

75th Anniversary of D-Day

Attempts to Sow Divisions Dishonour All Those Who Fought Together to Defeat Fascism

- Nick Lin -



Allied casualties are helped ashore on the beaches of Normandy, France on D-Day.

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June 6 marked the 75th anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 1944, when Britain and the U.S. opened a second front against Nazi Germany with a massive amphibious assault on the beaches of Normandy in occupied France. The Soviet Union, fighting with incredible resilience and sacrifice to the east, had long-awaited this development promised by its allies. It made its own contribution to D-Day with the coordinated Operation Bagration on the eastern front.

This year, the representatives of Britain, the U.S., France, Canada and others attending the main ceremonies in France, were more boorish than ever in assigning the victory over fascism to themselves and making no mention of the Soviet Union whatsoever. Their refusal to acknowledge all those who contributed to the defeat of fascism in World War II, conspicuously ignoring the role of the Soviet Union and the Red Army, brings them no honour. Nay more, it causes great offence to all those who sacrificed so much to defeat fascism in their own countries as well.

For his part, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who attended the ceremonies in Europe, issued a D-Day statement that referred to the Allied forces, but totally omitted any mention of the Soviet Union, a key member of the Allies. The statement concluded, without irony, with the line "Lest we forget."

These attempts to sow divisions today dishonour all those who fought against fascism, a victory that was only possible because of the tremendous sacrifice of the Soviet peoples acting together with the U.S., Britain and others, a victory that was hastened by D-Day. Such disinformation is not only self-serving but constitutes malicious activity by the Anglo-American imperialists, intended to portray their present-day imperialist war and aggression as akin to the anti-fascist struggle, and the essential factor for world peace and stability.

At the same time, the peoples of the former Soviet countries proudly celebrate their unparalleled contributions to the defeat of fascism on Victory Day, May 9, in a magnanimous spirit in which everyone's contributions are acknowledged and everyone is invited to take part in the worldwide marches of the Immortal Regiment. This is portrayed by bourgeois media, especially in the U.S., as "pro-Russian" and "militaristic," and therefore unacceptable.

The Soviet Union bore the brunt of the Nazi aggression during World War II. Who if not the Red Army veterans and their descendants have a right to have these sacrifices acknowledged and commemorated?

As *TML Weekly* pointed out on the occasion of V-E Day, "Today it is commonplace to hear the Anglo-American and European imperialists dismiss the feats of the Soviet peoples in defeating Hitler, while claiming that it was the historic landing in Normandy on June 6, 1944, which broke Hitler's back. This makes it possible to claim that the United States played the decisive role in saving the world from Hitlerism and describing current U.S. wars of aggression and occupation as wars of liberation. All U.S. military interventions since the landing at Normandy are said to oppose dictatorships and tyrannies similar to Hitler's, thus faithfully following in the tradition of the landing at Normandy."

In light of the unacceptable disrespect to the Soviet Union, Russia and Red Army veterans that unfolded at the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of D-Day, remarks by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in a June 5 article in *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, are all the more pointed.

He noted:

"Bitter as it is to witness, we see the attempts to discredit the heroes, to artificially generate doubts about the correctness of the path our ancestors followed. Both abroad and in our country we hear that public consciousness in Russia is being militarized, and Victory Day parades and processions are nothing other than imposing bellicose and militaristic sentiment at the state level. By doing so, Russia is allegedly rejecting humanism and the values of the 'civilized' world. Whereas European nations, they claim, have chosen to forget about the 'past grievances,' come to terms with each other and are 'tolerantly' building 'forward-looking relations.'

"Our detractors seek to diminish the role of the Soviet Union in World War II and portray it, if not as the main culprit of the war, then at least as an aggressor, along with Nazi Germany, and spread the theses about 'equal responsibility.' They cynically equate Nazi occupation, which claimed tens of millions of lives, and the crimes committed by collaborationists, with the Red Army's liberating mission. Monuments are erected in honour of Nazi henchmen. At the same time, monuments to liberator soldiers and the graves of fallen soldiers are desecrated and destroyed in some countries. As you may recall, the Nuremberg Tribunal, whose rulings became an integral part of international law, clearly identified who was on the side of good and who was on the side of evil. In the first case, it was the Soviet Union, which sacrificed millions of lives of its sons and daughters to the altar of Victory, as well as other Allied nations. In the second case, it was the Third Reich, the Axis countries and their minions, including in the occupied territories.

[...]

"We hold sacred the contribution of all the Allies to the common Victory in that war, and we believe any attempts to drive a wedge between us are disgraceful. But no matter how hard the falsifiers of history try, the fire of truth cannot be put out. It was the peoples of the Soviet Union who broke the backbone of the Third Reich. That is a fact."

Posted below are articles presenting a recounting of the Red Army's Operation Bagration, notable events at this year's commemoration of D-Day, as well as an item that details the prevarications and ulterior motives that characterized the U.S. and British participation throughout World War II, including D-Day.



