targets in Germany.⁸⁶ After the Casablanca Conference ended on January 24, 1943 the American 8th Air Force launched their

⁸⁰ USA *The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943*, Fredrick Aandahl, William M .Franklin, and William Slany, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968), 670-671.

⁸¹ Ibid, 670.

⁸² Ibid, 671.

⁸³ Ira C. Eaker, "Why Have US Bombers Not Bombed Germany!" January 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Washington, D.C., 1.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 2.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 1.

first raid into Germany on January 27, 1943. This was probably done to alleviate some of the concerns that Churchill had over the American bombing effort up until that point. The raid into Wilhelmshaven was a “milk run.” The lead group, the 306th Bomb Group, reported that they had faced only five to twelve enemy fighters over the target and the flak was moderate to heavy.⁸⁷ Also, the timing of the raid may have something to do with what took place at the C.C.S. summit. Charles F. Kiley, a writer for Stars and Stripes wrote, “It seemed likely that the raid, coming in broad daylight a scant 12 hours after the joint declaration by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill that the enemy would be hit and hit hard this year, took the German defenses by surprise.”⁸⁸ One person who was not happy about the Wilhelmshaven mission was Eaker. “We are bombing Germany now with less than a hundred heavies-something you and I both agree should not be done...I am still hoping that you can avoid a further depletion of our little Air Force here...”⁸⁹ This portion of a letter sent from Eaker to Spaatz came on the heels of the Wilhelmshaven raid and after Eaker was informed that he was losing an addition two heavy bomb groups.⁹⁰ This is not to say that Eaker was disappointed with the results of the first raid into Germany, which he called “fairly successful.” His main concern was that the 8th Air Force was progressing towards missions deep inside Germany without an adequate bomber force to use for protection and concentration of fire power.⁹¹ However, despite Eaker’s misgivings, he was forced to take a more aggressive approach against the Axis.

A major concern of Eaker’s, not addressed in the Casablanca Directive, was the role that TORCH would play in the coming C.B.O. “I am not certain whether General Eisenhower or

⁸⁷ John B. Wright, Intelligence Teletype Report January 27, 1943. 306th Bomb Group Collection, Abilene Christian University History Department, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX.

⁸⁸ Kiley, Charles F. “Attack in Daylight First American Blow on German Proper: Flying Fortresses Smash Wilhelmshaven, Surprise Nazi Warships; Liberators Hit Targets in Northwest.” *The Stars and Stripes*. January 28, 1943.

⁸⁹ James Parton, “*Air Force Spoken Here*” *General Ira Eaker & the Command of the Air*, 231.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 231.

⁹¹ *Ibid*.

General Spaatz will agree with me that our strategic bombing directive can now give German targets priority over the sub-pens in the Brest peninsula.”⁹² Eaker no longer wanted to continue his supporting role in the TORCH operations. It was his intention to break away from the North African campaign as soon as possible. It was also his understood belief that his air force was to be the primary air effort against the Reich. He expressed these beliefs at Casablanca. “I think we should have supported the TORCH operation. I believe we were absolutely sound in devoting our whole effort to that as long as that operation was critical. Now that their Air Force has been built up we can get back to our job.”⁹³ This shows that Eaker did not expect to lose any future bomb groups to the 12th Air Force, which in his mind, was already built up to its necessary size for operation in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Eaker also believed that it was time for the 8th Air Force to focus on more important targets, German war industry.

The meeting that took place at Casablanca in January 1943 was the culmination of months of debate over air doctrine and direction between the British and Americans. With two opposing doctrines, the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. leaders and theorists met to discuss the nature of the future bombing offensive in Europe. All agreed that a more aggressive posture was needed from the U.S. 8th Air Force in Western Europe. The agreements ended there. Clearly the American air offensive in 1942 had been ineffective. The 8th Air Force’s bombing of coastal areas and targets in France angered the R.A.F. The objectives laid out in the Casablanca Directive appeared to address this crucial issue of target selection. However, after looking at how the two different countries interpreted this new directive, it is obvious that nothing had been resolved regarding the objective of the campaign. Bomber Command was going to continue its city bombing and the Americans were allowed to conduct daylight missions. In the end, the

⁹² Ira C. Eaker, “How Do You Select Your Targets?” January 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Washington, D.C.

⁹³ Ira C. Eaker, “Why Have There Been So Few Missions?” January 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Washington, D.C.

directive resolved nothing except to agree that a stronger bomber offensive was needed. The Americans were going to continue their strategy of attacking the Luftwaffe and industrial systems and the British were going to focus on undermining the morale of the German people. All this document did was to prioritize for the 8th Air Force what systems needed to be attacked first, and even then it was very vague.

A small, but still important issue over the method of bombing held up the talks temporarily. The Americans laid out their defense of daylight bombing, stating that the 8th Air Force had not been given a fair chance to prove the daylight precision bombing doctrine. Results of earlier raids by the 8th Air Force favored British arguments against such missions. The end result of these quarrels was an agreement to disagree over doctrine. What happened at the meeting of the C.C.S. was a written confirmation of what the two air forces had already been moving towards in the first place: separate doctrines and strategies on how to win the air war. Churchill did make a last ditch effort to have Roosevelt turn his daylight bombers into night bombers but judging by the response made by the American chiefs of staff and by Churchill's quick withdrawal, it appears that this was nothing more than a final attempt to convince the Americans to quit day missions. Eventually the Americans would win out, partially due to the British air marshals' reluctance to continue the debate, and the Americans were able to convince enough RAF officials of the value of daylight bombing. All that Casablanca did was maintain an air strategy that left neither side satisfied.

CHAPTER 3

POLICY MEETS STRATEGY: THE PLANNING OF THE CBO

Historians can judge operations by performing map exercises. When looking at the military objectives it is easy to critique flaws that appear evident on paper. This presents a one dimensional view of operational warfare. Planning is a multi-dimensional process. Sometimes the best plan reflects policy and is not an efficient means to wage war. In 1943, the Combined Bomber Offensive (C.B.O.) relied on such a directive. The Allies drew up a document that satisfied every air force commander in the theater, but failed to specify an objective other than the destruction of Germany. The Allies created the C.B.O. in the midst of coalition politics between air force leaders, their superiors, and two nations. They drew up a plan that appeased all of the parties involved, but was not a competent way to wage war. This chapter will provide a multi-dimensional look at the planning for the C.B.O. and why the Allies drew up this plan in particular.

A bombing campaign must have a clear goal in mind. What happens when there are multiple, but equally prioritized objectives? The 1943 POINTBLANK Directive authorized a bombing campaign that failed to focus on one specific objective or way of bombing. POINTBLANK was the C.B.O.'s operational plan. Clearly something was wrong with its "let's do everything approach." Targeting everything was not an efficient means to wage a bomber campaign in 1943. No country was capable of producing an air force capable of following such a plan. Why then did the Allies choose this method?

The fact of the matter is that armies, countries, and allies don't always choose the best plan. In theory the best plan of attack would have been to overwhelm the German Air Force with

bombers and fighters through daylight missions. Realistically, the Allies adopted the strategy they had, because it was a compromise between two nations. Operation POINTBLANK accommodated the wishes of the 8th Air Force's commanding officer, Ira Eaker, and Bomber Command's, Arthur Harris. Eaker wanted to divert bombers back to his theater of operations. His joint R.A.F.-U.S.A.A.F. staff drew up a force allocation plan that reflected these wishes. Harris made his own edits to POINTBLANK days before it became operational to ensure that he could deviate from the American vision of the coming air offensive. The scheme they agreed upon allowed Harris and Eaker to go their own separate ways.

The new plan served as the basis for the strategic bombing campaign against Germany. The directive never changed after it was put into action during the summer of 1943. Originally known as the "Eaker Plan," POINTBLANK decided how the Allies intended to conduct their strategic air offensive. This aggressive operation failed to meet its lofty expectations during the 1943 campaign. One argument that has been made is that the directive merely needed its requirements met before it succeeded in the spring of 1944. Defenders of Eaker make this argument. According to one scholar, Eaker worked diligently in spite of the fact that he received less aircraft than his proposal required.⁹⁴ This line of argumentation maintains that POINTBLANK failed because the 8th Air Force didn't receive the airplanes that Arnold promised Eaker. However, these requirements weren't small. Eaker wanted more than a couple hundred bombers, but several thousand B-17s and B-24s. 425 German fighters protected the Eastern Front, while 1650 guarded Germany in 1943. In heavy bombers alone Eaker's requests outnumbered the German fighters.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ James Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here" General Ira Eaker & the Command of the Air*. (Bethesda, Maryland: Adler & Adler Publishers Inc., 1986), 290-291.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 285.

This plan offered a simple solution. The 8th Air Force was to destroy the Luftwaffe, smash German war production, and conduct preparatory bombardment missions for future landings in France. Unfortunately, “simple,” doesn’t mean “easy.” As Clausewitz wrote, “The knowledge in war is very simple, but at the same time it is not easy to apply.”⁹⁶ Luftwaffe forces enjoyed a position of advantage. Their fighters flew over friendly territory, while 8th Air Force fighters lacked the capabilities to penetrate German air space. This left American heavy bombers at the mercy of the Luftwaffe.

The plan was ambitious. POINTBLANK demanded a massive commitment of heavy bombers to this theater. The directive made the 8th Air Force the primary consumer of aircraft and combat crews in the U.S.A.A.F. Furthermore, it called for the aggressive employment of heavy bombers supported by only a handful of escort fighters. The document argued that the heavy bomber would gain air superiority through the use of its self-defending capabilities. By concentrating a large formation of “self-defending” bombers over Germany, the Americans hoped to attrite the Luftwaffe and destroy German industry. They decided to kill two birds with one stone. The concept of using only bombers in an air superiority plan had never been tried.

The plan for the C.B.O. was a politically motivated document. Eaker and Harris got what they wanted. POINTBLANK enabled everyone to pursue their own objectives. With no sense of direction and a high priority on aircraft, C.B.O. planners sought to strengthen their own air forces’ independence rather than work together against a common enemy.

The process of planning Operation POINTBLANK began a month before the agreement at Casablanca. In December 1942, General Muir S. Fairchild, a member of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, ordered Colonel Byron E. Gates to form an American operations analysis

⁹⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1993), 169.

group.⁹⁷ Fairchild told Gates, Major W. Barton Leach, and Captain Guido R. Perera that he wanted a report on future strategic bombing operations. Fairchild posed this question: “How can Germany be so damaged by air attack that an invasion of the Continent may be made possible within the shortest possible period—say one year?”⁹⁸ On December 9, 1942, Arnold ordered the formation of the think tank, which became known as the Committee of Operations Analysts (C.O.A.).

The committee was composed of a diverse group of intellectuals. It included financiers Thomas W. Lamont and Elihu Root, Jr., attorney George W. Ball, military historian Edward Mead Earle, Judge John Marshall Harlan, Leach and Perera.⁹⁹ The job of the C.O.A. was to identify choke points within the German war economy. They sought targets that were within range of the 8th Air Force’s bombers. The industrial system needed to be significant enough that its loss severely impacted Germany’s ability to wage war.¹⁰⁰ Three priorities determined the systems chosen: importance to the German war effort, vulnerability, and timeliness of impact.¹⁰¹

C.O.A. also formed subcommittees to conduct studies on the western Axis economy. The A.A.F. A-2 (intelligence) already conducted detailed research on Axis electrical power, oil, transportation, and rubber. The C.O.A.’s data relied heavily on these sources.¹⁰² The group interviewed numerous economists, plant operators, and in some cases individuals who worked at the industrial targets prior to their takeover by the Nazis.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ James Parton, 249.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 250.

⁹⁹ Donald Miller, “*Masters of the Air: America’s Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany*,” (New York, New York: Simon and Schusters, 2006), 186.

¹⁰⁰ Alan J. Levin, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*. (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 85.

¹⁰¹ John F. Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog: Intelligence and Army Air Forces Operations in World War II*, (Washington D.C.:Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996), 153.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Before the conference at Casablanca, the C.O.A. presented Arnold with an interim report. The document stated, “It is clear that our day operations and the night bombing of the RAF should be correlated so that both may be applied to the same system of targets, each at the point where it is most effective.”¹⁰⁴ The problem with this was that both the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. disagreed about the point of emphasis. At the same time, British and American air power advocates were in a heated debate over the whether or not to employ strategic bombers for day missions or night missions. Ultimately, the two sides agreed to conduct their own bombing campaigns through the use of “round-the-clock” bombing.

At the same time, C.O.A. members flew to England to meet with 8th Air Force personnel. The visit did not go smoothly. Members of the 8th Air Force’s planning and intelligence committees felt threatened that their job was being taken over by the C.O.A.¹⁰⁵ They argued that the committee had stepped outside its authority and was taking over operational planning. The representatives decided to leave the debate over force requirements to those in the 8th Air Force.¹⁰⁶ Eaker met with the committee on January 27 and listened to their presentation.¹⁰⁷ After the briefing, Eaker told C.O.A. members, “Now that I see your attitude, I will be glad to cooperate in every way.” As a result, they received full access to 8th Air Force intelligence and data needed to complete the committee’s reports. Eisenhower, Spaatz, Eaker, and Arnold could not come to a concurrence over target priorities. Eisenhower wanted air superiority, Spaatz the destruction of aircraft factories, marshalling yards, and submarine pens, and Eaker and Arnold wanted to destroy the aircraft industry and industrial nodes. The C.O.A. agreed not to include target

¹⁰⁴ James Parton, 250.

¹⁰⁵ John F. Kreis, 153.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ James Parton, 251.

priorities, but the order presented in their report reflected their preferences.¹⁰⁸ The group discovered six industrial systems that met these requirements. They included: submarines, aircraft, ball bearings, oil, synthetic rubber, and military transport.¹⁰⁹

The oil choke point was stressed throughout the war. While it was a valuable economic target, the refineries at Ploesti became a politically motivated objective as well. Economically, Ploesti provided the Allies with a substantial choke point that might dismantle the German economy and impact the battlefield. It was estimated that the oil plants in Romania provided Germany with as high as 50% of its fuel.¹¹⁰ The Allies believed that an air campaign against Axis held oil facilities and synthetic products might reduce 90% of Germany's petroleum products.¹¹¹

Politically, Ploesti was an important target for both the Allies and the Soviets. Winston Churchill called Ploesti the “taproot of German might.”¹¹² Early during Operation BARBAROSSA, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Russian bombers attempted to destroy the Romanian oil fields. The Reds committed six bombers to the mission and destroyed over 9,000 tons of oil.¹¹³ According to Arnold's post war memoirs, one Allied attack took place during a meeting between Joseph Stalin, Churchill, and Franklin Roosevelt.¹¹⁴ By attacking the oil fields, the C.B.O. became another front from which to support the Soviets.

One difference between reality and the pre-war planning conducted by American air strategists revolved around the number of bombers assigned to the offensive. Air War Plans

¹⁰⁸ John F. Kreis, 154.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen L. McFarland, *America's Pursuit of Precision Bombing, 1910-1945* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1995.), 168.

¹¹⁰ Jay A. Stout, *Fortress Ploesti: The Campaign to Destroy Hitler's Oil*, (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2011), 27.

¹¹¹ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943 volume 5 of The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Chicago, Illinois: The University Press of Chicago), 358.

¹¹² Jay A. Stout, 7.

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Henry H. Arnold, *Global Mission*. (Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1989), 494.

Division 1 (AWPD-1) addressed aircraft allocation along with system targeting. When the C.B.O. began in June, the American 8th Air Force relied upon 287 aircraft for air operations. AWPD-1 called for 1,000 plane raids.¹¹⁵ These numbers weren't reached until 1944. A later plan, Air War Plans Division 42 (AWPD-42), stated that strategic operations over Europe required 2,965 heavy bombers.¹¹⁶ The document said that this force could be operational by January 1944. It also claimed that after 1943 only four months of follow up operations would be needed against Germany.¹¹⁷ Including European air assets, AWPD-42 required the formation of 289 groups and 63,068 combat aircraft for operations.¹¹⁸ These pre-war and early strategic air plans influenced Eaker and his staff when they began to make their pitch for more aircraft throughout the early phases of the 1943 campaign.

