

CHAPTER 4

European Cities Under the Bomb: Nazi and Allied Bombing Campaigns, 1939–45

Introduction

During the Second World War the Germans bombed most of their neighbouring countries to the east, north and west. In 1941 the relatively forgotten air raids on Soviet cities began following the collapse of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and the failure of the Blitz on Britain. For their part, the USSR also engaged in attacks on the allies of Nazi Germany at various times during the war. The British began bombing German cities in August 1940 and stepped up the Allied bombing campaigns from 1942, assisted by the United States Army

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Air Force (USAAF). Significant bombing raids were also mounted by British and American air forces on Nazi-occupied European countries, notably France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Italy was also bombed both by the Allies and the Nazis.

Much of this has been covered by Overy in his peerless histories of the bombing war in Europe. Furthermore, a convenient short cut into his and others' work on the effects of bombing on cities and civilians can be found on the webpages of the Centre for the Study of War, State and Society at Exeter University, where Overy is based. Drawing upon these materials and other sources, this chapter focuses upon the experiences of European urban populations as the bombs rained down. While it would be impossible in a book of this scope to provide a completely representative picture of all air raids and their victims, the chapter does focus upon the most significant or infamous bombing raids and their consequences for civilians. Key themes and similarities with the experience and behaviour of civilian populations are identified across counties.

Blitzkrieg over Europe

The German attacks on Barcelona and Guernica during the Spanish Civil War provided minor dress rehearsals for the massive suffering inflicted by Nazis upon European cities from September 1939. On the first day of that month, Operation Wasserkante was launched against the Polish capital city, Warsaw. Blitzkrieg had begun, and with it, the Second World War. The Luftwaffe entered the war with over 4,300 combat aircraft, and deployed over 1.5 million military personnel during the invasion of Poland. Although the Nazis had carefully studied Polish strengths and weaknesses, and possessed overwhelmingly favourable resources, the Poles resisted bravely. But heavy air raids on the people and

urban fabric of Warsaw during the early days of September 1939 led to a bloody and hugely destructive victory for the Germans.¹⁵³ Anyone searching online for images of the Warsaw Blitz can find many photographs of environmental destruction, and harrowing images of the people killed, maimed or left homeless by the bombings. The air raids were significant not only for their indiscriminate targeting of the urban population, but for the barbaric manner in which German fighter pilots wilfully selected individual civilians in the open spaces of Warsaw, and strafed them with machine gun fire.

In April 1940, Denmark and Norway were targeted for invasion by the Nazis. Sweden remained neutral throughout the war, while Finland was an ally of Germany. On 10 May 1940, however, Nazi Germany simultaneously invaded Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Four days later the Luftwaffe mounted a further infamous bombing raid on the historic Dutch port city of Rotterdam. Dive bombers attacked mostly military and commercial targets, and communications. Although no incendiary bombs were deployed, the resultant fires killed almost one thousand people, mostly civilians. Over twenty thousand buildings were burned down and 78,000 people rendered homeless. Rotterdam yielded quickly to the invasion forces, but even historians who have been sometimes sympathetic to Nazi war narratives have viewed the bombing of Rotterdam as excessive: the Germans had ‘sewn the wind’ and would reap a terrible harvest later in the war.¹⁵⁴

Polish cities would again be bombed in late June 1941 as Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the abortive attempt to invade the USSR in pursuit of *Lebensraum* (German living space). The Nazis followed a strategy of interdiction, an attempt to disrupt and destroy Soviet materiel, personnel and supply lines. Many civilians were killed in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the

Ukraine and Soviet Russia. The initial air war instigated a terrible period of German war crimes and atrocities in Eastern Europe in 1941, including the mass starvation of over 3 million people and thousands of summary executions. The Nazis deported, executed and tortured about a million Jewish people during Operation Barbarossa, which came to an end as the Red Army prevailed in the winter months of 1941, during the five-month Battle of Stalingrad. The Luftwaffe initially enjoyed air superiority during the early phase of the campaign, and Soviet cities were heavily bombed. Minsk suffered twenty-one air raids in June and July 1941, and Moscow was attacked from 21 July to 22 August. Neither of these urban campaigns were very successful in military terms, argues Overy. Loss of civilian life was slight, but on 22 September Hitler called for Leningrad 'to be erased from the earth.'¹⁵⁵ The city was bombed during the autumn and winter of 1941, and again in April 1942. Despite Hitler's apocalyptic claim, bombing and destruction was on a relatively small scale. High casualty rates in the Battle of Stalingrad, and a significant lengthy bombing of Moscow and Leningrad, failed to lead to the capitulation of Soviet citizens. The Soviet Civil Defence Programme and the Self Defence Groups that mobilised against the Germans were certainly operating within a totalitarian system, but they played a significant role in defeating the expansionist plans of the Nazis.¹⁵⁶