Behold Operation Bagration, D-Day of the Eastern Front

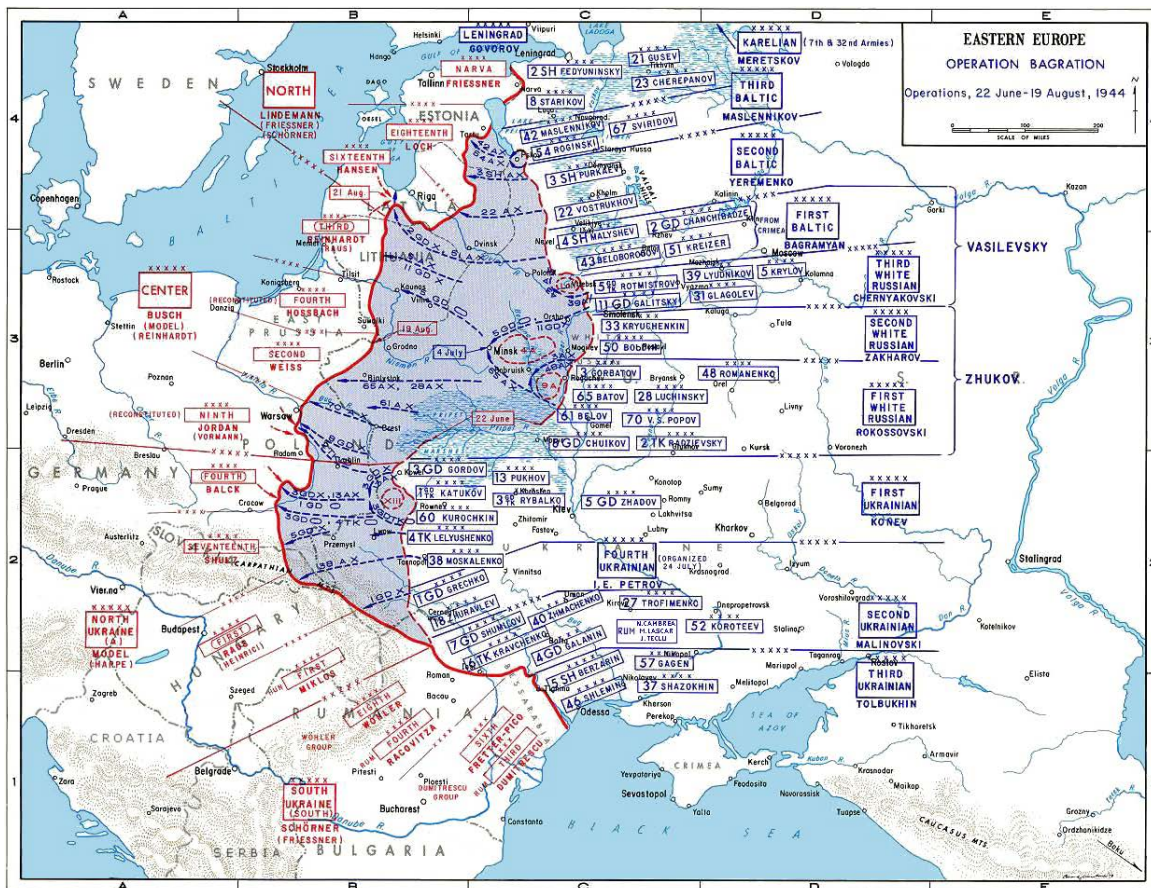
- John Wight -

Operation Bagration was the D-Day of the Eastern Front. In scope, size, scale and impact, it was a remarkable feat of arms unmatched in WWII.[1]

Crucially, Overlord (D-Day) and Bagration were planned and undertaken as part of a coordinated effort on the part of the Grand Alliance to break the back of German resistance in Europe with a determination that was equally held by the Soviets, British and Americans to force the unconditional surrender of Hitler's Germany.

In his book *Stalin's Wars*, Geoffrey Roberts reveals that "Soviet plans for Operation Bagration were closely co-ordinated with Anglo-American preparations for the launch of the long-awaited Second Front in France. The Soviets were informed of the approximate date of D-Day in early April and, on 18 April, Stalin cabled Roosevelt and Churchill that, 'as agreed in Tehran, the Red

Army will launch a new offensive at the same time so as to give maximum support to the Anglo-American operation."



Map of Operation Bagration, showing the massive westward thrust of the Red Army.

Though both operations were of immense military and strategic importance, Bagration dwarfed Overlord. It began on June 22, the third anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, with air attacks on enemy artillery positions and concentrations, guided by partisan units operating behind German lines.

The main offensive began on June 23 along a 500-mile front, involving close to two million troops.

Operation Bagration was designed to complement D-Day, to effect the liberation of the Soviet territory from the Nazis and destroy the Wehrmacht as a serious fighting force in the East. It achieved all three of these objectives and more.