The C.O.A. sent their report to Arnold on March 8, 1943. The group's list of systems and priorities from highest to lowest included: single-engine fighter aircraft, ball bearings, petroleum products, grinding wheels and abrasives, nonferrous metals, synthetic rubber and rubber tires, submarine construction plants and bases, military transport vehicles, transportation, coking plants, iron and steel, machine tools, electric power, electrical equipment, optical precision instruments, chemicals, food, nitrogen, and AA and antitank artillery.¹¹⁹ Many officers in the U.S.A.A.F. were disturbed that transportation and electric power were not in the top group. In AWPD-1 and AWPD-42 these systems were considered high priority targets, but the C.O.A. thought that these targets were outside the operational capabilities of the 8th Air Force.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Daniel J. Simonsen, "Air War Plans Division 1: The United States First Air Power Plan and the Strategic Bombing of Europe, 1943," (master's thesis, Louisiana Tech University, February 2011), 76-77.

¹¹⁶ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, 289.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Craven and Cate

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Craven and Cate

¹¹⁹ John F. Kreis, 154.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 155.

While the C.O.A. unofficially listed their priorities, the Combined Chiefs of Staff (C.C.S.) agreed to their own targets and priorities at Casablanca. The C.O.A. laid the ground work for the selection of targets during the planning for the C.B.O. By leaving the operational and aircraft requirements in Eaker's hands they acknowledged that they were unable to put a date on when a ground invasion was possible.¹²¹ Once submitted, their report ended the first stage of the planning.¹²² Now it was upon Eaker's shoulders to formulate how his forces went about destroying the systems listed.

As Arnold's research team prepared their report, another issue came to a head that affected POINTBLANK's planning. Prior to the Casablanca Conference, the 8th Air Force lost a significant numbers of its bombers and nearly all of its fighters to Operation TORCH. This set a significant precedent that continued through the 1943 campaign. Air forces in the Mediterranean received air assets prior to or directly from the 8th Air Force. Eaker's most experienced bomb groups, most of the fighters, and numerous ground personnel were sent to support land operations in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. This caused the 8th Air Force and Northwest African Air Forces (N.A.A.F.), under Lieutenant General Carl Spaatz, to wage a private war over the allocation of heavy bombers.

The N.A.A.F. began operations on February 18, 1943.¹²³ Assigned to support the drive on Tunis, it received priority above all other theaters, including the 8th Air Force in England. The strategic arm of the N.A.A.F. was the Northwest African Strategic Air Force (N.A.S.A.F.) under the command of Major General James H. Doolittle. The N.A.S.A.F. was not a true strategic air force like the 8th in England. One scholar argues that Doolittle's command targeted "grand

¹²¹ John F. Kreis, 156.

¹²² Alan J. Levin, 85.

¹²³ Richard G. Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force history, 1993), 178.

tactical targets, enemy lines of supply, and logistical support.”¹²⁴ A better term is operational bombing. The N.A.S.A.F.’s job was to limit the ability of the German army to maneuver and receive supplies.

Another arm of Spaatz’s command was the Northwest African Tactical Air Force (N.A.T.A.F.), under the leadership of Air Marshal Arthur Coningham.¹²⁵ These two portions of the N.A.A.F. proved to be critical during the Battle of Kasserine Pass. In the opening moments of the battle American air units failed to properly coordinate their attacks.¹²⁶ Over the course of the German offensive the Americans recovered from their setbacks and launched more effective air attacks against Axis positions. From February 20 to February 24, 1943, Spaatz released the strategic bombers to Coningham. The Australian unleashed a massive bombing campaign against German and Italian ground components. Axis columns came under heavy aerial bombardment as they withdrew from the region. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who commanded the Axis troops at Kasserine Pass, recalled that his forces “were subjected to hammer-blow air attacks by the US air force in the Feriana-Kasserine area.”¹²⁷ During this period air and ground commanders began the process of working out who got the majority of the air assets in the region. This part of the picture was unavailable or ignored by air force leaders in England as they began to lodge complaints about the lack of heavy bombardment groups allocated to their theater of air operations.

8th Air Force personnel objected to losing aircraft as far back as TORCH. Those in England reluctantly gave up valuable air components for what many American commanders deemed to be a diversion in the desert. Eaker’s first post-Casablanca salvo came on January 30,

¹²⁴ Ibid, 180.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 179.

¹²⁶ Thomas E. Griess ed., *The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean*, (Garden City, New York: Square One Publishers, 2002), 175.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 183.

1943 in a letter to Arnold. Shortly after the Wilhelmshaven raid he fired off a message asking Arnold for aircraft and in particular replacement crews.¹²⁸ Eaker detailed how the North African operations seriously hindered his air force's combat capabilities. "We have been about bled to death by the African operation, and setting this up as a separate theater may help some on that score."¹²⁹ A day earlier Eaker sent a letter to Spaatz begging him to refrain from taking more aircraft from his "little Air Force."¹³⁰ Spaatz replied that it was crucial that Eaker send him all of the P-38s and more bombers.¹³¹

Two weeks later, Eaker brought up the issue of aircraft allocation again. The general argued that he did not have the equipment or personnel to maintain consistent operations over Continental Europe. He pointed out that he did not receive a sufficient amount of aircraft. "We were just getting up off the floor from the loss of our P-38 fighters, when we received cables indicating the diversion of our next two heavy groups to the 12th Air Force."¹³² Eaker also pushed off some of the responsibility of decreased operations onto Arnold's inability to send the 8th Air Force reinforcements. "It is perfectly obvious to me that the limiting factor on the number of missions we execute will not be the weather, but the rate at which you can furnish aircraft and crews." Finally, Eaker concluded by telling Arnold to prevent "other Air Forces from stealing all our planes and pilots."¹³³

After another two weeks, and on schedule, came another complaint about aircraft allocations from the 8th Air Force. "We have to date, received but 24 replacements crews and 63 replacement aircraft. We have lost 75 planes and crews in over 2206 sorties."¹³⁴ Casualties

¹²⁸ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, January 30, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ Ira Eaker to Carl Spaatz, January 29, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹³¹ Carl Spaatz to Ira Eaker, February 10, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹³² Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, February 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, February 26, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

limited operations per month and this came after the Casablanca Directive demanded more operations from England. However, this letter was full of more criticism about the Mediterranean Theater's ever increasing demand for heavy bombers. The 8th Air Force's commanding officer stated that the agreed upon quota for bombardment groups in Africa was four, but five groups had been assigned to the region with two more on the way.¹³⁵

One author suggests that Eaker hatched a letter writing campaign amongst his friends and supporters to acquire the bombers he felt were rightly his.¹³⁶ The theme of these letters was that the bomber offensive needed to be the main effort and the 8th Air Force needed to become a priority in air operations.¹³⁷ There is evidence that supports this thesis. In one instance, Eaker invited the Winston Churchill to a party thrown in his honor. The general ordered an aid to make certain that he had plenty of Scotch. Captain Clarence Mason ordered a waitress to stand behind the British leader all night and refill his glass. According to Mason, "During the course of the evening he had five double Scotches."¹³⁸ After giving a few speeches and handing out medals, Churchill went up with the generals to Brigadier General Newton Longfellow's room. He downed a bottle of Longfellow's brandy and proposed they write a letter to Arnold.¹³⁹ He suggested the following message be sent: "We are dining together, smoking your cigars, and waiting for more of your heavy bombers."¹⁴⁰ Eaker passed on Churchill's comments, but failed to mention them in their proper context.¹⁴¹

This may sound like Eaker devised this plan to change the priority from the N.A.A.F. to the 8th Air Force for his own personal benefit, but Eaker would not have resorted to such tactics

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Thomas M. Coffey, *Decision Over Schweinfurt: The U.S. 8th Air Force Battle for Daylight Bombing*. (New York: David McKay Inc., 1977), 173.

¹³⁷ Thomas M. Coffey, 173-174.

¹³⁸ James Parton, 245.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, April 5, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

if he didn't actually believe the bomber offensive needed to take center stage. In their 1941 book, *Winged Warfare*, Arnold and Eaker suggested that air superiority operations should target the destruction of an enemy's aircraft industry.¹⁴² This explains why Eaker believed air operations in the Mediterranean were a diversion from his vision of the main air effort, the German aircraft industry. Air operations in North Africa were designed to gain air superiority in that theater alone, but not the complete destruction of the Luftwaffe. 8th Air Force commanders believed this to be a distraction. Arnold agreed with this assessment.

There are two main theaters where we can get at the heart of our enemies' countries. One of course is England...In my opinion, any other air operations that we endeavor to carry out are mere diversions...For political and other reasons we must keep up these air forces and we must supply them with sufficient replacements to maintain a constant operating strength, but I am hopeful that in spite of pressure being brought to bear, we won't have to increase their strength.¹⁴³

This letter shows Arnold's position within the greater context of the air wars being conducted around the world. Arnold believed that the 8th Air Force's operations were the primary air effort against the Axis, but due to conditions on the ground he needed to supply other combat units with aircraft. The commanding general felt Eaker needed to be informed that there were other theaters in the war besides his own. At the same time Arnold agree with Eaker's view of air operations.

Soon Eaker received a chance to shift the focus of the air war back to England and the 8th Air Force. His letter writing campaign temporarily ended. Now the general was going to draw up a plan that gave him both the aircraft and air offensive he desired. On March 8, 1943 the C.O.A. submitted their report to Arnold.¹⁴⁴ He passed on the report to Eaker's new superior officer, Lieutenant General Frank Andrews and Spaatz on March 24, 1943. Andrews replaced

¹⁴² Henry Arnold and Ira Eaker, *Winged Warfare*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers: 1941), 132.

¹⁴³ Arnold to Eaker, March 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴⁴ John F. Kreis, 154.

Eisenhower as commander in chief E.T.O.U.S.A. Accompanying the report was Colonel Charles Cabell, one of Arnold's advisers.¹⁴⁵ Cabell briefed Andrews and Eaker on the C.O.A. report and expressed Arnold's own opinions of it to the two generals. They received the report enthusiastically. Eaker told Arnold that he saw the report in the same light.¹⁴⁶ Arnold requested that the air staff in England complete a report that detailed how many planes they needed to accomplish the objectives listed in the C.O.A. report.¹⁴⁷

Eaker immediately formed a joint staff containing both R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. officials. The Americans were Hansell, Brigadier General Frederick Anderson, Cabell, Colonel Richard Hughes, and two others. The British contributed Air Commodore Sidney Bufton, the R.A.F.'s own precision bombing advocate.¹⁴⁸ Eaker's influence over the planning for the Combined Bomber Offensive became apparent in the composition of the planning committee. Hansell and Anderson commanded two of Eaker's combat wings. Hansell became the committee's chair.¹⁴⁹ The reason Hansell chaired the staff lay in his previous experience. He was in charge of AWPD-42's committee prior to his time in England. The U.S.A.A.F. used AWPD-42 as the basis for the force allocation portion of POINTBLANK.¹⁵⁰ Arnold was able to have his voice heard with the appointment of Cabell. He had served as an adviser to Arnold and acted as his observer in England. Air Commodore Sidney Bufton represented the R.A.F. He supported daylight precision attacks conducted by Eaker's air force. The lack of R.A.F. officers in the planning committee did not mean that Britain was not interested the Eaker Plan. They observed the group

¹⁴⁵ James Parton, 251.

¹⁴⁶ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, April 5, 1943.

¹⁴⁷ James Parton, 251-252.

¹⁴⁸ John F. Kreis ed, 191.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Charles Griffith, *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II*. (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, September 1999), 96.

from afar. Later, Harris made some timely edits to the proposed plan before it became Operation POINTBLANK in June 1943.

AWPD-1 and AWPD-42 never dealt with how the U.S.A.A.F. intended to destroy these systems. Instead, they focused on the allocation of aircraft for coalition and U.S. air forces.¹⁵¹ AWPD-42 called for the buildup of U.S.A.A.F. forces in England to a total of 7,268 planes. Planners only designated 824 aircraft to the North African theater.¹⁵² The plan identified 177 targets that could be destroyed in 66,045 sorties. Planners believed that the loss of these targets would destroy the Luftwaffe, eliminate the U-boat threat, and lead to the destruction of the German war economy.¹⁵³ AWPD-42 called for a force of 2,965 heavy bombers by January 1944 and projected a 20% monthly attrition rate.¹⁵⁴ The Allies had the capabilities to back up their optimistic projections. Throughout the course of the war Allied aircraft production soared to 151,000, while the Germans countered with 43,000.¹⁵⁵

Another idea that AWPD-42 put forward was the notion of the self defending bomber. The document said that unescorted bombers could reach their targets without high losses.¹⁵⁶ This plan did not emphasize long range fighter escorts. By doing this, the Americans stunted the development of long range fighters that Eaker and other strategic air force commanders begged for later that year.¹⁵⁷ The U.S.A.A.F. did not throw out completely the idea of using escort

¹⁵¹ Jay A. Stout, *The Men Who Killed the Luftwaffe: The U.S. Army Air Forces against Germany in World War II*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2010), 98.

¹⁵² Charles Griffith, 96.

¹⁵³ John F. Kreis, 150.

¹⁵⁴ Alan J. Levin, 77.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, (New York, NY: W.W.& Norton Company Inc.,1996), 2.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen McFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton, *To Command the Sky: The Battle For Air Superiority Over Germany, 1942-1944*,(Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 82.

¹⁵⁷ Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002.), 226.

fighters. The YB-40 was a modified B-17 used as an escort for heavy bombers going deep into Germany. Many hoped that this heavy escort was the solution.¹⁵⁸

AWPD-42 did not receive a positive reaction from American leaders. Brigadier General Laurence Kuter wrote Spaatz that the plan wasn't feasible. "It's clear that we cannot build the AWPD-42 program."¹⁵⁹ AWPD-42 reflected America's inexperience and lack of intelligence.¹⁶⁰ After the war Hansell said the idea that the bomber could penetrate German airspace without long range escort fighters was the plan's "greatest fault."¹⁶¹ The British had their own doubts about AWPD-42 as well, but Air Marshal John Slessor advised Portal that it would be best to avoid publicly objecting to it.¹⁶²

Hansell and his joint R.A.F.-U.S.A.A.F. committee melded the C.O.A. report with the AWPD-42 force allocation plan to create the "Eaker Plan." The "Eaker Plan" focused on how the R.A.F. and 8th Air Force would accomplish the objectives laid out in the C.O.A. report. This rough draft mixed Eaker's desire for aircraft with Hansell's vision of the air war. The plan should be called the Eaker-Hansell Plan, but Eaker received full credit when he presented it in Washington prior to the Trident Conference. The "Eaker Plan" contained six primary objectives:

1. Submarine Construction Yards and Bases
2. German Aircraft Industry
3. Ball Bearings
4. Oil
5. Synthetic Rubber and tires
6. Military Transport Vehicles¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Tami Davis Biddle, 227.

¹⁵⁹ Charles Griffith, 99.

¹⁶⁰ John F. Kreis, 151.

¹⁶¹ Stephen McFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton, 82.

¹⁶² Rober S. Ehlers Jr., *Targeting the Third Reich: Air Intelligence and the Allied Bombing Campaigns*.(Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 142.

¹⁶³ *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences, Trident Conference, May 1943*, CD-ROM (MilSpecManuals.com, 2011), 10-11.