The failure of Operation Barbarossa is widely viewed by military historians as a turning point in the Second World War. Nazi Germany suffered heavy losses of men and materiel in an ignominious defeat, which now presaged a more coordinated response by the Allies, particularly after the USA entered the European arena in the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. And those nations that had supported the Nazi

invasion – Hungary, Romania and the Slovaks – suffered retaliatory air raids from the Russians towards the end of the war, as did Finland, used as a launching pad for Nazi air raids. Helsinki was subject to three heavy air raids in 1944, but according to Overy they had little impact on the city and its people, nor on the outcome of the war.¹⁵⁷

The Ordeal of France

France was subjected to over a quarter of the Allied bombing in wartime Europe.¹⁵⁸ From the Blitzkrieg and the Fall of France in 1940, through campaigns to target Nazi V-weapon launch sites during 1944, and the heavy bombing during the fight to liberate the French from Nazi occupation, many towns and cities suffered extensive levels of destruction. Almost 60,000 French civilians were killed, and twenty of the largest industrial cities were declared ‘bombed out’ during the Second World War.¹⁵⁹ Most were in north-eastern France. In Alsace-Lorraine for example industrial and mining areas were bombed the urban centres of Metz, Mulhouse, St. Dié and Strasbourg suffered extensive destruction.¹⁶⁰

Lyndsey Dodd extends the notion of the ‘Blitz’, traditionally associated with Britain, to the French civilian experience of bombing, arguing that the ‘Blitz’ was a transnational phenomenon.¹⁶¹ Using oral history, she provides an often emotional account of the devastation to homes, streets, communities and families in the industrial region around Lille in north-eastern France. She also portrays the effect on the individual. Since the later twentieth century social history has witnessed an increasing focus on the body as the locus of historical change, and Dodd shows how the fragile

bodies of children were affected by the invasive and cruel nature of bombing, and provides vivid images of distorted corpses being extricated from bombsites. Her oral history focuses upon subjectivity: the way her oral respondents experienced, remembered and processed what they went through.

While the ‘Blitz spirit’ was alive amongst those who lived in the ruins of French urban communities, the theme of the ferocious disruption to people and places is powerfully evident in oral testimonies. ‘Finding home intact was a relief,

After that life continued in the monotonous bombscape. Walking through once familiar streets, Cécile saw ‘ruined houses, ruined houses, ruined houses. All down the street – another one, and another.’ Lucien too illustrated such stunned disbelief: ‘Now it was just a field of ruins. The whole district destroyed. We walked for months and months in ruins. There was nothing to repair it with.’¹⁶²

Overy details the wider social impact of the bombing of French cities during 1943–4, and the outrage and resentment that many French people felt. In Lorient and Nantes for example, the ferocity and destruction of Allied air raids in the autumn of 1943 led the Germans and French to combine forces to put out fires, patch up buildings and repair infrastructure. The area bombings of Nantes also exposed weaknesses in the evacuation scheme organised by the French government. Many perished unnecessarily.¹⁶³ Large tracts of the urban-industrial sprawl of north-eastern France lay in ruins by the time liberation was secured in the summer of 1944.

The Bombing of Italian Cities

Over 60,000 people were killed by air raids in wartime Italy. This tragedy was triggered on 10 June 1940 when the Italian leader

Benito Mussolini declared war on Britain and France. Now that Britain had its metaphorical back to the wall, and the Nazis had occupied Paris, Mussolini felt he was on the winning side. In Britain, Italians were swiftly interned, and the RAF began its bombing campaign firstly upon Italian military positions, but soon afterwards against cities. The day after Italy took up arms against the Allies, Turin was bombed, and other Italian cities came under attack, notably Milan, Genoa, Taranto and Naples. As the University of Exeter's Centre for the Study of War, State and Society webpage notes, the historic heart of Venice was spared. But during the campaign to oust the Italian fascist dictatorship, heavy bombing was inflicted on the historic capital of Rome. In northern Italy, Genoa, Milan and Turin were among the leading urban centres to come under attack, while in southern Italy Naples and Taranto, and Palermo and other Sicilian cities were bombed by the Allies, particularly the USAAF. The Germans also bombed Italy following the Allied landings, but in vain, as the Italians surrendered to the Allies on 8 September 1943.¹⁶⁴