As British historian and author David Reynolds points out: "In five weeks the Red Army advanced 450 miles, driving through Minsk to the outskirts of Warsaw and tearing the guts out of Hitler's Army Group Centre. Nearly 20 German divisions were totally destroyed and another 50 severely mauled -- an even worse disaster than Stalingrad." He goes on: "This stunning Soviet success occurred while Overlord was still stuck in the hedges and lanes of Normandy."

The famed Soviet journalist and author, Vasily Grossman, whose collection of wartime journalism, *A Writer At War*, is a classic work that should be required reading for those interested in the reality of war and conflict, describes with customary force and power the human toll of the Soviet offensive:

"Sometimes you are so shaken by what you've seen," he writes in one report from the front,

"blood rushes from your heart, and you know that the terrible sight that your eyes have just taken in is going to haunt you and lie heavily on your soul all your life." He continues: "Corpses, hundreds and thousands of them, pave the road, lie in ditches, under the pines, in the green barley. In some places, vehicles have to drive over the corpses, so densely they lie upon the ground."

Despite the coordination of Operation Bagration with D-Day, and despite the former's ineffable military and strategic importance, not one mention was made of it during the 75th D-Day anniversary commemorations in Northern France. Such a glaring and unconscionable omission stands as just one of many shameful examples of historical amnesia on the part of Western governments and ideologues in recent years -- people more concerned with politicizing history than they are with respecting it.



Left: Tanks and other vehicles are abandoned by the Nazis as they flee the Red Army during Operation Bagration in Belarus, July 1944. Right: Some 57,000 German prisoners of war, captured during an encirclement east of Minsk are paraded through Moscow, July 15, 1944.

The valour and courage of the 156,000 troops who landed on the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944 is not in question, nor is that of the thousands of sailors, airmen, and airborne troops who also took part in D-Day. Operation Overlord was, and will likely remain, the largest amphibious military assault ever mounted. In terms of its ambition, planning and the coordination of the combined military forces of the multiple nations involved, it deserves the place in military history that it commands.

Soviet leader Joseph Stalin more than understood the importance and achievement of D-Day, which he set out in a congratulatory telegram to Roosevelt and Churchill at the time:

"As is evident, the landing, conceived on a grandiose scale, has succeeded completely. My colleagues and I cannot but admit that the history of warfare knows no other like undertaking from the point of view of its scale, its vast conception, and its masterly execution."

Wind things forward 75 years and the parlous quality of statesmanship in the West, with the open violation of the spirit of the Grand Alliance between East and West that is enshrined in Stalin's telegram, has never been more lamentable. For example, French President Emmanuel Macron served up a speech in commemoration of D-Day that drew deep from the well of Western exceptionalism. In lauding NATO and the European Union as positive achievements of the war, he confirmed how deeply entrenched the malaise of historical amnesia runs in Western European capitals.

The notion that the men who gave their lives on D-Day, and thereafter in Europe on the way to

war's end in 1945, did so in order to give birth to a continent dependent on Washington and in fear of Moscow, is preposterous. The devastation that Russia suffered in the war, moreover, the magnitude of losses the country incurred, demands the respect and reverence of everyone interested in drawing the right lessons from this epic struggle of world-historical importance.

It is for this reason that the decision not to extend an invitation to Russian President Vladimir Putin to attend the 75th D-Day anniversary celebrations is both a travesty and evidence of the gulf that exists between those for whom history is a guide and those for whom it is a weapon.

A Europe liberated from fascism but divided by a Cold War that shattered forever the hopes for a lasting and enduring peace of equals -- for global stability and cooperation reflected in the war's Grand Alliance between East and West -- is nothing to celebrate. It reminds us that, although so much was sacrificed and won by so many during the war, so much was thrown away and lost by so few after it.

Operation Bagration and Operation Overlord should never be spoken of separately. Both were mounted at the same stage in the war by a Grand Alliance that contained within it the seeds of a future that, if it had come to pass, would've met the scale of the sacrifice needed to emerge victorious.

The last word goes to Vasily Grossman: "Nearly everyone believed that good would triumph, that honest men, who hadn't hesitated to sacrifice their lives, would be able to build a good and just life."

John Wight has written for a variety of newspapers and websites, including the Independent, Morning Star, Huffington Post, Counterpunch, London Progressive Journal, and Foreign Policy Journal.

TML Note

1. Operation Bagration was named after Pyotr Bagration (1765-1812), a Russian general of Georgian origin. He was known for being innovative and creative in his tactics to find the particular approach required by a given situation, as well as for the great importance he gave to the training, education and discipline of troops, and to ensuring their well-being.

(RT.com, June 7, 2019. Photos: U.S. Army, RIA Novosti.)