The German Air Force became an intermediate objective. Intermediate in this case did not mean secondary. The joint committee considered the Luftwaffe a major obstacle to success. Allied intelligence suggested that German fighter production increased by 44% since 1941, while Axis bomber production dropped.¹⁶⁴ This pointed to an impending escalation of the air war. In this way, Allied intelligence proved to be incredibly accurate. The writers of the “Eaker Plan” realized the need to defeat the Luftwaffe at the earliest possible date. ULTRA intercepts gave the Allies a partial picture of the Luftwaffe’s deployment in multiple theaters. However, the intercepts didn’t give exact locations of German air units once they reached a theater of operations. So while the Allies knew roughly where the Luftwaffe was deployed, they did not know how the Germans dispersed their planes.¹⁶⁵

The strategic bomber offensive forced Germany to make major strategic and operational decisions with their air and ground forces to meet the new threat in the west. In 1942, the Luftwaffe deployed 60% of its planes in Russia. By July 1943, the Germans shifted the majority of their forces back west. Only 36% of the German Air Force faced the Russians. Overall, the Germans only contributed 21% of their fighters to maintain air superiority over the Red Air Force.¹⁶⁶ The situation became so bad in July that Hitler recalled the 3rd Fighter Wing from Russia, JG 27 from Italy, and JG 51 from Sardinia to defend the Reich.¹⁶⁷ Luftwaffe pilot and general, Adolph Galland, recommended that the periphery defense, used up to this point in the war, needed to be abandoned. In his opinion, German fighters were no longer able to mass effectively against the bomber stream.¹⁶⁸ The Luftwaffe was now spread thin by committing significant numbers of aircraft to halt the Soviet advances in the east and to hold back the Allies

¹⁶⁴ *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences*, 12.

¹⁶⁵ John F. Kreis, 147.

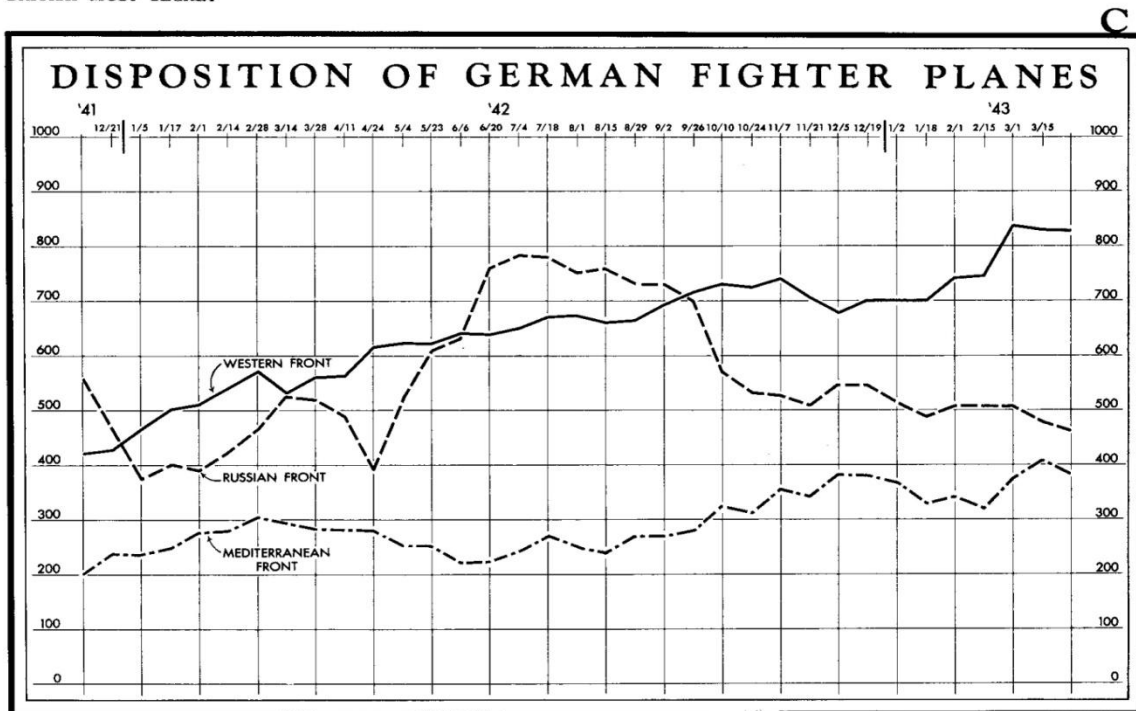
¹⁶⁶ Rober S. Ehlers Jr., 155.

¹⁶⁷ Samuel W. Mitcham Jr., *Men of the Luftwaffe*, (Novata, California: Presidio Press, 1988), 227.

¹⁶⁸ Adolph Galland, *The First and the Last: The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe: 1939-1945*, trans Mervyn Savill (New York: Ballantine Books, 1954), 185.

in the Mediterranean. There were just not enough fighters to cover the entirety of Western Europe and contribute aircraft to support ground operations in other theaters. During this period, German ground defenses improved significantly. Hitler cut down on the navy's building program to build tanks, anti-tank guns, and anti-aircraft artillery.¹⁶⁹ Compared to 1943, German flak strength increased dramatically in the west. On the Western Front, Axis heavy flak batteries increased by 68% and in Germany by 65%. However, on the Russian Front there was no increase in flak batteries from 1942.¹⁷⁰

U. S. SECRET
BRITISH MOST SECRET



Allied estimates of the disposition of the German Air Force presented at the Trident Conference May 15, 1943. [Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences, Trident Conference, May 1943, CD-ROM (MilSpecManuals.com, 2011), Chart C.]

¹⁶⁹ Edward B. Westerman, *Flak: German Anti-Aircraft Defenses, 1914-1945*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 189.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 192.

The authors of the “Eaker Plan” proposed that German aircraft and engine production needed to be targeted immediately.¹⁷¹ They believed that the destruction of the German Air Force could be completed in their four phase plan. Realizing that they did not possess the current bomber force necessary to penetrate into Germany, planners called for a buildup of the 8th Air Force until July 1943. U.S. bomber strength needed to reach 800 aircraft prior to conducting deep penetration operations over Germany.¹⁷² The “Eaker Plan” stated that the second phase of operations required 1,192 planes. The writers projected that the bomber force would be large enough to fight their way into Germany and carry out raids against the German aircraft industry. More importantly, from July to October 1943, the 8th Air Force was to gain air superiority and defeat the Luftwaffe.¹⁷³ In the following two phases the Americans wanted to continue the build up and target other industries, while maintaining air superiority.¹⁷⁴ The proposal required a large commitment of heavy and medium bombers to accomplish its mission. By June 1943 it required over 900 heavy and 200 medium bombers. At the end of the year, the “Eaker Plan” called for 1,700 heavies and 600 mediums.¹⁷⁵ That number didn’t include replacement bombers and crews. These numbers showed how many bombers he expected to have operational in the theater. According to past experience, less than half of the aircraft allocated to the 8th Air Force would be able to fly due to combat attrition.¹⁷⁶

Two other targets mentioned in correlation with the air superiority phase were Schweinfurt and Ploesti. The “Eaker Plan” stated that an attack on Ploesti needed to be coordinated with a strategic attack in the west against oil refineries in the Ruhr. Planners felt that

¹⁷¹ *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences*, 15.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 17.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 18.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 20.

an attack against Ploesti alone could not cause enough damage to the Reich's oil reserves.¹⁷⁷

Schweinfurt was a different case. The Allies believed that a successful surprise attack against Schweinfurt might go a long way to ending the war. The committee considered Schweinfurt to be a one raid effort. The Allies needed to succeed in the first raid, because a second might be more costly.¹⁷⁸

After the committee finished the plan, key participants in the bomber offensive listened to the proposal. On April 8, Hansell briefed Andrews on the "Eaker Plan." He quickly approved it and gave Eaker orders to fly to Washington to make the pitch.¹⁷⁹ Portal looked over the rough draft and gave it his full support. He encouraged a quick approval of the proposed operation. "The German Fighter strength is increasing and every week's delay will make the task more difficult to accomplish."¹⁸⁰ The C.C.S. enclosed Portal's letter as an attachment to the Eaker proposal.¹⁸¹ The 8th Air Force's commander wrote that the plan received universal approval from all of the principal commanders in the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. in England.¹⁸²

Prior to the proposed plan's presentation in Washington two missions made air power advocates and the C.C.S. optimistic about their chances of success. The raids against Vegesack and Bremen were used as Exhibit A and B during the Trident Conference. To the U.S.A.A.F. this proved that the "Eaker Plan" would work. "[I]n the case of the submarine yards at VEGESACK and the Focke Wulf plant at BREMEN, a long step has already been taken toward completion of the plan."¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 19.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ James Parton, 253.

¹⁸⁰ Charles Portal to Henry Arnold, April 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸¹ *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences*, 7-8.

¹⁸² Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, April 16, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸³ *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences*, 19.

The attack on the submarine plant at Vegesack further entrenched the Americans into the daylight bombing strategy. On March 18, 1943, the 8th Air Force struck Vegesack with 73 B-17s and 24 B-24s.¹⁸⁴ The 8th Air Force claimed 97% accuracy on the raid and post strike photos looked promising.¹⁸⁵ The raid created quite a stir amongst air power advocates. Harris, Portal, and Sir Archibald Sinclair called the raid “a magnificent piece of work.”¹⁸⁶ Portal went on to say that Vegesack showed critics that daylight precision bombing could be achieved.¹⁸⁷ At a press conference Eaker said that, “We have proved beyond doubt that our bombers can penetrate in daylight to any target in Germany.”¹⁸⁸

German opposition was noted too. The Luftwaffe sent very few FW-190s against the formation and opposition fighters appeared to be inexperienced.¹⁸⁹ Eaker believed that this proved daylight raids could penetrate German air space successfully. “It shows conclusively that if we had the force to keep the fighters and other defenses dispersed, we should go in with little loss.”¹⁹⁰ At this point in time, Eaker’s assessment was on target. It was during this period of the air offensive against Germany that the Luftwaffe began abandoning their outer defenses. Therefore, future raids against Germany faced a more concentrated fighter force that Eaker could not have predicted when he and Hansell wrote the plan.

The raid provided a perfect chance for Eaker to lodge complaints about receiving too few aircraft. Eaker wrote Spaatz, “We are more certain than ever that we are in the right place if we only had sufficient force.”¹⁹¹ Eaker wrote to Arnold about his concerns over three heavy groups that were originally slated for the 8th Air Force. He worried that no news equaled a diversion. “I

¹⁸⁴ James Parton, 243.

¹⁸⁵ Ira Eaker to Carl Spaatz, March 19, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸⁶ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, March 19, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid

¹⁸⁸ Donald Miller, 120.

¹⁸⁹ Ira Eaker to Carl Spaatz, March 19, 1943.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

hope you will not let that fellow George Kenney, or that other fellow Tooey Spaatz, steal any of our heavy bombers!”¹⁹² Back at the press conference, Eaker said all that the USAAF needed to do was “concentrate enough bombers for this vital task.”¹⁹³

While the accuracy and minimum losses made Arnold happy, he still reserved judgment on the success of the raid. He wrote that President Roosevelt and others were impressed with the mission’s success.¹⁹⁴ However his compliment came with a warning. “It is very natural for many people in high places to note that so many bombs were dropped on a given occasion by units of your striking force. The very natural next question is, what was destroyed?”¹⁹⁵ Arnold concluded by requesting more information and bi-monthly reports on the bombing campaign from England. One scholar argues that the U.S. exaggerated the raid’s impact on the U-boat industry.^{196 197}

The second raid that stood out to planners was the attack on Bremen in April. The 8th Air Force suffered its first real setback during the 1943 bombing campaign. A force of 107 heavy bombers from the 1st Bomb Wing dropped 265.5 tons of ordnance on the city.¹⁹⁸ The Germans exacted a heavy toll on the Americans. As many as 16 heavy bombers were lost and 39 damaged during the raid.¹⁹⁹ According to the document presented in Washington by Eaker, the Americans believed the Bremen raid to be a success in spite of the high casualties.²⁰⁰ The 8th Air Force’s commanding officer found out about the raid during his visit to Washington.²⁰¹ Missions like these and high losses led Eaker to write one of his boldest letters to Arnold. He told his superior that daylight bombing was an illusion and the 8th Air Force badly needed bombers. He called the

¹⁹² Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, March 19, 1943.

¹⁹³ Donald Miller, 120.

¹⁹⁴ Henry Arnold to Ira Eaker, April 10, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Donald Miller, 120.

¹⁹⁸ Roger Anthony Freeman, *The Mighty Eighth War Diary*, (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1990), 54.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences*, 19.

²⁰¹ James Parton, 253.

daylight offensive “an unkept promise.”²⁰² Eaker was right. The 1st Combat Wing conducted most of the strategic bombing raids during the pre POINTBLANK period.²⁰³ This placed a great amount of strain on a handful of bomb groups that lacked a sufficient amount of crews and planes.

Despite the fact that Eaker was correct in his assessment, he failed to see the bigger picture. Operations in the Mediterranean were eating up resources. This doesn't mean Eaker deserved blame for trying to divert aircraft to his theater. All generals try to acquire the necessary resources for their units. It appears that neither Eaker nor Arnold spoke the same language. The campaigns in the Pacific and Mediterranean required bombers. Clearly areas where ground campaigns were underway received priority. This meant diverting heavies designated for the 8th to the N.A.A.F. A lack of communication or understanding developed between numerous air theater commanders. Throughout the entire 1943 offensive Eaker failed to grasp that his operations were secondary to that of the Allied campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy.

After his arrival in Washington, Eaker prepared to present his plan to the J.C.S. One thing Eaker never failed at was pitching an air offensive to the C.C.S. or J.C.S. Back at Casablanca, he convinced Churchill to withdraw his objection about daylight bombing. During this briefing he impressed the Joint Chiefs of Staff (J.C.S.) and successfully convinced them of the need to commit more resources to the bomber campaign. They agreed to the operational plan that he and Hansell wrote up. Expected opposition from the navy did not materialize. The plan included some provisions to get it past non air power advocates vying for airplanes. Submarine facilities

²⁰² Donald Miller, 139-140.

²⁰³ Donald Miller, 140.

remained a high priority to get the approval of naval personnel.²⁰⁴ Keeping the submarine bases as a priority was a crucial factor in garnishing their support. Arnold expressed the overall opinion of the briefing in his last letter to Andrews. "... [H]is [Eaker] presentation was superb. As far as I can see everyone on the Joint Chiefs of Staff is convinced the idea is sound."²⁰⁵

General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff U.S.A., understood the briefing and situation facing American air power globally better than any other person in the room at the time. He was very direct with Arnold after the meeting. "Should we accept without qualification the full estimates?"²⁰⁶ His memo continued with several questions about the allocation of bombers that Eaker asked for in his briefing and plan. Marshall asked Arnold if the bomber offensive should eat up as many resources as briefed. He reminded the Chief of the U.S.A.A.F. that operations were ongoing in the Pacific as well as the Mediterranean Theaters.²⁰⁷ Despite the warnings Marshall did support the plan now that a cross-channel invasion was not going to happen after Operation HUSKY. He now believed the C.B.O. was the only way to strike at Axis held Europe.²⁰⁸

The same debate over aircraft allocation came up during the meetings of the C.C.S. at Washington during the TRIDENT Conference in May 1943. According to British sources, "One of the motives behind the plan had been to give the 8th Air Force 'a definite program of operations' and thereby to strengthen General Arnold's hand in his attempts to secure reinforcements and reduce diversions."²⁰⁹ Eaker claimed the only requirement for success was

²⁰⁴ James Parton, 252-253.

²⁰⁵ Henry Arnold to Frank Andrews, May 2, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁶ George C. Marshall to Henry Arnold, April 30, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *Endeavor, Part 4 The Combined Bomber Offensive: The Role of Bomber Command volume II of The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1961), 17.

the reinforcement of his plan.²¹⁰ Portal felt that the Eaker's proposal faced strong opposition in Washington and attempted to rally British efforts to support the plan.²¹¹

What really sold this plan to the combined staffs was its emphasis on using the CBO as a part of the preparation for the land invasion of France. "During the last phase-early 1944-the entire force should be used to sustain the effect already produced and to pave the way for a combined operation on the Continent."²¹² While Eaker briefed the J.C.S. on the proposed offensive, the debate over a cross-channel invasion of Europe neared its end. The C.C.S. agreed to launch an invasion of Europe at the TRIDENT Conference, which coincided with the approval of the "Eaker Plan."