The historic period between the surrender and the final defeat of fascism in the summer of 1945 witnessed further Allied and German air raids on Italian cities. As in all other air campaigns over cities, the death and destruction visited upon urban populations profoundly distorted the environment, and tragically disrupted people's lives. The fusion of personal experience with the degraded cityscape is expressed beautifully on website of the Centre for the Study of War, State and Society:

Cities became symbolic and emotional spaces which had to be defended by their inhabitants when their 'soul' was wounded by bombs: for many civilians, an outrage to their home town was an outrage to the motherland. Grazia Alfieri Tarentino, a young woman in Milan from

1941, for example, expressed a painful resentment of the enemy when she saw La Scala theatre burning: it was 'all that had remained of the heart of the city'. In October 1944, when a bomb killed 200 school children in the Gorla working class district of Milan, she witnessed the pain and the tragedy of innocent children. The whole city was in mourning on the day of the funerals, the women in black beside the small white graves:

*On the church square, among the silent crowd, someone dared to say: 'these are the Anglo-Americans, assassins of children'. Among the sincere pain, propaganda was insinuating; on the walls posters appeared with images of death to remind those who persisted in refusing to believe it, that the so-called 'liberators' were the enemies Ideas were confused.*¹⁶⁵

The resentment felt towards the forces that were effectively liberating Italy from fascist occupation and Nazi aggression is palpable, while the reference to the wounded 'soul' of the city implicitly references the spiritual desolation many Italians felt as practising Roman Catholics who held their country to be sacred territory. Ultimately, however, ill-feeling towards the liberators cannot ignore the fact that Mussolini brought the bombs upon Italy.

The RAF Bombing Campaigns Against German Cities, 1942–5

The British bombing of Berlin in August 1940 and the smaller raids of 1940–1 can be viewed as an early and particular stage in the RAF campaign against Germany. British propaganda boasted that the RAF was inflicting serious damage on the Nazi war effort, but while reassuring, that was far from the truth. The RAF engaged in relatively minor attacks on industry, infrastructure

and military targets, with limited success. The attacks on Lubeck and Rostock were small if highly destructive strikes. In the summer of 1942, however, the RAF changed tactics.¹⁶⁶

When Bomber Command installed Air Marshall Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris in February, 1942, the area bombing campaign against Germany was significantly ramped up. Concerned that the reputation of Bomber Command was waning in Whitehall, Harris wanted his air fleet to be much more effective, more deadly and destructive, than in previous raids. His famous statement that the British had to kill as many ‘Boche’ as possible in order to win the war echoed the point made by Baldwin some ten years earlier, that victory meant killing more men, women and children of the enemy.¹⁶⁷ This was expressed in the bluntly described policy of ‘de-housing’, of rendering the civilian population homeless and helpless.¹⁶⁸ His justification was that Nazi Germany had started the war and mass aerial bombardment, known as area bombing, would help to end it. Under the proactive leadership of Harris, Bomber Command initiated a programme of massive air raids to destroy industrial capacity, infrastructure and housing, and to create chaos and submission, the very conditions that Hitler had unsuccessfully attempted to create during the Blitz.

With elite officials in the RAF, Harris planned his first signature bombing event, the Thousand Bomber Raid on Cologne on the 30–1 May 1942, which continued until 17 August. The RAF website notes that the exact number of bombers used on the first two nights of the raid is unclear, but the figure was most likely up to one thousand. Over 3,300 buildings were destroyed, most of them by fires. Large-scale firms were put out of action, roads and railway lines were incapacitated, and the power supply was destroyed in many areas of the city. Hospitals, churches, schools and university

buildings, and many shops and places of leisure were razed to the ground. Over 13,000 homes were completely destroyed, 6,360 were seriously damaged and 22,270 less badly damaged. These statistics are from an RAF source that notes 'These details of physical damage in Cologne are a good example of the results of area bombing':