The Road to Berlin

- Stan Winer -

***Excerpted from "If Truth Be Told:
Secrecy and Subversion in an Age Turned Unheroic"***

With the invasion of Normandy on D-Day on June 6, 1944 the terms of warfare in occupied France ceased to be ostensibly those of Hitler and became clearly those of the Allied Expeditionary Force. The cross-channel build-up provided it with at least twice the number of men, four times the number of tanks, and six times the number of aircraft available to the enemy.



British commandos land at Gold Beach on D-Day.

On D-day itself the Germans had mustered only 319 aircraft against 12,837 of the Western Allies whose military strength soon increased to the point where they had effective superiority of 20 to one in tanks and 25 to one in aircraft. Yet, despite its vast numerical superiority and other advantages in its favour, the offensive of the Allied Expeditionary Force was characterised by restraint. Compared with the Russians, who still bore the brunt of fighting on the eastern front, the invading force was merely playing about. It had 91 full-strength divisions facing Germany's 60 weak divisions whose overall strength was roughly equal to only 26 complete divisions. The invasion force, consisting of British, American and Canadian troops, thus engaged less than a third of the total number of German divisions in France, while the Red Army engaged 185 enemy divisions in the east. For every German division engaged by the Western armies, the Red Army met three. In terms of armoured units alone, of the roughly 5,000 tanks available to Germany, more than 4,000 were deployed on the eastern front.^[1] So obvious was the disparity, most of the German divisions having been deployed to fight Russia on the eastern front, that in real terms a western front hardly even existed.

The invading force's lethargic ground offensive was characterised by such obvious restraint as to cause bitter resentment within some of the top-most British military echelons. In the words of Major General John Kennedy, then Assistant Chief of the General Staff: "For six weeks or so, (after the invasion) the Germans did not attempt or even desire to move their divisions in the Pas de Calais or elsewhere towards the scene of action in Normandy."^[2] The West's failure to launch a concerted ground attack on the enemy was similarly noted by the British Vice-Chief of General Staff, General Sir David Fraser: "For a little while -- a few weeks of August and September (1944) -- the Western Front was open, and a determined effort on our part might have finished the war, with incalculable strategic and political consequences, and with a saving of the huge number of casualties suffered later ... it was the last chance to seize this great strategic opportunity. It failed, and the war went on."^[3]

In Holland, General Montgomery's stated objective in September 1944 was for British and American tanks and paratroopers to capture bridges across various canals and rivers. But crucial intelligence derived from Ultra intercepts and decrypts, and from agents providing detailed reports

of enemy movements and reinforcements in the area, was either ignored or did not reach Montgomery. On September 17 two American and one British airborne divisions were dropped as an "airborne carpet" between Eindhoven and Arnhem. A ground link-up was to have been affected with Montgomery's 21st Army Group within two to three days. The agreed plan was that once the lower Rhine was crossed, operations would then be expanded against the Ruhr to bring an early end to the war. Over 7,000 men, more than two thirds of the 1st Airborne Division, were dropped in the Arnhem area, where British intelligence had indicated only a maximum opposition of brigade strength. The enemy's reaction was one of astonishment at their good fortune. Arnhem and its environs had been chosen by the Germans as a suitable place in which to refit two entire divisions of the 2nd SS Panzer Corps, which were available immediately to contest the landings. Their reaction was swift and without mercy: At the key Arnhem bridge, 1,200 British paratroopers -- the cream of the British Army -- were killed and more than 3,000 taken prisoner.

An Overall Debacle in Holland



Allied paratroop drop in the Netherlands, part of Operation Market Garden.

That was only the start of an overall debacle in Holland, resulting in a total Allied loss exceeding 17,000 killed, wounded and missing in action.^[4] Scarce air transport resources had been diverted from useful operations elsewhere to the disastrous paratroop drop at Arnhem. The Commander in Chief of 2nd Tactical Air Force, Air Marshal Arthur Coningham complained bitterly that "the freezing of air transport during a week of fine weather, with ample ground suitable for landings, when the American and British armies were only halted through lack of fuel and ammunition supply, was the decisive factor in preventing our armies reaching the Rhine before the onset of winter."^[5] A further eight months would pass before Arnhem was finally captured -- just a month before the war in Europe ended. Montgomery, soon to be promoted to Field-Marshal and for the sake of immediate press reaction, described the disaster at Arnhem as "a 90 per cent success" -- drawing from Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands the bitter retort: "My country can never again afford the luxury of a Montgomery success."^[6]

There were similar "successes" occurring elsewhere along the western front. In Belgium, where the stated intention of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was to capture the crucial maritime port of Antwerp, SHAEF disregarded explicit intelligence warnings that the Germans were about to secure the approaches to the port. The invading force, failing to move swiftly on the offensive before the Germans completed defence preparations, ended up with

Antwerp rendered entirely useless to them for the next six months. This made it impossible for an immediate advance on the Ruhr or on Berlin, which would have been practicable only if Montgomery's 40 divisions could be supplied through Antwerp.[7]