The British, who were opposed to an invasion of France, agreed that the plan laid out by Eaker must be put into action as soon as possible. Both the Americans and British feared that the ever increasing German fighter strength posed a direct threat to the future of land operations in either the Mediterranean or the Northwest European Theaters.²¹³ Portal argued that if the American proposal succeeded the British would benefit from German fighters suffering high losses in attritional battles over Europe.²¹⁴ According to the British perspective, "it was clear that the task of the combined bomber offensive, as indicated in the 'Eaker Plan', which was first in importance, was an attack upon the German fighter force."²¹⁵

The R.A.F. did not whole heartedly support the American plan for the C.B.O. In fact, they had no intention of working in a combined effort with the Americans. The "Eaker Plan" was viewed as an American plan and not British. As a result, significant edits were made to the plan. The changes reflected those advocated by Harris. One major revision was a paragraph added that

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid, 19.

²¹² *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences*, 18.

²¹³ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, 373.

²¹⁴ Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, 19.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 21.

stated that the plan did not reflect the major effort of the R.A.F. bombing offensive. Instead, targets bombed by the Americans “should be complemented and completed by R.A.F. bombing surrounding the industrial area at night.”²¹⁶ What this meant was that Harris was under no obligation to support American daylight attacks, but it was recommended that he support them if the Americans bombed the same industrial systems. In short, Harris and Eaker were under no obligation to support one another. Theoretically, Harris could be forced to support 8th Air Force operations, something that more assertive leaders were able to achieve in 1944. On June 3, 1943 a draft of the Combined Bomber Offensive plan was sent to Harris. Now under the code name Operation POINTBLANK, this new directive placed Portal in command of the offensive from England.²¹⁷

The Allies issued the POINTBLANK Directive on June 10, 1943.²¹⁸ What was originally drawn up as an American plan to secure bombers and destroy precision targets, transformed into a plan full of loopholes and escape clauses. Strategically, nothing changed from Casablanca to POINTBLANK. This plan largely reflected the concerns of the Allied air force commanders involved. It wasn’t drawn up so that both air forces could exploit their strengths against the Luftwaffe. Instead, it was a series of compromises that were agreed to so that the C.B.O. could be carried out. The first compromise was getting the 8th Air Force more heavy bombers. Eaker wanted more aircraft and POINTBLANK secured thousands for his air force. The American way of bombing argued that an air force needed to strike precision targets during the daylight. Prior to the war Eaker and Arnold further advanced this vision of striking the central nervous system of an enemy nation’s industry. The C.O.A. report reflected the economic centers that the Americans

²¹⁶ Ibid, 23-24.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 27.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 28.

thought were most vital to the German war economy. After the directive was issued they were allowed to bomb these objectives.

A Combined Bomber Offensive could have still been achieved in spite of the fact that the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. were bombing at separate times. However, Harris wisely snuck loopholes into the plan to preserve the R.A.F.'s style of bombing. According to Hansell, the objectives laid out in the Casablanca Directive were open to two significantly different interpretations. The R.A.F. interpreted the document to mean that they were to focus their bombing efforts on attacking the morale of the German people. They emphasized the "undermining of the morale of the German people" portion of the document. For the British, it was through these means that they would bomb Germany to a point where "their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened."²¹⁹ This opposed the viewpoint of the Americans who felt that Germany should be weakened through "the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial, and economic system."²²⁰ They took these ideas and placed them into the operational plan, POINTBLANK. This shows that despite the fact that the debate had ended over daylight bombing, the two air forces were clearly not working together to increase effectiveness. It seems apparent that neither air force intended to give ground on what they considered to be the principal objectives in the C.B.O. This can be seen by looking at the loopholes that Hansell pointed out. Therefore, how could "round-the-clock bombing" have been considered a joint strategy? Even when they bombed the same cities, they did not attack the same targets. With a lack of concentration on a specific objective, the idea of bombing by night and day appeared to be more of an excuse for splitting strategies rather than an actual cohesive plan. These statements by Hansell after the war indicate that nothing changed since Casablanca. Like at that conference,

²¹⁹ Haywood Hansell, *The Strategic Air War against Germany and Japan: A Memoir*. (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History United States Air Force, 1986), 78.

²²⁰ Haywood Hansell, *The Strategic Air War against Germany and Japan: A Memoir*, 78-79.

Harris and Eaker were given permission to select targets they felt were necessary as long as they were on the POINTBLANK approved list.²²¹ According to one historian, the “high-sounding rhetoric about ‘round the clock’ bombing, each side gave the other one the freedom to go its own way, and the resulting bombing directive was an agreement to disagree.”²²² These loopholes provided Eaker and Harris the opportunity to go their own ways and make the tactical decisions that they saw best with regards to their own air force.²²³ These out clauses allowed Harris to divert from POINTBLANK objectives as long as he was attacking strategic targets.

The British should not be judged too harshly for this skillful move. The Americans pulled a similar maneuver earlier that year. At Casablanca, Eaker proposed the use of a loose command structure under Portal. He stated that he preferred to receive his orders from Portal and that the command, as then constructed, worked for the best. “In my opinion the directives received by the RAF Bomber Command from the Chief of Air Staff [Portal], RAF, have always been sound and have always left sufficient latitude to the Commander for the selection of individual targets.”²²⁴ One historian argues that “the real power was in the hands of Harris and Eaker” when it came to the C.B.O.²²⁵ Another author wrote that the Allies should not have been surprised that Harris knowingly refused to follow the Casablanca Directive.²²⁶ One British air power historian wrote, “Portal’s position was anomalous; through his own Air Staff he could theoretically issue guidelines for the prosecution of the offensive, but he never chose or saw any need to do so.” This historian states that there was never any coordination established between Bomber Command

²²¹ Denis Richards, *Portal of Hungerford: The Life of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Portal of Hungerford KG, GCB, OM, SO, MC*. (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1977), 311.

²²² Tami Davis Biddle, 215.

²²³ Ibid

²²⁴ Ira Eaker, “Why Not Give Our Bombers and the RAF’s Bombers the Same Strategic Objective: The Same Targets?” (paper, Casablanca, Morocco, January 21, 1943).

²²⁵ Tami Davis Biddle, 215.

²²⁶ Anthony Verrier, *The Bomber Offensive: The Exciting Saga of the American and British Strategic Bomber Offensive Against Germany from 1939-1945*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1968), 160.

and the 8th Air Force.²²⁷ Setting up such a weak command structure, where subordinates could do whatever they wanted, led each air force commander to believe he was the main theater of operations. This issue came up during the planning of the C.B.O. and its implementation. These power coalition politics led to a disorganized command that was reflected in Operation POINTBLANK.

The only thing the two sides seemed to agree upon was the importance of destroying German fighters. However, this was only assigned as an intermediate objective. It was believed that the Americans could knock this force out of the sky using the self defending capabilities of their heavy bombers. The raid on Vegesack suggested that all of this was possible. At the time, many Americans believed that the German fighters were inferior to their heavy bombers.

In short, Operation POINTBLANK said “yes” to every request made by Eaker and Harris. The C.B.O. continued to pursue competing agendas. By agreeing to implement opposing methods and strategies in the plan, POINTBLANK became a worthless piece of paper. Instead of being an actual plan it was more of a set of guidelines than a blueprint for air superiority. What it succeeded in doing was to identify the threat that German fighters posed. Finally, it made the 8th Air Force the premier US air command in the world.

The plan for the C.B.O. established in 1943 was open to interpretation and not an actual plan. By writing this bombing policy the two allies agreed to avoid an argument over bombing doctrine again. Depending on who was in charge of the C.B.O., POINTBLANK could be interpreted as strictly or loosely as that officer wanted it to be. In 1943, that man was Air Marshal Charles Portal, who was chosen, because he didn't try to rein in Eaker or Harris. Later, during the 1944 campaign, Eisenhower was unofficially put in charge of the C.B.O. He interpreted the POINTBLANK Directive more strictly than Portal. As a result, cooperation that

²²⁷ Ibid, 183.

was seldom seen in the 1943 offensive was achieved during 1944. So why did they choose this plan? It appeased everyone at the table, but left open the possibility of a more strictly guided bomber offensive later in the war. POINTBLANK was a reflection of bombing policy rather than a way to win the war through bombing.

CHAPTER 4

FROM LIMITED SUCCESS TO FAILURE: THE OPENING BLOWS OF THE CBO

The summer of 1943 signaled an intensification in the air war. In cinematic fashion, Germany finished repositioning its fighters as the two allies set into motion their disconnected air campaign. The Combined Bomber Offensive was officially under way. The overall results were negative. The accelerated tempo of operations and rising casualties forced several major changes in the C.B.O. that were critical in 1944 and 1945. Lessons learned from this stage of the air war had a lasting effect on the course of future operations.

The first lesson that the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. gleaned from summer 1943 operations was that cities could be wiped off the face of the earth. While Hamburg was a rare success, the attack demonstrated the potential of terror raids. These startling types of attacks became routine in 1945. The success of Hamburg proved to the R.A.F. the legitimacy of city bombing.

Secondly, American bombers proved incapable of winning air superiority over Europe. At Casablanca and in the POINTBLANK Directive the Americans maintained that their self-defending Fortresses and Liberators were capable of fending off German attacks by massed single engine fighters. Unacceptable combat losses disproved this hypothesis by the end of August. The heavy machine guns employed by the bombers were unable to eliminate the Luftwaffe.

Finally, the organizational structure of the Allied air forces led to problems in conducting and coordinating operations. Multiple commands pursued their own objectives. In numerous cases they competed against each other for resources and officers. POINTBLANK provided little direction and summer operations proved that. The lack of cooperation between the air forces

suggested that changes might be necessary. In the first stages of the C.B.O. there were numerous warning signs that showed the offensive was going down the wrong path. Plans do not usually last once contact with the enemy is made. The POINTBLANK directive did not alter once operations began in June 1943, however it was clear that changes were needed as operations from June to August 1943 led to increased combat losses, but inconclusive results.

One of the more successful points during the Allied bombing campaign was the joint city bombing effort against Hamburg. The mission was the most successful combined air action. In a sense, it proved that strategic bombing worked. American casualties up to this point had been moderate, because they did not have a large enough force to launch continuous operations against Germany. The British on the other hand, experienced a steady stream of losses from operations over Germany. To alleviate losses they created a new method of avoiding German resistance. One of these new ideas called for the release of thin metal strips that would deceive German radar operators. This device, code named WINDOW, decreased casualties amongst Bomber Command.²²⁸ Prior to the employment of WINDOW, Bomber Command's casualties totaled 16.2% per mission. After the strips were introduced losses reduced to 10.7%.²²⁹ The British planned to employ this new weapon as a means to fool German night fighters for their next set of operations against Germany. In a rare joint operation, the 8th Air Force and Bomber Command set out to destroy a German city. The Hamburg blitz displayed the ultimate example of the bombing policy the Americans and British sought to implement during their campaign.

²²⁸ Max Hastings, *Bomber Command: The Myths and Reality of the Strategic Bombing Offensive 1939-1945*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1979), 231-232.

²²⁹ Randall T. Wakelam, *The Science of Bombing: Operational Research in RAF Bomber Command*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 139.

Bomber Command planned to attack with 791 planes in Operation GOMORRAH.²³⁰ This first major use of WINDOW was a key to the night operation. Previously, the secret weapon was only tested on smaller missions. The 8th Air Force decided to support Bomber Command in its attacks on Hamburg. Both included the raid in a series of strikes against the Reich called “Blitz Week.”²³¹ In this series of operations, the Americans planned to run rings around German fighters and flak. They hoped to exhaust and outmaneuver German defenses during the operation and in the process score a major victory.

Blitz Week began on July 24, 1943. During the day, American heavy bombers flew missions to Norway.²³² That evening Bomber Command struck Hamburg. WINDOW allowed them to reach the target with minimal casualties. R.A.F. bombers were unusually accurate for a night raid. Out of 728 bombers, 306 placed their bombs within three miles of the target area in pitch darkness.²³³ The raid resulted in the loss of only 12 bombers. That was reason enough for Bomber Command to celebrate Hamburg. However, the raid and future missions were more effective than any previous attempts at nighttime attacks. On July 25, the Americans followed up with a raid of their own against the city. The U.S. 1st Combat Wing received orders to bomb the diesel-engine factory at Hamburg. They were unable to locate the factory, because of poor weather. Instead, they struck the shipyards around Hamburg and other targets of opportunity.²³⁴ The Americans dropped 195.9 tons of bombs on the city, most of which were incendiaries.²³⁵ That evening the R.A.F. pushed their attacks into the heart of the German city.²³⁶ On July 27,

²³⁰ Max Hastings, 233.

²³¹ Donald Miller, *Masters of the Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany*, (New York, New York: Simon and Schusters, 2006), 180.

²³² Eric Hammel, *The Road to Big Week: The Struggle for Daylight Air Supremacy Over Western Europe, July 1942, February 1944*, (Pacifica, California: Pacifica Military History, 2009), 248.

²³³ Max Hastings, 233.

²³⁴ Eric Hammel, 249.

²³⁵ Roger Anthony Freeman, *The Mighty Eighth War Diary*, (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1990), 78.

²³⁶ Donald Miller, 180.

Harris decided to go for the kill. The city was already a flaming wreck. This decision proved fatal for Hamburg. At 1:00 AM over 700 British bombers dropped incendiaries on the city.²³⁷

The effect was catastrophic. During the raids, Hamburg was experiencing a drought, creating perfect conditions for what ensued.²³⁸ The Allies dropped a total of 1.7 million bombs onto the city, one for each resident.²³⁹ The first fire storm of the war engulfed Hamburg. Wind speeds reached 150 mph and temperatures 1,000 degrees Celsius.^{240 241} Thousands of Germans died in the blaze and even more suffocated. According to one German report, “It was as though they had been placed in a crematorium, which was indeed what each shelter proved to be.”²⁴² In previous air raids common sense and conventional wisdom dictated that civilians should seek the safety of bomb shelters. However, this was exactly the wrong thing to do during a raid involving incendiaries. The fire storm drained oxygen from these basements and shelters killing civilians that sought their protection.²⁴³ The city lost between 30,000 and 50,000 inhabitants from the blitz. Another one million residents became refugees.²⁴⁴

The raid was a success. For the first time the two coalition air forces struck the same target and effectively destroyed it. One historian argues that Hamburg disproved the “round-the-clock bombing” strategy, because the Americans struggled to identify their targets in the smoke

²³⁷ Ibid. See also Mark Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars: A New history of Bombing Command in World War II*, (New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 100-101.

²³⁸ John Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War*. (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 158-159.

²³⁹ Jorg Friedrich, *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 166.

²⁴⁰ Donald Miller, 181.

²⁴¹ Max Hastings, 235.

²⁴² Donald Miller, 181.

²⁴³ Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 153.

²⁴⁴ Max Hastings, *Bomber Command: The Myths and Reality of the Strategic Bombing Offensive 1939-1945*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1979), 235. Donald Miller, *Masters of the Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany*, (New York, New York: Simon and Schusters, 2006), 184. John Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War*. (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 159.

from the R.A.F.'s missions.²⁴⁵ While the technical aspect proved problematic, since bombardiers struggled to identify targets through the smoke, Hamburg proved that two air forces could work together in unison, something the Allies failed to accomplish up until this point in the war. Years later, the two countries found more effective ways to incorporate "round-the-clock bombing."

In spite of the significance of the first combined and coordinated attack between the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F., the two forces decided to move in opposing directions. Blitz Week and Operation GOMORRAH were costly partial victories. The blitz cost the R.A.F. 86 aircraft.²⁴⁶ Eaker's command lost 87 bombers in the attacks against Hamburg, Kiel, and Hannover. As a result, no missions were flown from July 30 to August 12, 1943.²⁴⁷ Eaker waited and rested his exhausted units in preparation for future strikes against the Reich.