Virtually the same kind of deliberate stalling, procrastination and prolongation of the war had occurred months earlier at Anzio in Italy, where the Germans were wholly unprepared for amphibious landings. Excellent conditions had existed here for providing substantial relief to the Red Army on the eastern front by launching a determined Allied thrust northwards through Italy. SHAEF clearly ignored available intelligence showing conditions to be ideal for an immediate and unopposed advance on Rome. Instead, the military command waited until the Germans had organised an effective defence and counter-attack. The New Zealand and Indian contingents of the landing force took particularly heavy casualties, with the enemy then retiring north of Rome in good order. There the Germans established a new and unyielding line in Tuscany where the Italian campaign would drag on for at least another year, at a cost of many more courageous Allied lives sacrificed on the altar of deception.[8]

The Battle of the Bulge



U.S. troops at the Battle of the Bulge.

A final debacle in the patterned distribution of epic intelligence "failures" and unheroic command decisions occurred in December 1944, when the invading force failed to anticipate the December 1944 German offensive in the Ardennes -- the Battle of the Bulge, where the Germans inflicted major casualties on the Anglo-American armies and nearly halted the Allied advance in its tracks. Field Marshal Albrecht Kesselring was later to reveal that Germany's 10th Army, the defending force in Italy, was so unprepared that it would have been virtually annihilated had the Western Allies immediately advanced their attack once a beach-head was established.[9]

With the command structure of the Allied Expeditionary Force thus masquerading as "liberators" while actually prolonging the war, Churchill was busily engaged behind the scenes in intervening persistently in the Anglo-American nuclear weapons project. He continually spurred the Los Alamos scientists to more vigorous efforts in producing an atomic bomb before the Russians single-handedly won the war in Europe. Churchill could count on the unwavering support of Roosevelt who was fully prepared, hopeful even, to use the atomic bomb against Germany.[10]

The Red Army's momentous breakthrough into eastern Germany, and its inexorable advance on Berlin, then in progress, threatened to turn into reality not only the worst fears of Hitler but also those of the Western leadership. Britain's Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had in 1941 already warned that Russian prestige at the end of the war would be so great that "the establishment of communist governments in the majority of European countries would be greatly facilitated."^[11] Similar fears had also been conveyed to Churchill by his South African ally, General Jan Smuts, who complained in 1943:

"I have the uncomfortable feeling that the scale and speed of our land operations leaves much to be desired ... Almost all the honours on land go to the Russians, and deservedly so, considering the scale and speed of their fighting and the magnificence of their strategy on a vast front. Surely our performance can be bettered and the comparison with Russia rendered less unflattering to us? To the ordinary man it must appear that it is Russia who is winning the war. If this impression continues, what will be our post-war world position compared with that of Russia? A tremendous shift in our world status may follow, and leave Russia the diplomatic master of the world. This is both unnecessary and undesirable, and would have especially bad reactions for the British Commonwealth."^[12]

Similar fears had been expressed to Roosevelt in Washington by his Chiefs of Staff who warned the American president in August 1944: "The end of the war will produce a change in the pattern of military strength more comparable ... with that occasioned by the fall of Rome than with any other change during the succeeding fifteen hundred years."^[13]

The Destruction of Dresden

Neither Smuts nor the American Chiefs of Staff would have been aware, as Churchill and Roosevelt were, of the secret nuclear weapons project then nearing completion, and which would guarantee for them the achievement of post-war political goals in Europe. The atomic bomb, however, had not yet been tested, and with few urban dwellings left to set on fire in western Germany, Churchill and the bomber barons needed another means by which to demonstrate at close quarters to the Russians an uncontested margin of military if not moral superiority over them. The fate of Dresden was sealed. Although the city was only of very minor importance to the overall German war effort, it lay conveniently across the Red Army's direct line of advance to Berlin. Famous for its china and architecture, Dresden was also the largest of very few civilian areas remaining intact in the whole of Germany.^[14] It also happened to be crowded with large numbers of civilian refugees who had fled from bombing in other parts of Germany, its population of 600,000 having more than doubled to 1,250,000. Since January 26, 1945 special trains had delivered thousands of evacuees to the city, most recently on the afternoon of February 12, while thousands more arrived on foot or in horse-drawn carts.^[15] What followed was to be one of the most senseless acts of savagery ever known to humankind.

In the early hours of February 14, Ash Wednesday, a total of 778 RAF heavy bombers began the attack. The following day the Americans attacked with almost as many aircraft again. They somehow managed to overlook the fact that 26,000 Allied prisoners of war were imprisoned in the suburbs of Dresden. When the last of the bombers departed, the open spaces on the banks of the Elbe were piled with the bodies of civilians who flocked to the river in search of escape from the heat and then drowned. The bodies of many others were glued to the surface of streets where the tarmac had melted and then solidified as the firestorm engulfed 11 square miles -- an area much larger than that destroyed at Hamburg. About 75 per cent of all property was gutted completely as temperatures soared to around 1,000 degrees Centigrade.^[16] Apart from the many victims it incinerated immediately, thousands more died in air raid shelters as the firestorm sucked out oxygen which was replaced with poisonous fumes. About 50,000 civilians were killed -- around 10,000 more than those who perished in the Hamburg firestorm, and 20,000 more than

those killed during the entire eight-months "blitz" on Britain. Countless numbers of people were rendered homeless. Bomber Command casualties were negligible -- Germany's earlier loss of France to the Allied Expeditionary Force had created a gaping hole in Hitler's early-warning radar system, providing the RAF with unchallenged operational omnipotence.[17]

Astonishingly, almost unbelievably, Dresden was attacked again on March 2, this time by the Americans alone. Mustang fighter escorts machine-gunned fleeing civilians while the heavy B-17s achieved the singular distinction of sinking a hospital ship on the Elbe, filled with injured from the earlier raids.[18]



Aftermath of the 1945 bombing of Dresden, Germany by Allied forces.

Dresden did not contain any oil refineries or synthetic oil plants, unlike Brux to the south, or Bohlen, Ruhland and Politz which remained untouched, to the north and west of the doomed city. Nor did Dresden appear on any list of priority targets issued weekly by the Combined Strategic Targets Committee. Any military justification for the American and the British raids was non-existent, damage in terms of "war production" being confined solely to the German cigar and cigarette industry.[19] Nor did the destruction of Dresden disrupt or delay the Red Army's continued, rapid advance on Berlin from the east. This probably came as something of a disappointment to Royal Air Force Marshal Sir Arthur Harris who had issued briefing notes to Bomber Command aircrews stating modestly that an "incidental" purpose of the massed aerial attack on Dresden was to show the Russians, then just a few miles from Dresden, "what Bomber Command can do." [20] The inference to be drawn from this is that Harris, at the behest of Churchill, wished to convey to the Russians a vivid impression of the West's overwhelming superiority in long-distance aerial bombardment and the ability of British and American aircraft to demolish an entire city in the space of just a few hours. Indeed, the demolition of Dresden may be interpreted as an act of outright intimidation stopping just short of direct military operations against the USSR.

The destruction of Dresden had been recommended by Churchill "with the particular object of exploiting the confused conditions which are likely to exist ... during the successful Russian advance."^[21] Before the massacre, No.1 Group, Bomber Command, had been told during pre-flight briefing that Dresden was to be bombed because it was "a railway centre"; No.3 Group was duped into believing it would be attacking "a German army headquarters"; No.6 Group was misinformed that Dresden was "an important industrial area, producing chemicals and munitions"; some squadrons were deceptively assured that Dresden contained a Gestapo headquarters and a large poison-gas plant; another Group was given the impression that the bombers would be breaching the defences of a "fortress city" essential to the Germans in their fight against the advancing Russians.^[22]

Whatever impression the Russians themselves might have gained from taking possession of a ruined city after having witnessed at close quarters the destructive potential of the West's long-distance bombers, this was probably not what the Red Army had in mind when on February 4, 10 days before the Dresden atrocity, it had conveyed to the Western Allies an urgent request. The Red Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, Marshal Antonov had specifically asked the Western Allies as a matter of urgent priority to cripple the transportation system in eastern Germany. The request was reiterated by Marshal Khudyakov, Chief of the Soviet Air Staff. Both commanders urgently wished to prevent enemy troop movements toward the eastern front, particular reference being made by Khudyakov to the necessity of preventing the movement by road and rail of German reinforcements from Italy.^[23] The request was ignored. Dresden's crowded Dresden-Klotzsche airfield remained unscathed, and the railway marshalling yards were similarly spared destruction.^[24] Yet highly advanced and extremely accurate ground-attack fighter-bombers and dive-bombers of the Anglo-American 2nd Tactical Air Force, then dispersed at various airfields in newly liberated Belgium, Holland and France, were readily available for such a task. Armed with rockets, light bombs and heavy machine guns, they had the easy capability to destroy German road and rail communications and generally harass the German armed forces deep in eastern Germany, without indiscriminately slaughtering civilians. So under-utilised was 2nd Tactical Air Force during these closing stages of the war that many of its aircraft were left neatly parked next to unprotected runways in Allied occupied territory where they were systematically destroyed on the ground by remnants of the Luftwaffe. In just one such raid, 200 brand-new fighter-bombers of the 2nd Tactical Air Force were destroyed at an airfield in Belgium, without any loss to the enemy.

The highly-decorated 2nd Tactical Air Force commander, Air Chief-Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, was at the centre of a bitter row with Britain's war planners over the merits of combined tactical operations in support of Allied ground forces, and "strategic" bombing conducted independently of combined operations.^[25] The argument came to an abrupt end shortly after the destruction of Dresden, when Sir Trafford was suddenly transferred to the Far East. He was mysteriously killed when the aircraft that was transporting him to India crashed in the French Alps. The exact cause of the crash was never officially established.