The campaign changed drastically after Blitz Week. The Americans decided to focus on choke points listed in the POINTBLANK Directive. The attacks against these nodes were not properly coordinated. It was believed that a decisive strike against any one of these industries might bring the whole German economy down. The air offensive envisioned by the Americans began with an attack on the oil refineries at Ploesti.

Prior to Ploesti, the Americans proposed two very different raids to win the war. A mission that Eaker and Spaatz discussed during the latter part of July was the feasibility of a coordinated strike against the German aircraft factories. The plan went by the name STILETTO.²⁴⁸ It focused on the destruction of the ME-109 plants at Regensburg and Wiener Neustadt.²⁴⁹ There was considerable debate over the possibility of conducting this raid. What

²⁴⁵ Donald Miller, 183-184.

²⁴⁶ Max Hastings, 235.

²⁴⁷ Edward Jablonski, *Double Strike: The Epic Air Raids on Regensburg-Schweinfurt, August 17, 1943*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 23-24.

²⁴⁸ Ira Eaker to Carl Spaatz, July 19, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁴⁹ Alan J. Levin, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*. (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 99.

started as a plan to strike at the two German aircraft factories, turned into a debate over the allocation of resources and targeting issues.

At the same time STILETTO was being debated, another big operation was under consideration. This was an air strike against the oil refineries at Ploesti, code named TIDALWAVE. One of Arnold's staff officers, Colonel Jacob E. Smart, planned the August 1, 1943 mission to Ploesti.²⁵⁰ Originally, Smart came up with the codename SOAPSUDS, but an intervention by Churchill quickly replaced it with the more appropriate TIDALWAVE.²⁵¹ This proposal focused on a different theater of operations. An attack on Ploesti required a massive commitment in B-24s. For this operation three 8th Air Force B-24 groups were diverted to the Mediterranean Theater to strengthen the attack and participate in other actions against the Axis.²⁵² The goal was to strike a decisive blow against an important choke point that produced 60% of Hitler's crude oil.²⁵³

Eaker's main concern with the Ploesti mission was the diversion of heavy bombers from his theater of operations. In response to this newest threat Eaker wrote Arnold addressing this issue of target and theater priority.

We are firmly convinced that the employment of our heavy bombers against German industry is the greatest contribution we can make to the war. We do not have, or have in prospect, any more force than is required for the accomplishment of this task. That, and that alone, is why we take the attitude we do toward any attractive plan which will divert our force from that task.²⁵⁴

Eaker also opposed the idea of a strike against the Romanian oil fields. He suggested that "either the first attack not be made , or that it will cause enough sufficient disruption so that we

²⁵⁰ Jay A. Stout, *Fortress Ploesti: The Campaign to Destroy Hitler's Oil*, (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2011), 29.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 31.

²⁵² Ira Eaker to Carl Spaatz July 19, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁵³ Donald Miller, 186.

²⁵⁴ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, July 12, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

can let the matter drop there for the time being and get after this German fighter production.”²⁵⁵ His reasoning was that one mission against the Ploesti oil fields should be enough to do the job, while the remaining bombers could be diverted back to his theater. Eaker wanted the 8th Air Force to launch missions involving massive numbers of heavy bombers into Germany. He argued that his command must be the main air effort for this next phase of the operations. Without these resources the general felt that he was unable to carry out the proposed attacks against Schweinfurt and Regensburg. After looking at the planned double strike, it became clear to Eaker that he needed every heavy bomber available in the theater.

This was a major fight in the larger debate on the course of operations in the Mediterranean Theater. The disagreement over resources between Eisenhower and Eaker carried over into operations. Eisenhower wanted more heavy bombers to support land operations in Italy. This took planes away that Arnold tabbed for the 8th Air Force. On July 19 Marshall ordered Eisenhower to release the three B-24 groups that had been lent to his command by Eaker.²⁵⁶ Eisenhower was both opposed to Eaker’s plan against the attack on Axis aircraft production and Spaatz’s proposal to bomb Ploesti.²⁵⁷ After Marshall’s order, Spaatz and Eisenhower agreed to launch the attack on Ploesti. Once the mission was completed, then the bombers would be sent back to England.²⁵⁸ Eisenhower now argued that TIDALWAVE should not be abandoned and that it could be attacked after the STILETTO operation.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, it appeared that Eisenhower’s stance on Ploesti changed dramatically. He now believed that the B-24 groups needed to be kept in his theater to maintain consistent air operations against the

²⁵⁵ Ira Eaker to Carl Spaatz, July 19, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁵⁶ Wilbur H. Morrison, *Fortress Without a Roof: The Allied Bombing of the Third Reich*. (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 165.

²⁵⁷ Wilbur H. Morrison, 165.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, Alfred D. Chandler Jr., Stephen E. Ambrose, Joseph P. Hobbs, Edwin Alan Thompson, Elizabeth F. Smith, eds., vol 2., (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins Press), 1269-1270.

refineries. “They [Spaatz and Tedder] feel that if we should fail to follow up, we will probably lose much of the value of the first attack.”²⁶⁰ Prior to the Ploesti mission, the three bomb groups flew several hundred sorties in support of the Sicily invasion.²⁶¹ To make matters worse for Eaker, Eisenhower and Spaatz wanted more than just the three groups that the 8th Air Force loaned. Eisenhower requested four additional B-17 groups from Eaker to supplement the B-24s for the landings at Salerno.²⁶² He further pressed the issue of weakening the 8th Air Force by suggesting that Eaker personally lead the 8th Air Force units in Italy.²⁶³ He wrote, “I personally suggest that if this matter is favorably considered, General Eaker should, if possible, lead his formations here in person in order that there may be no misapprehension as to the temporary and specific nature of the reinforcement. Our estimate is that the size of the reinforcement should be four full groups of B-17’s.”²⁶⁴ Eisenhower had little intention of releasing the groups he just acquired. That August he wrote, “In view of the critical situation in Italy we consider that the B-24 force which carried out the attack on TIDALWAVE and which is now awaiting suitable weather conditions for attack on JUGGLER coordinated with B-17 force from 8th Bomber Command should, immediately on completion of JUGGLER, be concentrated on targets in Italy.”²⁶⁵ General Jacob Devers, who had taken over command of E.T.O.U.S.A. after Frank Andrews died, protested the order in a message to Marshall. Marshall ultimately decided in favor of Devers and Eaker. The move made Eisenhower furious. Marshall rejected his request and

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 1270.

²⁶¹ Richard G. Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force history, 1993), 261.

²⁶² Ibid, 263.

²⁶³ Wilbur H. Morrison, 166-167.

²⁶⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, Alfred D. Chandler Jr., Stephen E. Ambrose, Joseph P. Hobbs, Edwin Alan Thompson, Elizabeth F. Smith, eds., vol 2., (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins Press), 1296.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 1330. Originally Operation STILETTO was designed to destroy both Regensburg and Wiener Neustadt. Eventually Regensburg and Schweinfurt became the 8th Air Force’s objectives. The Americans drew up Operation JUGGLER to deal specifically with Wiener Neustadt. Bombers from Italy struck JUGGLER on August 13 without the support of the 8th Air Force.

ordered the three groups to return shortly after the Ploesti mission.²⁶⁶ This decision cost the Italian bombing campaign seven strategic bomber groups.

While the haggling over resources paints Eisenhower in a bad light, both he and Eaker needed the bombers. The question was which theater of operations required the heavies more. It seems clear that Marshall's decision was a reflection on future American policy. Italy was ultimately a sideshow. Eisenhower's persistent requests for bombers proved to have a great deal of basis during the September landings at Salerno. During the operation, Allied bombers played a pivotal role in pushing back German counter-attacks. Beginning on September 14 and throughout Wednesday September 15, the American heavy bombers flew over one thousand sorties against German positions and supply lines.²⁶⁷ On September 14, the Americans called upon 187 B-25s, 166 B-26s, and 170 B-17s to help stem tide of the German offensive along the Salerno plain.²⁶⁸

In spite of Eaker's protests, the Ploesti raid was going to happen. The oil refineries provided a political and strategic target for American bombers. Smart's plan called for a low level attack by unescorted B-24s from Benghazi. The strike force consisted of all five of the B-24 groups in the E.T.O. Two bomb groups, the 44th and 93rd, came from Eaker's command.²⁶⁹ Throughout the first half of July the B-24s supported the invasion of Sicily.²⁷⁰ From July 19 to August 1, 1943 they were withdrawn from battle and prepared for the attack on Ploesti.²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Wilbur H. Morrison, 167.

²⁶⁷ Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943*, (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 230.

²⁶⁸ Defense Department., Center of Military History, *Salerno: Operations From the Beaches to the Volturno, 9 September-6 October 1943*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990), 74.

²⁶⁹ Jay A. Stout, 32.

²⁷⁰ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943 volume 5 of The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Chicago, Illinois: The University Press of Chicago), 479.

²⁷¹ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 479.

On August 1, 1943, the mission got underway. Crews observed radio silence and flew at tree top level.²⁷² By flying below 800 feet bombers would be able to stay under Axis radar and achieve greater accuracy.²⁷³ The altitudes did present a series of problems. Low level flying increased the amount of guns capable of targeting planes. Instead of just facing the big flak guns, B-24 crews now faced small arms, and short ranged anti-aircraft fire. Also, the B-24s provided an easier target at tree top level. The Germans augmented their anti-aircraft guns with 250 fighters surrounding the vital oil production facilities.²⁷⁴ All of these issues came second to the ability to fly at low altitude. The operation provided a new difficulty for pilots, because the ground passed by faster than at high altitudes. Not only were pilots challenged by the low altitudes, but they had to maintain formation in conditions considered to be dangerous even without the stresses of combat.²⁷⁵ Lieutenant General Lewis Brereton, commander in chief of the 9th Air Force based in North Africa, said that he knew the B-24 was not suited for this low-level attack. He believed the chance to catch the Axis off guard and destroy Ploesti outweighed the risk of taking high casualties.²⁷⁶

The attack went horribly wrong despite the massive amount of planning prior to the mission. A major obstacle that the Americans faced was a lack of reconnaissance done on the target area. According to intelligence reports, Ploesti was lightly defended by Romanian slaves.²⁷⁷ However, officers still warned their air crews that casualties could reach as high as

²⁷² Donald Miller, 187.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 190-191.

²⁷⁵ Jay A. Stout, 114.

²⁷⁶ Lewis H. Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries: The War in the Air in the Pacific, Middle East, and Europe, 3 October 1941-8 May 1945*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1946), 192.

²⁷⁷ Donald Miller, 187.

50%.²⁷⁸ In fact, German air defenses included over 300 anti-aircraft guns and more than 200 German and Romanian fighters.²⁷⁹

As the mission got under way the formation began to split up, because of a disagreement between two of the group commanders. Colonel Keith K. Compton flew the lead plane on this mission. His group, the 376th Bomb Group, led the attack. Following him was Lt. Colonel Addison E. Baker's 93rd Bomb Group. After the 93rd was the 98th, under the command of Colonel John R. "Killer" Kane. Following Kane's group was the 44th and 389th bomb groups.²⁸⁰ Kane and strike leader Compton disagreed over air speeds during the mission. Compton wanted to move as fast as possible, but Kane, who was uneasy about flying at low altitude, argued for a slower, more conservative attack. As a result, Kane slowed his formation and created separation that further exposed the formation.²⁸¹

To make matters worse, Compton took a wrong turn and led the two groups following him of course. Other air crews attempted to radio the leader to warn him of the mistake.²⁸² This caused the formation to break and opened them up to attacks from the air and on the ground. Without the protection of high altitude or a tight formation the Axis defenses made easy work of the vulnerable B-24s. Of the 178 Liberators that were dispatched only 33 were fit for action the next day.²⁸³ Altogether, 54 planes were lost in the raid. Over 30% of the strike force was destroyed. Of these, 40 were lost in combat, 7 landed in Turkey, and 7 more crashed.²⁸⁴ Combat

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 189.

²⁷⁹ Jay A. Stout, 51.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 35-36.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 46.

²⁸² Donald Miller, 191.

²⁸³ Ibid, 192.

²⁸⁴ Jay A. Stout, 76.

crews losses included 310 killed, 130 wounded, and over 100 airmen became prisoners of war.²⁸⁵ The mission effectively put the 3 heavy bomber groups out of action for the foreseeable future.

While Ploesti may be significant in terms of casualties and oil, the real importance of the raid lay in its impact on the future of the C.B.O. This raid showed the flawed concept of POINTBLANK. The Americans did not possess enough heavy bombers to effectively follow up the attack against the oil refineries and there was no coordination to hone in on this objective. During the mission to Romania, Eaker and his planners developed a plan to strike at and destroy the German aircraft industry. Both Ploesti and the aircraft industry were considered priority targets in the POINTBLANK plan, but it was the U.S.A.A.F. that failed to agree on where their forces should concentrate, not the R.A.F.

Ploesti directly impacted the C.B.O. from England. Two days after the catastrophe, Eaker sent a letter to Spaatz requesting the status of the 8th Air Force groups involved in the mission. His main concern was whether or not they would be able to participate in his planned dual strike on Schweinfurt and Regensburg.²⁸⁶ Any possibility of using these B-24 groups for the upcoming attack was now out of the question. In spite of the losses suffered by the Liberators over Romania, Eaker attempted to bring back the B-24s for the upcoming Schweinfurt-Regensburg mission. He now planned to use these groups to train new B-24 personnel arriving in England and for the upcoming attacks on the German aircraft industry.²⁸⁷

The final plan for the raid against the German aircraft industry was a high risk-high reward operation. The Schweinfurt-Regensburg operation was in actuality two separate missions. One force, under the command of Colonel Curtis LeMay, was to attack the aircraft factories at Regensburg and serve as a diversion for the main effort against Schweinfurt. After LeMay's

²⁸⁵ Donald Miller, 192.

²⁸⁶ Ira Eaker to Carl Spaatz August 3, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁸⁷ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, August 12, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

units hit their target, they were to escape over the Alps to North Africa. While the first wave struck Regensburg, Brigadier General Robert Williams was to turn his planes away from the Regensburg formation and hit Schweinfurt. The first attack served as a decoy and expected to take on the majority of the fighters. As a result, Williams expected to face less opposition in his attack against the ball bearing facilities.²⁸⁸

Schweinfurt provided a tempting target for U.S. strategic forces. The three plants around the town produced 57% of Germany's antifriction bearings.²⁸⁹ The other objective, Regensburg, was responsible for the production of German aircraft. This plant produced 30% of the single engine fighters that were being built. The Americans hoped to cripple the Luftwaffe and German industry in one massive blow.²⁹⁰ In March 1943, Eaker's chief of plans, Colonel Richard Hughes, argued that, "A curtailment of bearing production would seriously interrupt the output of aircraft."²⁹¹ Both industrial systems were primary objectives in the POINTBLANK Directive.

A number of variables went into this mission. One crucial aspect was the timing of the attack. The first set of bombers needed to take off ten minutes before the second strike force.²⁹² This was meant to push the German fighters into a corner. If successful, German fighters would limit their attacks to one formation. Due to the unpredictable English weather, it was difficult to determine when conditions might permit such a large scale and complex mission. Another serious concern for the 8th Air Force was whether or not they had enough aircraft to accomplish the mission. This was why Eaker requested the return of his bomb groups. Instead, the mission was launched without reinforcements from the United States or the Mediterranean Theater.

²⁸⁸ James Parton, 299

²⁸⁹ Donald Miller, 185

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 186.

²⁹¹ John F. Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog: Intelligence and Army Air Forces Operations in World War II*, (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996), 201.

²⁹² Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 685.