Churchill warned him to be "very careful ... not to admit that we ever did anything not justified by the circumstances..."

As for events in eastern Germany immediately after the Dresden attacks, a blinding deference for the official version ensured that the British Broadcasting Corporation reported on 14 February that RAF and American bombers had "raided places of utmost importance to the Germans in their struggle against the Russians, notably at Dresden."^[26] One press officer at Supreme HQ Allied Expeditionary Force was rather more forthcoming. In an "off the record" comment to war correspondents, a certain Air Commodore Grierson confirmed for the first time that the Allied plan in eastern Germany was to "bomb large population centres and then to prevent relief supplies from reaching and refugees from leaving them". Associated Press swiftly cabled this news to the

world at large. The British censors reacted promptly, imposing a general clampdown on the report.[27]

A massacre of such magnitude as occurred at Dresden, however, was difficult to hide indefinitely. During a debate in the House of Commons on 6 March, the irrepressible Labour MP for Ipswich, Richard Stokes, quoted the Associated Press report and a German account which had appeared in the previous day's Manchester Guardian. For the first time the expression "terror bombing" was used in Parliament when Stokes complained:

"... you will find people in the Army and Air Force protesting against this mass and indiscriminate slaughter from the air ... Leaving aside strategic bombing, which I question very much, and tactical bombing, with which I agree if it is done with a reasonable degree of accuracy, there is no case whatever under any conditions in my view, for terror bombing." [28] Air Minister Sir Archibald Sinclair left it to his deputy to reply to the debate. The relatively obscure Under-Secretary assured the House: "We are not wasting bombers or time purely on terror tactics. It does not do the Honourable Member justice to ... suggest that there are a lot of Air Marshals or pilots ... sitting in a room thinking how many German women and children they can kill." [29]

Barely a week later on March 11, more than 1,000 of Harris's bombers carried out a heavy daylight raid on Essen, unleashing 4,700 tonnes of bombs which destroyed the city almost completely. On 12 March, Dortmund became the target of the heaviest of all raids in Europe so far when 1,107 bombers dropped 4,851 tonnes of bombs on the already almost completely destroyed city.[30] German war production in the period between January and the time of Germany's capitulation in May was reduced by a mere 1.2 per cent.[31] British Intelligence analysts would have been well aware of this anomaly, given that Ultra had since 1944 been providing them with a great deal of reliable information about the German economy.[32]

While these final atrocities were taking place under the twin banners of "halting German war production" and "helping the Russians", Churchill took great pains to obscure the fact that the true fulcrum of air power lay neither with the Directorate of Bombing Operations, nor with the Air Ministry or the Chiefs of Staff, but solely with himself, Harris and a small cabal of handpicked confidants. Official documents suppressed for many years in the British archives but now available to researchers, contain a reproachful minute dated March 28 from Churchill to the Chiefs of Staff in which he deftly shifted all blame for the terror bombing onto the hapless Chiefs of Staff. It was they, according to Churchill, who had been principally responsible for "increasing the terror, though under other pretexts." [33] In a worried "most private and confidential" message to Harris, Churchill warned him to be "very careful ... not to admit that we ever did anything not justified by the circumstances and the actions of the enemy in the measures we took to bomb Germany." [34]

The Red Army Strikes

Meanwhile, undeterred either by the measures of Churchill and Harris or by the circumstances and the actions of the enemy, the Red Army continued its inexorable advance on Berlin's heavily defended Reichstag, the symbolic heart of Nazidom. A few months earlier, in January 1945 the Red Army and the Western Allied armies were still approximately the same distance away from Berlin, even though the disparity of enemy forces facing them was heavily in favour of the Anglo-Americans. But by mid-April it was the Red Army that arrived first in Berlin and began engaging its defending troops in close combat. Street by street, building by building, and finally staircase by staircase and cellar by cellar, Soviet soldiers inched their way forward through the city, taking heavy casualties in the fierce fighting. Finally, on 30 April a red flag bearing the hammer and sickle fluttered over the Reichstag. Three days later Berlin fell. After more than 1,000 days and nights of war along a front thousands of miles in length, as well as behind enemy lines in the

occupied territories, a victorious Red Army marched through the Brandenburg Gate.[35]

The price paid by the Russians for defeating Hitler on the principal and decisive front of the war was enormous. Every minute of the war the Russians lost nine lives, 587 lives every hour and 14,000 lives every day, with two out of every five persons killed during the war being Soviet citizens. Hundreds of Russian towns and cities were devastated. Well over 20 million Russians, half of them civilians, had died -- many more than the combined total military casualties of Germany and the Western Allies together.[36]



April 30, 1945: The Soviet Victory Banner is raised over the German Reichstag in Berlin by Red Army soldiers, shortly before the surrender of German forces in the city and the decisive victory over the fascists on May 9, 1945.