Eaker committed around 350 heavy bombers to the dual raid.²⁹³ The generals were not the only ones deeply concerned about the upcoming raid. In one briefing crews were told, “Three months after they get their target, there won’t be an engine operating in the whole country.” This was met with a great deal of skepticism by the airmen.²⁹⁴

One lesson learned after the Ploesti raid, was the need for experienced officers to lead out complex and dangerous missions. The first division of bombers was under the command of LeMay, who had already gained a reputation as a successful group and wing commander. The second group was under the command of Williams, another highly experienced officer. With the recent blunders from the Ploesti raid still fresh in his mind, Eaker was not going to allow this mission to be sidetracked by poor tactical leadership. Williams and LeMay, at the time, were considered to be the top two combat leaders in the 8th Air Force.²⁹⁵

As the two forces prepared to take off on August 17, they faced a weather delay that postponed the mission for several hours. This forced Frederick Anderson, commander of 8th Bomber Command, into a corner. His choices consisted of scrubbing the mission, sending out both forces in spite of the poor weather, or to send out the first wave and hold back the second until the weather cleared.²⁹⁶ With the pressure Arnold had been applying during the previous months, it was hard to call off a mission of this size and scope. Even Anderson’s superior officer, Eaker, was intimately involved in the planning of this mission. Finally, strategic bomber forces in England waited most of August for the weather to clear for this mission. It was going to take a lot to call it off, even in the face of more weather delays. An added factor that went into Anderson’s decision making process was operational security. The 8th Air Force went to great

²⁹³ Roger Anthony Freeman, *The Mighty Eighth War Diary*, (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1990), 89-90.

²⁹⁴ Donald Miller, 193.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 195.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 195-196.

lengths to keep this mission a secret. The lead crews for the upcoming mission prepared separately from the regular crews. Soon, their absence was going to be noted.²⁹⁷ Time was working against Anderson as he contemplated his options. On August 9, 1943 the crews were put on alert and by the next morning weather had postponed the mission again.²⁹⁸ For Anderson, time had run out. On August 17, he ordered the Regensburg force into the air. At the same time he stood down the planes going to Schweinfurt until things cleared.

Under the circumstances, he made what was considered at the time to be the right decision. It was impossible to cancel the mission without facing significant criticism from both Eaker and Arnold. Arnold and his associates in Washington had become frustrated with the lack of success in Europe. Arnold and Eaker operated under the belief that if these crucial economic choke points were hit, the bomber campaign would strike a killing blow to the German war effort. This belief that just one raid could disable the economy put added pressure on the crews and officers who flew and planned the mission. In this case it was both the faith in the bomber and weight of the mission that most affected Anderson's decision to send out the first wave unprotected. Anderson elected to send out LeMay's command, but held back most of the fighters and the remaining bombers until the weather improved.²⁹⁹ The revised plan meant that the main strike force of 230 bombers needed to receive the more protection, because LeMay's diversion was compromised.³⁰⁰

As the planes bound for Regensburg prepared to take off there was a lot of tension. As crews gathered their equipment there was more than the usual fighting over ammunition. According to one witness, "There were almost riots over ammunition. Gunners were always

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 192-193.

²⁹⁸ Thomas Coffey, 232.

²⁹⁹ Donald Miller, 196.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 195-196.

trying to sneak extra ammunition aboard, and given the chance, would even steal some from the next aircraft if they could get at it before its crew came out.”³⁰¹ LeMay’s mission started smoothly. His bombers broke through the clouds at 7:30 AM.³⁰² Since the Regensburg force was more experienced at instrumental flying, there was less trouble during assembly.³⁰³ This was another reason Anderson elected to go ahead with the Regensburg raid.

The bombers faced little opposition as they crossed the North Sea into Holland. At 10:25 near Woensdrecht, Belgium German fighters made their first pass at the 100th Bomb Group.³⁰⁴ As more German fighters began to ascend for their attacks, crew members could only sit, watch, and wait for the next series of attacks. Lt. Colonel Beirne Lay, who later co-authored the script of Twelve O’clock High, described the ominous situation that the 100th found itself in as the tail end of the attack. “At the sight of all of these fighters, I had the distinct feeling of being trapped.”³⁰⁵

Over Eupen, Belgium the few escorts assigned to LeMay’s bombers pulled away and headed for home.³⁰⁶ The bombers now faced the brunt of the German air assaults on their own. German interceptors made their first passes at the 95th and 100th Bomb Groups.³⁰⁷ The American crews put up their own wall of fire to combat the Luftwaffe’s attacks. According to some of the fighter pilots, one pass through the formations was like “flying through a garden sprinkler.”³⁰⁸ These two groups were the most exposed. German fighter tactics focused on the front and rear

³⁰¹ Martin Middlebrook, 74.

³⁰² Donald Miller, 196.

³⁰³ Martin Middlebrook, 77.

³⁰⁴ Martin Middlebrook, 105.

³⁰⁵ Beirne Lay Jr. to Neil P. Harding, “Regensburg Crews 17 Aug 43- Page 4,” 100th Bomb Group, <http://www.100thbg.com/mainpages/history/history4/regensburg04.htm> (accessed July 1, 2010).

³⁰⁶ Donald Miller, 197.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Martin Middlebrook, 107.

of the bomber stream. These two areas provided the least resistance to German fighters. These first passes against the unescorted heavies claimed 6 bombers.³⁰⁹

After an hour and a half of constant fighting, the bombers finally arrived over Regensburg and dropped their payloads.³¹⁰ As the last of the heavies finished their run, the long formation made for North Africa and safety. For the remainder of the mission, LeMay and his crews fought a running fight for their lives. Fighters pursued the groups as far as the Alps. Many Germans reached the end of their fuel capacity and turned back.³¹¹ The Regensburg force may have suffered more casualties had they returned directly back to England instead of retreating to North Africa.³¹² Afterwards, they rearmed and refueled for what would be their second battle of the day. LeMay's force dispatched 146 heavies in the attack on Regensburg. Of that force, 24 aircraft failed to return and 10 more were scrapped due to excessive battle damage. A total of 16.4 % of the attacking force was lost in this diversion. The 100th Bomb Group suffered the highest percentage of casualties. Out of the 21 dispatched only 12 returned.³¹³

At 11:18 in the morning, the second wave of bombers made their way from England to Schweinfurt.³¹⁴ Weather delays caused another serious problem for the Schweinfurt force. Besides losing the diversion provided by LeMay's bombers, the attack plan against Schweinfurt also needed to be altered. Since it was later in the day, the bombers were now forced to approach the ball bearing factory from a different angle that exposed them to more anti-aircraft fire.³¹⁵

³⁰⁹ Donald Miller, 197.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 198.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 686.

³¹³ Martin Middlebrook, 280. The ten scrapped bombers were not included in the total combat losses. The percentage of total planes that were disabled is 23.28%; See also, Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 848.

³¹⁴ Martin Middlebrook, 174.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 175.

While the Schweinfurt force was forming over England, the remainder of the German fighter command began mobilizing and reassembling to intercept the second strike. Due to their inability to successfully coordinate the attacks, the Germans received ample time to prepare for the next phase of the operation. Luftwaffe commanders assembled a larger force of fighters to attack the returning B-17s from LeMay's command. However, once the Germans realized this formation of bombers was not returning, they began to prepare for the next wave of heavies. Instead of facing less fighters, the Schweinfurt force now had to contend with fresh German reinforcements plus units that were supposed to be off chasing the first strike. The timing of the operation, which was so crucial in the planning stages, now thrown off by the weather, placed the 8th Air Force in a precarious situation. The Luftwaffe could not have planned the trap that fell into their laps.

As the Regensburg force limped towards North Africa, Williams' bombers penetrated Axis air space. Escorted by P-47s and Spitfires, the long formation made its way across Belgium suffering few losses. As the fighters reached the end of their fuel, the main German fighter effort began to climb into position. The moment the escorts turned for home, the main battle began. Lieutenant William Wheeler remarked, "The thing I remember most vividly is that the Germans turned and started making their initial attack almost exactly at the same time as the P-47s above us made their 180-degree turn to return to their base."³¹⁶ Above Eupen, the Germans sprang their trap. Without protection, the American bombers faced constant German attacks. Their pilots used multiple avenues of attack on the bomber formation. Using proven techniques, the Luftwaffe shot down scores of heavy bombers in head on passes.³¹⁷ From the Dutch coast to the

³¹⁶ Ibid, 192.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 195.

initial point (I.P. point) a total of 24 B-17s were lost. In a span of 27 minutes, German aircraft downed 21 of the 24 “Flying Fortresses” claimed that day.³¹⁸

After making their run on the target, the B-17s returned through Belgium and to England. In a desperate attempt to support the shot up formation, Colonel Hubert Zemke ordered his P-47 pilots to hold onto their fuel tanks once in the combat zone. This allowed him to push his fighters past Eupen, Belgium. By keeping their drop tanks, Zemke’s fighters intercepted and shot down several German planes attempting to pursue the bombers back through Belgium.³¹⁹ The danger was obvious. With their exposed fuel tanks still attached to the wings, German fighters did not have to score as many hits on the American P-47s to bring them down. One well placed round might have easily done the job.

As the formation limped back home, many of the crews knew that long range escort fighters were not a luxury, but a necessity. The myth of the self defending bomber was blown apart in skies above Schweinfurt and Regensburg on August 17, 1943. The losses were disturbing to say the least. Of the 3,150 combat crews that flew to either the aircraft factory or the ball bearing plant, 559 were lost or unaccounted for.³²⁰ Of the 315 planes dispatched, 250 were either missing or damaged.³²¹ The 8th Air Force’s self defending bombers proved incapable of carrying out their assigned mission.

While the C.B.O.’s 1943 campaign seemed to start off on the right foot with the bombing of Hamburg, it was clearly falling apart weeks after its greatest success. The competing objectives laid out in Operation POINTBLANK first affected the Americans. The debate over the allocation of aircraft to the Ploesti mission meant that Eaker was forced to weaken his

³¹⁸ Ibid, 216-217.

³¹⁹ Donald Miller, 199.

³²⁰ Roger Anthony Freeman, *The Mighty Eighth War Diary*, (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1990), 89-90; See also, Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 848.

³²¹ Ibid.

striking force, while he prepared to conduct a massive strike against the German aircraft industry. Spaatz and Eisenhower cannot be blamed for wanting the planes, because Ploesti, like Schweinfurt and Regensburg, was a primary target. Without a clear objective, the American part of the offensive became decentralized and inefficient.

Secondly, the idea that the B-17s and B-24s were capable of defending themselves inside Germany had no basis after the losses suffered in August. Mounting casualties throughout the summer showed that the American heavy bombers needed long range fighters. The future of the C.B.O. depended on resolving these two critical issues. Without long range escort fighters, losses against high priority targets would continue to mount. The first phase of operations showed that drastic changes needed to be made in order to conduct a more efficient bombing campaign. The question now became, could the Americans make the necessary changes before the end of the bombing season?

CHAPTER 5

THE INCOMPLETE OFFENSIVE: THE END OF THE 1943 BOMBING CAMPAIGN

In the summer of 1943, the 8th Air Force participated in the costliest fighting of the European air war. For the Germans and Americans it appeared that the Combined Bomber Offensive had reached its culmination point. Both sides were proven wrong. In October 1943, the 8th Air Force attempted another failed blitz of the Reich. The planned knockout blow against the German war economy became one of the most disastrous periods of the air war. It surpassed anything veteran combat crews experienced. This series of missions became known as “Black Week;” its final mission, a second raid against the ball bearing factory at Schweinfurt, gained notoriety as “Black Thursday.” The 8th Air Force’s perception of the battle was an immediate victory; however it was nothing short of a disaster. It appeared that American bombers destroyed 67% of Germany’s ball bearing production, but this was one of several false intelligence indicators that altered the American perception of their campaign.³²²

The 8th Air Force suffered unsustainable losses. Schweinfurt cost the Americans 60 heavy bombers. Crews still recovering from intense action before the Schweinfurt mission neared their breaking point. These last desperate missions against the German war economy appeared as victories to those in charge of the Combined Bomber Offensive (C.B.O.). A month later the offensive’s architect, Ira Eaker, reckoned it a defeat. Why were the generals unanimously claiming victory, and at the same time losing entire bomb groups?

At the end of August 1943, the 8th Air Force suffered a massive defeat. Two issues needed to be resolved. First, the Boeing B-17 “Flying Fortress” and Consolidated B-24 “Liberator” proved to be no match for the single engine fighters they faced. The Luftwaffe shot

³²² Donald Miller, *Masters of the Air: America’s Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany*, (New York, New York: Simon and Schusters, 2006), 211.

down unescorted bombers in mass. Arnold, called for more long range fighters arguing, “Operations over Germany conducted here the past several weeks indicate definitely that we must provide long range fighters to accompany daylight bombardment missions.”³²³ During the August 1943 dual raid on Schweinfurt and Regensburg, three bomb groups within the 8th Air Force lost 16% of their bombers. Of the 376 bombers deployed, 60 failed to return. 70 heavies were unable to attack their primary targets.³²⁴ Losses suffered in August were so debilitating that Arnold cabled for 217 B-17s to arrive that September.³²⁵

Eaker and Arnold ought to have learned from these missions that the Luftwaffe still packed a powerful punch. The idea that the German Air Force had or would soon collapse was little more than wishful thinking. German fighters had suffered significant losses of their own, but were far from being knocked out of the fight. This misperception of Luftwaffe capacity influenced senior decision making. On September 26 Arnold wrote, “We obviously must send the maximum number of airplanes against targets within Germany, now that the German Air power appears to be at a critical stage.”³²⁶ Along with Arnold, LeMay shared this same enthusiasm. He stated, “I think everybody is now convinced that the four-engine bombers are here to stay, and can’t be stopped.”³²⁷ This optimism is very startling given that the 8th Air Force had just suffered one of its most costly months of the war.

There are two explanations for this optimism preceding the heavy engagements of October. Fighter claims by the 8th Air Force more than likely influenced the false perception that

³²³ Henry Arnold to George C. Marshall, September 3, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³²⁴ Martin Middlebrook, *The Schweinfurt-Regensburg Mission: American Raids on 17 August 1943*, (London: Cassell and Co, 2000), 280.

³²⁵ Henry Arnold to George C. Marshall, September 3, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³²⁶ Henry Arnold to Jacob Devers and Ira Eaker, September 26, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³²⁷ Warren Kozak, *LeMay: The Life and Wars of Curtis LeMay*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing Company Inc., 2009), 146.

the Americans were winning in the air war over Germany. Luftwaffe General Adolph Galland later wrote that the American combat crews often exaggerated their fighter claims. He stated that more accurate intelligence was not available to the Americans until after the war. According to Galland, the German fighter defenses actually strengthened during this period.³²⁸ One scholar wrote that while all exaggerated enemy aircraft claims during the war, the Americans were masters of that particular art. “Many senior officers realized that the claims were inflated.”³²⁹ Nonetheless, they still justified the success of their missions with these numbers throughout the 1943 campaign.

There may be another source for this false optimism. Leading up to the landings at Salerno the Allies sought a way to keep Germany from diverting reinforcements from France to the Italian peninsula. The Allies devised a deception operation to keep those reinforcements in France that went by the name of STARKEY. STARKEY’s primary objective was to force Hitler to divert resources and troops to France that his forces in Italy desperately needed. The ultimate goal of the operation was to pin Wehrmacht forces down in France. Allied planners intended to use this feint to force the Germans to commit their ground and air forces to repel the invasion. The secondary objective of the deception operation was to bring on a large daylight air battle. The Americans hoped to engage the Luftwaffe within range of their escort fighters. In the process of supporting the operation, American fighters intended to strike a massive blow to the German fighters. Both the Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht refused to be baited. From August 25 to September 9 the 8th Air Force carried out missions in support of STARKEY.³³⁰ One author notes that the operation was a complete failure. “This elaborate but immature deception plan was an

³²⁸ Adolph Galland, *The First and the Last: The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe: 1939-1945*, trans Mervyn Savill (New York: Ballantine Books, 1954), 185.

³²⁹ Martin Middlebrook, 285.

³³⁰ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943 volume 5 of The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Chicago, Illinois: The University Press of Chicago), 689

unmitigated disaster.³³¹ He states that the Germans maintained their focus on the Mediterranean Theater. The same day STARKEY went into action, the Allies landed at Salerno in Operation AVALANCHE.³³² In spite of the fact that some in the Wehrmacht were concerned about the possibility of an invasion, the Axis decided maintained their current strategic stance until the Allies actually invaded.³³³ A major reason the Axis showed a lack of interest towards the deception lay in the shortage of landing vessels allocated to the operation. The number of landing craft involved did not warrant a response by the Germans; only an alert.³³⁴

It was largely believed that STARKEY was irrelevant except for the fact that the operation diverted American bombers away from POINTBLANK objectives.³³⁵ However, the leaders of the American bomber offensive believed that the Luftwaffe did not react, not because they chose not to react, but because the German fighters were incapable of reacting. Instead of viewing their previous operations as failures, they now operated under the illusion that only a few more missions might secure victory in the attritional battles above Europe. Eaker's analysis of the diversion speaks to this false optimism that STARKEY reinforced:

They refused to attack our bombardment whenever it was supported by our fighters. We sent as many as seventy five (75) heavy bombers, supported by one group of our fighters, into areas where enemy fighters were known to outnumber our force by three or four to one, with the result indicated. The enemy could have concentrated his fighters and overwhelmed and overpowered one of these air task forces of ours. This they did not do. This indicates a breakdown in German air command or communication, or both, in the areas in which operations were conducted yesterday. It also indicates a firm determination on the part of Germany to conserve air strength, and it is a further indication that he is rapidly concentrating his hard pressed and worn fighter forces about

³³¹ Michael I. Handel, *War, Strategy, and Intelligence*, Totawa, (NJ: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1989), 406.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Frances Harry Hinley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations, Volume III*, (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 5.

³³⁴ Mary Kathryn Barbier, *D-Day Deception: Operation Fortitude and the Normandy Invasion*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.,2007), 8.

³³⁵ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 689.

the heart of Germany, and will refuse to defend occupied territory if this endangers his aviation.³³⁶

A day later, Eaker wrote Arnold that the German reaction during STARKEY “should be carefully considered. It may have tremendous implications.”³³⁷ Inside the American air power circles it did. They were already preparing to launch a series of heavy attacks designed to destroy the Luftwaffe and the German aircraft industry. This helped the Allies see what they wanted to see, which was that the German fighter command was near a complete collapse.

In late August, Arnold made an inspection tour of all U.S.A.A.F. forces in England. He concluded that the 8th Air Force lacked the B-17s necessary “to maintain operations of past strength.”³³⁸ Put another way, even though the bombers were getting through, they were unable to strike the decisive blow imagined by Eaker. Due to the significant losses suffered by the strategic bomber forces in August, pressure was taken off of the Germans. The Americans began to build up for another heavy dose of bombing against Germany. Eaker’s air force became a priority, because time and good weather was running out to gain air superiority. The Americans were desperately hoping to finally take command of the skies above Germany by October.

Even though Arnold was shifting the priority of the air war to Eaker, the main focus of was still in the Mediterranean Theater. More aircraft were diverted to support Eisenhower in Italy. Although plainly aware of this, Eaker continued to operate as if his was the main air effort in the E.T.O. In a letter to Carl Spaatz, the general tried to poach several of his commanders for assignments in England. Most notable among these was General Elwood Quesada. In fact, Eaker was so sure that he was going to get Quesada to run the 8th Air Force’s fighter command that he

³³⁶ Ira Eaker to George C. Marshall and Henry Arnold, September 10, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress Washington D.C.

³³⁷ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, September 11, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³³⁸ Henry Arnold to George C. Marshall, September 3, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

told Spaatz that Quesada needed to arrive in England within the next two weeks.³³⁹ Spaatz replied that he could not release Quesada for the foreseeable future.³⁴⁰

Worse, Arnold and Eaker were soon informed that more fighters and bombers were to be diverted to the Italian Campaign. Eisenhower requested that more bombers be sent from the 8th Air Force to be placed under his command. This request like previous ones angered the Combined Bomber Offensive commanders. Devers wrote Eisenhower telling him that these groups were essential to future operations of 8th Air Force.³⁴¹ Further, Eaker was asked to plan for missions in northern Italy to support Eisenhower. Eaker complied, suggesting that 140 of his longest range bombers be sent as soon as possible to hit the targets that Eisenhower designated.³⁴²

Eaker received another bombshell when he discovered the possibility of basing a large number of heavies in Italy. He was adamantly opposed to this proposal. In his five page rebuttal he made numerous arguments against the bases, ranging from weather to the logistical capabilities of the Foggia airfields. However, the heart of his argument was that heavy bombers were intended for strategic bombing. He pointed out that, “Heavy bombers operating out of Northwest Africa have, on more than 95% of their missions, engaged not in strategic bombing but in tactical bombing, supporting armies and navies in land campaigns.”³⁴³ While all of the other arguments are valid, his lecture about the role of the heavy bomber explains why Eaker opposed any transfer of aircraft to Italy. The general thought that commanders in the Mediterranean Theater were losing focus on what he believed was the real purpose of U.S. air power, which was the strategic bombing of Germany.

³³⁹ Ira Eaker to Carl Spaatz, September 11, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁴⁰ Carl Spaatz to Ira Eaker, September 18, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁴¹ Jacob Devers to Dwight Eisenhower, September 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁴² Ira Eaker to Jacob Devers, September 16, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁴³ Ira Eaker to Chief of Staff ETOUSA, October 1, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

More evidence of a lack of cooperation between commanding officers can be found in the relationship between the R.A.F. and 8th Air Force. Harris received the majority of the incendiaries for a badly needed follow up raid against Schweinfurt. Instead they were used against the German rocket factory, Peenemunde, in a precision bombing mission.³⁴⁴ Peenemunde proved that Bomber Command was capable of carrying out precision raids. After the successful mission nothing changed. Portal continued to argue that attacks on German cities were ineffective and Harris continued to ignore requests to properly support the Combined Bomber Offensive.³⁴⁵ Two members of Portal's staff, Commodore Sydney Bufton and Group Captain Richard Morley, disagreed with Harris's assessment that Schweinfurt could not be bombed at night. On six different occasions they attempted to convince Harris of the importance of hitting Schweinfurt in support of the 8th Air Force. Harris was finally convinced of the necessity of hitting Pointblank targets, in February of 1944.³⁴⁶ For months the British Air Staff tried to convince Harris of the necessity of supporting the American attacks on the ball bearing facilities at Schweinfurt.³⁴⁷ Nonetheless, he remained against POINTBLANK and made very little effort to attack its objectives. In fact, he was adamantly against anything that did not center on city bombing.³⁴⁸

Operationally, September was a time of resting and regrouping for the 8th Air Force. From the time of the double strike on Schweinfurt and Regensburg till September 27, the 8th Air

³⁴⁴ James Parton, *"Air Force Spoken Here" General Ira Eaker & the Command of the Air.* (Bethesda, Maryland: Adler & Adler Publishers Inc., 1986), 311.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Rober S. Ehlers Jr., *Targeting the Third Reich: Air Intelligence and the Allied Bombing Campaigns.*(Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 173.

³⁴⁷ Randall Hansen, *Fire and Fury: The Allied Bombing of Germany 1942-1945,* (Canada: Random House, 2009), 128.

³⁴⁸ Tami Davis Biddle, "Bombing by the Square Yard: Sir Arthur Harris at War, 1941-1945," *The International History Review* vol. 21 no. 3 (Sept. 1999) 641-642.

Force's 303d Bomb Group only flew one mission into Germany.³⁴⁹ That mission targeted the ball bearings facility at Stuttgart and was unsuccessful largely due to the poor visibility over the target.³⁵⁰ General Robert Travis who accompanied the 303rd commented, "If the weather had been better, it would have been a perfect mission. Despite that, we had to circle the target several times."³⁵¹ What Travis failed to mention was that many of the bombers were unable to drop their loads on the primary and only a handful of B-17s were able to return to their primary airfield at Molesworth.³⁵² Eleven B-17s were forced down into the English Channel because they ran out of fuel.³⁵³

Losses suffered in August kept Eaker from flying more missions into Germany during September. Necessity, not choice, forced Eaker to keep his bombers within range of his fighters. The 8th Air Force's own recovery efforts were remarkable. U.S. bombers carried out multiple operations within range of their P-47s despite the costly summer. American air power pushed the majority of Hitler's fighters back on two fronts. However, POINTBLANK planned for the destruction of the Luftwaffe, not its withdrawal to Germany.³⁵⁴ To the Americans, additional pressure on the Luftwaffe became vital to the success of the C.B.O. They needed to fly deeper into Germany to attack targets that both sides thought were vital to the Luftwaffe's survival. Part of the build up after August included the transfer of long range fighters to England to support POINTBLANK. U.S. planners felt they were in a position to take another calculated risk. Once

³⁴⁹303rd Bomb Group, "364 Combat Missions of the 303rd Bomb Group (H)," 303rd Bomb Group, <http://www.303rdbg.com/missions.html> [accessed October 2010].

³⁵⁰ Donald Miller, 206.

³⁵¹303rd Bomb Group, "303rd Bomb Group Combat Mission No. 67," 303rd Bomb Group, <http://www.303rdbg.com/missionreports/067.pdf> [accessed October 2010].

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Donald Miller, 207.

³⁵⁴ *Joint Combined Chiefs of Staff: World War II Inter-Allied Conferences, Trident Conference, May 1943*, CD-ROM (MilSpecManuals.com, 2011), 18.

again American bombers were going into Germany unescorted. All expected the casualties to be high, but the possibility existed that the German war economy might suffer a significant setback.

After a month of playing it safe, Eaker decided to launch his next major bombing blitz. Arnold pressed Eaker to launch maximum effort raids in upcoming operations against Germany. He expressed some doubt in Eaker's ability to put an adequate fighting force in the air. "We are under constant pressure to explain why we do not use massive flights of aircraft against a target now that we have the sufficient planes and pilots in sufficient quantity to put over five hundred planes in the air. What is the answer?"³⁵⁵ As September came to a close, Arnold pushed Eaker for more action against Germany.³⁵⁶

The period from October 8 to October 14 defined the 1943 campaign. Germany's first cities to come under attack in this latest blitz were Bremen and Vegesack. Of the 399 bombers that were dispatched 30 bombers were lost and 26 received major flak damage.³⁵⁷ The 100th Bomb Group lost 8 of the 15 B-17s they sent to Bremen.³⁵⁸ Major Shayler of the 303rd Bomb Group observed the heavy flak from his position above the low groups: "We were lucky enough to fly above most of it, but it must have been hell for the boys flying below us."³⁵⁹ The Americans lost 30 heavy bombers during the raid.³⁶⁰

The next day the 8th Air Force dispatched 352 heavies to hit Gdynia, Marienburg and Anklam.³⁶¹ The results of this mission were mixed. After looking at the strike photos of the Marienburg raid, Air Marshal Charles Portal, commanding officer in charge of the C.B.O., wrote

³⁵⁵ Henry Arnold to Jacob Devers and Ira Eaker, September 26, 1943.

³⁵⁶ Thomas M. Coffey, 240.

³⁵⁷ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 695.

³⁵⁸ Thomas M. Coffey, 258.

³⁵⁹ 303rd Bomb Group, "303rd Bomb Group Combat Mission No. 75," 303rd Bomb Group, <http://www.303rdbg.com/missionreports/075.pdf> [accessed October 2010].

³⁶⁰ Thomas M. Coffey, 253.

³⁶¹ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 696.

to Churchill that, “It was a magnificent attack.”³⁶² Eaker called it “the classic example of precision bombing.”³⁶³ At Anklam the bombers came under heavy attack after bombing the target. General Robert F. Travis, who had just taken over command 41st Combat Wing in August, claimed, “I never saw so many fighters in my life.”³⁶⁴ Out of the 106 bombers that attacked Anklam 18 were lost.³⁶⁵ The B-24s dispatched to bomb Gdynia missed their target completely.³⁶⁶ Throughout the entire day of October 9, the 8th Air Force claimed that they destroyed 122 German aircraft. In actuality, German combat losses were 14 fighters destroyed and 9 damaged.³⁶⁷

Following the previous two raids, the Americans once again launched another massive strike into Germany. 274 B-17s made their way to Münster. Once again the “Bloody” 100th became the focus of massed German fighter attacks. As the group reached the I.P. point, 200 German fighters attacked the formation in head on passes.³⁶⁸ The 100th was the low group for the mission to Münster, which placed them in the most exposed position in the formation.³⁶⁹ Captain Ellis Scripture, of the 95th Bomb Group described the attack, “They were everywhere, attacking from every direction, every level. It was similar to fighting off an aroused swarm of bees.”³⁷⁰ Captain Rodney Snow recalled that German fighters attacked them in multiple wave attacks. “I thought that the enemy had successfully shot down all of the 100th Bomb Group.”³⁷¹ After the 100th was destroyed, the 390th and 95th Bomb Groups became the focal point of the Luftwaffe’s

³⁶² Thomas M. Coffey, 253.

³⁶³ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 697.

³⁶⁴ 303rd Bomb Group, “303rd Bomb Group Combat Mission No. 76,” 303rd Bomb Group, <http://www.303rdbg.com/missionreports/076.pdf> [accessed October 2010].

³⁶⁵ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 697.

³⁶⁶ Thomas M. Coffey, 253.

³⁶⁷ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds., 699.

³⁶⁸ Donald Miller, 15.

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 17.

³⁷⁰ Ian L. Hawkins ed., *B-17s Over Berlin: Personal Stories From the 95th Bomb Group (H)*, (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 1995), 69.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

attacks.³⁷² 5 heavies of the 95th succumbed to fighter attacks during the mission.³⁷³ The remnants of the 13th Combat Wing grouped together in a single formation on the return trip home.³⁷⁴

Captain Snow landed at Thorpe Abbots, where the 100th ground personnel anxiously awaited news of their B-17s. Snow told the colonel, “I’m sorry to say this, sir, but I don’t think that you will have anyone from your group home this day.”³⁷⁵ In fact only one plane from the group returned home. Lt. Rosie Rosenthal and his crew became the only members of the 100th Bomb Group to survive the mission to Münster. 12 of the 13 planes dispatched failed to return home.³⁷⁶ The 8th Air Force lost 30 planes on the Munster strike and 88 in two days.³⁷⁷ Harry Crosby, a navigator in the 100th Bomb Group, recalled his reaction after learning that his unit was wiped out. “I drop the phone. I can’t believe it. Brady, Ham, Davy and Hoerr, all gone...Every crew who went through training with me in the States is gone.”³⁷⁸ The mission resulted in the loss of 29 of the 119 planes that took part in the mission.³⁷⁹ American bombers and fighters claimed 183 German fighters that day. However, the Germans lost only 22 fighters.³⁸⁰

While air staffs in both Britain and the United States hailed these raids as victories, it appeared as though they were not paying enough attention to their own casualties. Eaker received a congratulatory message from Arnold that showed he was still not satisfied with the results of the previous raids. “We did not miss the point in your congratulatory message about

³⁷² Ian L. Hawkins ed., 70.

³⁷³ Ian L. Hawkins ed., 75.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ian L. Hawkins ed., 76.

³⁷⁶ Donald Miller, 208.

³⁷⁷ Thomas M. Coffey, 253.

³⁷⁸ Harry H. Crosby, *A Wing and a Prayer: the “Bloody 100th” Bomb Group of the US Eighth Air Force in Action Over Europe in World War II*, (New York: iUniverse.com, Inc.,2000), 168.

³⁷⁹ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate eds.,699.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

going after the fighter factories and the German Air Force.”³⁸¹ Eaker planned to return to Schweinfurt. He and Arnold felt that the ball bearings were not sufficiently addressed in August. His command was waiting for the weather to clear to launch the second strike against Schweinfurt.