Notes

1. The figures are from: Churchill, *op cit*, Vol IV, p.832; John Kennedy, *op cit*, p.325; Paul Kennedy, *op cit*, pp.352, 354; Liddell Hart, *op cit*, p.559; Zhukov, Vol II, pp.307, 344; US Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, 15 May 1945.
2. John Kennedy, *ibid.*,
3. David Fraser, *And We Shall Shock Them: The British Army in the Second World War*, London: Hodder and Stoughton 1983, p.348.
4. The account of the Arnhem operation draws on: Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974; Ralph Bennett, "Ultra and Some Command Decisions," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 16, 1981, pp.145-6; Richard Lamb, *Montgomery in Europe 1943-45*, London: Buchan and Enright 1983, p.227.
5. PRO AIR 37/876, Arthur Coningham, "Operations Carried out by the Second Tactical Air Force between 6th June 1944 and 9 May 1945," p.23.
6. Ryan, *op cit*, p.454.
7. Bennett, *op.cit*, "Ultra and Some Command Decisions," p.135; Liddell Hart, *op cit*, p.536.
8. The account of the Italian campaign draws on: Martin Blumenson, *Anzio*: Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1963; Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War: Causes and Courses of the Second World War*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1986, pp. 511-2; Bennett, *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy*, p.264; Fraser, *op cit*, p.282.

9. Albrecht Kesselring, *Memoirs*, London: Greenhill 1988, p.193.
10. Leslie Groves, *Now It Can Be Told*, New York: Harper and Row 1962, p.184.
11. Elizabeth Barker, *op cit*, p.236.
12. Letter from Smuts to Churchill dated 31 August 1943, quoted in Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol V, p.112.
13. Chiefs of Staff quoted in Michael Balfour, *The Adversaries: America, Russia and the Open World 1941-1962*, London: Routledge, Kegan Paul 1981, p.9.
14. SAO, Vol III, p.252.
15. SAO, Vol III, p.108; David Irving, *The Destruction of Dresden*, London: Kimber 1963, pp.88, 106-7, 256.
16. Hastings, *op cit*, pp.340-4; Irving, *Destruction of Dresden*, pp.173-7, 206, 225-32, 236; Middlebrook and Everitt, *op cit*, pp.663-4.
17. Richards and Saunders, Vol III, p.270; Irving, *Destruction of Dresden*, pp.173, 206; SAO, Vol III, p.109.
18. Janusz Piekalkiewicz, *The Air War 1939-1945*, Poole: Blandford 1985, p.402.
19. See United States Strategic Bombing Survey, "Area Studies Division Report No.1", Washington: Government Printers 1945, pp.235-40, Alan S. Milward, *War, Economy and Society*, London: Allen Lane 1982, p.302.
20. Hastings, *op. cit.* p.342.
21. Churchill memorandum to Air Minister Sinclair, 26 January 1945 quoted in SAO, Vol III, p.103; Deputy Air Minister Sir Norman Bottomley to Harris, 27 January 1945 quoted in SAO, Vol III, p.103.
22. Longmate, *op cit*, p.335.
23. SAO, Vol III, pp.105-6.
24. Hastings, *op cit*, p.342; Irving, *Destruction of Dresden*, pp. 148, 158, 206; Piekalkiewicz, *op cit*, p.402.
25. See PRO AIR 37/876, Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, "Operations Carried Out by Second Tactical Air Force, 6 June 1944 to 9 May 1945".
26. Longmate, *op cit*, p.342.
27. SAO, Vol III, pp.113-4.
28. *Hansard*, House of Commons, 6 March 1945.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Richards and Saunders, *op cit*, Vol III, p.268.
31. Hastings, *op cit*, p.337; Piekalkiewicz, *op cit*, pp.403-5.

32. See Hinsley, *op cit*, Vol II, Appendix 5, pp.671-2.

33. SAO, Vol III, pp.113-4.

34 Randolph S. Churchill and Martin Gilbert, Winston S Churchill, (8 vols), London: Heinemann, 1954-1988, Vol VIII, p.259.

35. The capture of Berlin is described in Zhukov, *op cit*, Vol II, p.347 et al.

36. See generally Alexander Werth, *Russia at War 1941-1945*, New York: Avon 1965; John Erickson, *Stalin's War With Germany*, (2 vols) London: Grafton, 1985 where individual campaigns are listed at Vol II, p.1181. Total losses of the German Wehrmacht were 72 per cent of its officers and men. Most died on the Soviet-German front.

Stan Winer is an international journalist with 30 years' experience specialising in military-political and geo-strategic affairs. His articles have appeared in a wide range of specialist journals, newspapers and periodicals around the world. He has also worked for the information departments of various United Nations agencies.



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