Eaker spent this brief rest period attempting to coordinate a combined bombing effort against the German aircraft facilities. He was trying to get the R.A.F. on board with supporting night missions against German aircraft production factories.³⁸² In the opinion of many Americans this was a major reason why the 8th Air Force was forced to return to Schweinfurt. The first raid was incomplete and Arthur Harris diverted aircraft away from supporting Eaker. Harris carried on with what he felt were the more important targets in the Casablanca Directive and never fully supported Eaker. Without RAF support, the Americans were once again forced to attack Schweinfurt alone.

On October 14, 1943, briefing rooms across England became depressing scenes as group commanders informed their crews of what lay ahead for the day’s mission. Deputy Commander of the 40th Combat Wing, Colonel Budd Peaslee, recalled that after they unveiled the target one crew member in the briefing room said, “Sonofabitch! And this was my last mission.”³⁸³ At breakfast, Leonard Herman knew that they were going to have a rough mission. Crews received fresh eggs and to veterans like Herman that was a sign that they were in for a long day.³⁸⁴ Norman Sampson remembered thinking that German preparation made this Schweinfurt mission

³⁸¹ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, October 12, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁸² Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, October 12, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁸³ Thomas M. Coffey, 259.

³⁸⁴ Ian L. Hawkins ed., 91.

worse.³⁸⁵ In some cases morale dropped so low that men returned to their barracks to put on their best uniform in case they died or became a P.O.W.³⁸⁶

As the aircraft began forming up over England, things began to go wrong. Multiple groups were out of formation or lost. Colonel Peaslee, who led the attack, could not find 305th Bomb Group. The group's assignment in the formation placed them in the low position for the 40th Combat Wing.³⁸⁷ The group never caught up with their assigned wing and forced Peaslee to relinquish lead to the 1st Combat Wing.³⁸⁸ Oddly enough, Peaslee found the 305th flying the low group for the 1st Combat Wing.³⁸⁹

Attacks on the bombers began as soon as the escort fighters turned back near the Belgian-German border. The original plan called for longer ranged P-38s to clear the way to Schweinfurt, but too few arrived in time to be used in the attack.³⁹⁰ The 1st Air Division flew lead for the mission and suffered the brunt of the attacks going in. The Germans' first assault was so large and intense that gunners no longer tried to conserve their ammunition.³⁹¹ Merlin Miller recalled after the mission that they had no more than 150 rounds left in his airplane.³⁹² The attacks reached a crescendo at which point crews quit calling out fighters and just kept firing their guns.³⁹³ Lt. Colonel Louis Rohr stated that so many B-17s were going down that they were unable to keep track.³⁹⁴ German pilots employed numerous tactics to bring down American bombers, from head on passes, to rocket attacks, and in some cases dive bombing the

³⁸⁵ Brain D. O'Neill, *Half a Wing, Three Engines and a Prayer: B-17s over Germany Special Edition*, (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1999), 127.

³⁸⁶ Alan J. Levin, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*. (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 105.

³⁸⁷ Thomas M. Coffey, 261.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid, 262.

³⁹⁰ Alan J. Levin, 105.

³⁹¹ Thomas M. Coffey, 266-267.

³⁹² Brain D. O'Neill, 153.

³⁹³ Thomas M. Coffey, 269.

³⁹⁴ Brain D. O'Neill, 145.

formation.³⁹⁵ As the 3rd Air Division reached the extent of their fighter support, 44 German aircraft were spotted. The P-47s of the 56th Fighter Group engaged the enemy formation before fuel shortages forced them to withdraw from the battle.³⁹⁶

The 3d Air Division received less focus on the way in, but got the full attention of the German Air Force once the 1st Division turned for home. To make matters worse the escort fighters that were supposed to meet the 3d Division were unable to take off due to poor visibility over England.³⁹⁷ German fighters attacked the Fortresses without fear of a counter-attack. The 200 fighters that started the initial battle with the 1st Air Division engaged the crews of the 3d Air Division on their way home.³⁹⁸

As the B-17s arrived back in England, many sought the first available airfield to land. The poor weather that plagued the escort fighters now made landings anything but routine. 17 planes crashed in England, and another 60 were lost over the continent.³⁹⁹ The second raid over Schweinfurt was the largest air battle of the war up to that moment. The Americans committed over 300 bombers and escorts to the strike. The Germans sent up over 300 fighters to stop the raid.⁴⁰⁰

Those in charge of the C.B.O. claimed victory after Schweinfurt. Eaker, Arnold, Portal, and many others felt that they landed a death blow to the Luftwaffe. They successfully bombed the ball bearings at Schweinfurt. Prior to the war, Eaker and Arnold had preached that the destruction of economic choke points led to strategic victory. The ball bearing facility at Schweinfurt topped Operation POINTBLANK's list of choke points. However, few realized what Schweinfurt cost 8th Air Force or grasped the reality of the situation.

³⁹⁵ Thomas M. Coffey, 271.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, 288.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 289.

³⁹⁹ Donald Miller, 209.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid, 210.

Shortly after the mission many bomber commanders expressed jubilation at their so-called victory. Throughout the blitz, “Black Week” reflected victory not defeat. Portal informed Eaker that he believed the 8th Air Force was responsible for stopping over half of the German fighter production.⁴⁰¹ The day after the raid Eaker cabled Arnold that he believed they destroyed over half of the German ball bearings. He claimed 99 kills, 30 probables, and 14 more fighters damaged at the expense of 60 heavies.⁴⁰² According to Galland’s research, the Americans claimed 864 German fighters at the loss of 181 heavy bombers during the month of October. “Had the claims of planes shot down been only approximately correct the multiengine bomber should have hardly met any German fighters on their raids over the Reich.”⁴⁰³

Eaker said in a message to Arnold that he did not believe Schweinfurt to be a loss. He wrote that the air campaign was reaching its climax.⁴⁰⁴ “[The] employment of all types of defensive aircraft may mean the Luftwaffe is staving off a crisis.”⁴⁰⁵ His post-Schweinfurt recommendations included a request for P-38s and P-51s, more drop tanks for the fighters, a focus on attacking German airfields with smaller aircraft, and a final request to bomb in overcast weather.⁴⁰⁶ He reported that he received 143 replacement aircraft and aircrews, but he expected his losses to be over 200 aircraft for the month.⁴⁰⁷ Eaker requested that Arnold send him another 107 aircraft to maintain his current offensive.⁴⁰⁸ He came to the conclusion that this mission proved the success of the daylight bombing campaign. Eaker wrote to Arnold and U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall saying, “One fact which stands clear, the Germans

⁴⁰¹ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, October 14, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴⁰² Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, October 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴⁰³ Adolph Galland, 188-189.

⁴⁰⁴ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, October 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid

⁴⁰⁶ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, October 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴⁰⁷ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, October 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴⁰⁸ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, October 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

could not stop our attack.”⁴⁰⁹ Arnold wrote Eaker that he believed the Luftwaffe was near a major collapse. He told Eaker to tell his men that “the cornered wolf fights hardest and that the German Air Force has been driven into its last corner.”⁴¹⁰ Eaker’s response was that he felt the German Air Force was on its last leg. He described it as the “final struggles of a monster in its death throes. There is not the slightest question but that we now have our teeth in the Hun Air Force’s neck.”⁴¹¹ Brereton, whose 9th Air Force had just been transferred to England for OVERLORD and POINTBLANK, stated that Devers and Eaker discussed the possibility of a German surrender as early as October 18. They even submitted the outline of a plan to respond should the Germans take this course of action at their Commanders’ Meeting.⁴¹²

That was October 1943. A month later Eaker’s stance changed drastically. On November 5, 1943 Eaker wrote Portal about the problems plaguing the C.B.O. “The only deficiency which has prevented the complete accomplishment of the Combined Bomber Offensive, as originally laid down, has been the failure to provide the force required as called for in the plan to implement the Combined Bomber Offensive.”⁴¹³ A week later he sent another letter to Vice Marshal W.A. Coryton and said that Operation POINTBLANK was not “fully accomplished.”⁴¹⁴ These two letters confirm what many aircrews had suspected as early as August and October. The Americans and Germans both failed. The C.B.O. in 1943 was never halted, but the last chance to gain air superiority prior to winter ended with both sides still grasping for command of the air. Weather conditions deteriorated to a point where the Germans and Americans were having difficulty operating over Europe.

⁴⁰⁹ Ira Eaker to George C. Marshall and Henry Arnold, October 16, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴¹⁰ Henry Arnold to Ira Eaker, October 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴¹¹ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, October 15, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴¹² Lewis H. Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries: The War in the Air in the Pacific, Middle East, and Europe, 3 October 1941-8 May 1945*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1946), 218.

⁴¹³ Ira Eaker to Charles Portal, November 5, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴¹⁴ Ira Eaker to W.A. Coryton, November 11, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

What changed Eaker's mind? The Americans and Germans soon realized that the destruction of the ball bearing factory at Schweinfurt was incomplete. Only 10% of the machines were lost and the Germans made up for the temporary loss in production by purchasing ball bearings from Sweden.⁴¹⁵ In addition, the Germans had a larger stockpile of ball-bearings than what they and the Americans originally believed. The Axis stockpiled 6 to 12 months of ball bearings prior to the raid.⁴¹⁶ The Allies soon realized that German production was able to survive the temporary loss of the factory at Schweinfurt.

The Americans failed to see that the damage to Schweinfurt was far less than what their strike photos showed. . Only 10% of the bombs landed within 500 feet of the target area and the most accurate group was the 351st Bomb Group, at 29%.⁴¹⁷ Eaker didn't know of these numbers until after the war, but it does show that he was basing his information on strike photos that proved to be just about as accurate as his bombardiers. The bombing analysis during the war relied heavily on strike photos and the 8th Air Force staff concluded that 75% of Schweinfurt was destroyed.⁴¹⁸ Likewise, the figures from the Schweinfurt air battle were skewed. The 8th Air Force claimed 186 downed enemy fighters during the mission. The Germans only lost 43.⁴¹⁹ After the reality of October settled in on Eaker, he came to the conclusion that Schweinfurt was not the success he previously imagined.

Eaker was not the only one to change his mind significantly after his initial reaction to Schweinfurt. Arnold viewed the time period from August 1943 to the second Schweinfurt raid as the high water mark of the unescorted bomber. After the war, Arnold thought about the question

⁴¹⁵ Alan J. Levin, 106-107.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 106.

⁴¹⁷ Stephen L. McFarland, *America's Pursuit of Precision Bombing, 1910-1945* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1995.), 175.

⁴¹⁸ John F. Kreis ed, *the Piercing Fog: Intelligence and Army Air Forces Operations in World War II*, (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996), 202.

⁴¹⁹ Alan J. Levin, 106.

of whether they could have sustained their losses. “To this day, I don’t know for certain if we could have.” Nonetheless, he reiterated that, at the time, he was still for pushing forward with high losses, and that only poor weather put a halt on the whole campaign.⁴²⁰ Arnold still believed in unescorted bombing and was willing to take the casualties to prove the bomber was able to gain air superiority years after the second Schweinfurt mission.

The poor weather and renewed focus on Western Europe instituted a number of changes to the command structure within U.S. air commands. Eaker finally got what he asked for, the main effort was finally being shifted towards his theater of operations. A large number of long range fighters and heavy bombers were sent to the 8th Air Force. Put into place a new command structure that defined each air force’s role in the E.T.O. However, there was one catch. Eaker was fired and sent to the Mediterranean, away the main bombing effort, which he vehemently protested.⁴²¹ In a cable to Arnold, Eaker requested both that he retain command of the 8th Air Force and that Doolittle remain in command of the newly formed 15th Air Force in Italy.⁴²² That same day he sent off another message to Eisenhower, who was largely responsible for this decision, asking to keep him in his current position.⁴²³ Finally, on Christmas Eve 1944, Eaker agreed to take command of the air forces in the Mediterranean Theater.⁴²⁴ Eaker colorfully described his feeling over being replaced, “I feel like a pitcher who has been sent to the showers during a World Series game.”⁴²⁵

The failure of Eaker and many other generals to realize the shortcomings of the 1943 campaign are found in two areas. Combat strike photos provided a partial picture of bomb

⁴²⁰ Henry H. Arnold, *Global Mission*, (Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1989), 495.

⁴²¹ For more on the reasons why Arnold fired Eaker see Benjamin Franklin Cooling ed., *Case Studies in the Achievement of Air Superiority*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 284.

⁴²² Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, December 19, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴²³ Ira Eaker to Dwight Eisenhower, December 19, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴²⁴ Ira Eaker to Henry Arnold, December 24, 1943, Ira Eaker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴²⁵ Donald Miller, 245.

accuracy. Other than Allied intercepts the Americans based most of their bomb damage assessments on these photos. Another reason behind the inability of the 8th Air Force generals to come to grips with reality was Operation STARKEY. The deception operation that meant to deceive the Germans into an aerial ambush fooled the Americans. STARKEY's failure gave Arnold and Eaker a false intelligence indicator. This led them to believe that they were nearing a significant victory in the air war. When included with the inflated fighter claims, these ingredients led to a severe disconnect between the combat crews and generals in October 1943.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The roots of the failure of the 1943 C.B.O. campaign can be found at Casablanca. At the Casablanca Conference the Allies decided against making a decision over the best way to prosecute the C.B.O. As a result, they developed a largely interpretive document, the Casablanca Directive. This directive called for the destruction of the German war economy. This broad mission statement created a gaping loophole. To make matters worse, by assigning five primary objectives and one intermediate, they made the future offensive unfocused and uncoordinated.

Following the conference, the operational planning stages of POINTBLANK, reflected the disunity faced within the Allied air commands. Eaker drew up an operational plan that made his air force the *Schwerpunkt* of the American air effort against Germany. This directly conflicted with Eisenhower's needs in the Mediterranean Theater. Over the course of several months, the operational plan took the do everything and commit to nothing approach. The British felt no obligation to the plan, because it was seen as an American plan, not a British one. The operational plan, like the Casablanca Directive, reflected the Allied bombing policy, and became whatever each air force commander wanted it to be.

In spite of this, the Americans and British got off to a strong start with a highly successful coordinated attack on Hamburg. For the first time in the war, the Americans and British erased a city through round-the-clock bombing. However, the Americans and British decided to move in separate directions shortly after the raid. To make matters worse Eaker and Spaatz failed to work together in their prosecution of the air war. The two leaders spent a great deal of 1943 fighting over heavy bombers. This coupled with the myth of the unescorted bomber, led to one costly

mission after another from July to August. Afterwards, the Americans concluded that they needed long range fighter support.

In spite of this, some intelligence indicators showed that the Luftwaffe and Germany was on the ropes. Based on inflated fighter claims, Operation STARKEY's failure, and deceiving strike photos, the Americans believed that one more big push might lead to the collapse of the Reich. In fact, the Reich's fighter defense was stronger than ever. Over the course of October the 8th Air Force pushed its airplanes and crews to the edge. The result was another costly month in bombers and crews with inconclusive results. By November, the Allies were no longer under any illusions. The C.B.O. in 1943 ended in failure.

Armed with this and the high losses suffered during the air superiority phase of the campaign, the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. decided to change the organization of the two forces. These changes, along with the arrival of more American long range escort fighters proved vital during the 1944 campaign. There was no longer any confusion as to what the C.B.O. was supposed to accomplish and who was the primary focus for air operations. It was these measures that made the 1944 campaign the success that the 1943 campaign was not. While other changes did occur, such as fighter tactics and improved B-17 models, the introduction of the long range fighter and the agreement that the Luftwaffe was to be the primary focus for the 8th Air Force led to the rapid change in fortunes during in early 1944. Prior to this, the strategic air war over Germany was a series of mini air offensives working under the umbrella of the C.B.O.

The failure at Casablanca was the reason behind all of the other problems that developed during the 1943 campaign. Without Casablanca, long range fighters would not have been designated solely for the Mediterranean Theater. The inability by both the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. to agree on a strategy for the implementation of the proposed Combined Bomber Offensive led

to the a disorganized bombing effort that targeted everything and concentrated on nothing. The hard decisions were not made at Casablanca, because no one wanted to make them and the end result was a wasted year in the air war against Germany.

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