Similar results can be expected in those of Bomber Command's raids, which were successful during following years. The estimates of casualties in Cologne are, unusually, quite precise. Figures quoted for deaths vary only between 469 and 486. The 469 figure comprises 411 civilians and 58 military casualties, mostly members of Flak units. 5,027 people were listed as injured and 45,132 as bombed out. It was estimated that from 135,000 to 150,000 of Cologne's population of nearly 700,000 people fled the city after the raid.¹⁶⁹

German cities thus witnessed the phenomenon of 'trekking' in common with British cities under the bomb. The experiences of female and child evacuees also demonstrated strong similarities with their British counterparts, including feelings of separation from family members; rationing and squabbles over food; petty or more significant tensions between hosts and evacuees; and worries over the loss of the home. A high number of evacuees in a city also greatly increased overcrowding and exacerbated the struggle to find safe and suitable accommodation. For these reasons, many German evacuees unwittingly emulated their British counterparts during the Phoney War: they went back to whence they had left, despite official warnings to the contrary.¹⁷⁰

When the USAAF began operating from British bases later in 1942, the capacity for combined bombing offensives between the Americans and the British was mobilised to devastating effect. By

1943 the British had developed more sophisticated aids to their bombing operations, for example a scanning device known as the H2S apparatus, which allowed for a more accurate bombing of German urban areas by providing ‘an outline of the city and its buildings.’¹⁷¹ The device was first deployed against Hamburg in January 1943, initiating a phase of bombing from March to July of that year aimed at Aachen, Krefeld, Duisburg, Dortmund, Essen, Wuppertal, Dusseldorf, Cologne, Munster, Berlin, Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Munich. During the Battle of the Ruhr a number of these cities were attacked more than once, and some over many nights.¹⁷² On the 16–17 May 1943 the RAF instigated one of its most famous raids, the attack on the dams of the Mohne and Eder Reservoirs, subject of *The Dam Busters* (1955), a popular British war film about the ‘bouncing bombs’ that skimmed across the reservoirs. While historians have argued that the military value and the industrial damage of the Dam Busters raids can be overstated, there was some impact upon morale. Germans were shocked and saddened at the intrusion and at the tales of an ‘incredible deluge.’¹⁷³

The raids on Dortmund on 23–4 May 1943 saw 2,000 tons of bombs dropped, and a death toll of about 15,000 people. Visiting Dortmund after the bombing, the German Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels found the destruction ‘virtually total’ and was only cheered by the ‘respectable’ number of planes brought down.¹⁷⁴ As Stargardt argues, the noise of the raids on Dortmund was audible in Cologne, and casualties were rendered higher than they might have been by the flooding of air raid shelters caused by the bombing of the Mohne dam.¹⁷⁵ Contemporary estimates put mortalities at 17,000 in Dusseldorf and 27,000 in Wuppertal.¹⁷⁶

John Betjeman expressed sentiments that many British men and certainly airmen would have agreed with as the Allied bombing campaign began. In his poem *Westminster Abbey* he exhorted

God to 'bomb the Germans' but to 'Spare their women for Thy Sake'.¹⁷⁷ Betjeman was also railing against the destruction of beautiful English churches by air raids. Many churches in Cologne were smashed to pieces, while the cathedral mostly survived. The attack on Cologne was hailed by Bomber Command and the British government as proof positive that the RAF were now successfully fighting back against the Germans. Yet despite such propaganda value the philosopher A.C. Grayling has shown how well-prepared the German authorities and German people were for the heavy raids on Cologne. While he does not explore the degree to which such efficiency was superimposed on the German population by the Nazi regime, it could be countered that the extensive consent to the regime by millions of Germans did not require much coercion.¹⁷⁸ German preparations for the attack on Cologne greatly ameliorated the death and destruction meted out by the raid. As Grayling notes, the city had prepared 'public shelters for 75,000 people':

with twenty-five deep special bunkers for a further 7,500 (and twenty-nine additional such bunkers in the process of being built). A total of 42,000 small air raid shelters had been provided under or next to houses for apartment buildings or residents. Fourteen auxiliary hospitals had been constructed, giving an extra 1,760 emergency beds. The total cost of air-raid defences in Cologne prior to the 1,000 bomber raid was thirty-nine million marks. It was money well spent. The 1,000 bombers dropped 2,500 tons of high explosives and incendiaries, and destroyed centuries of history; the German dead numbered 469.¹⁷⁹

The raid on Hamburg in the summer of 1943 was the largest following Cologne. The Allies were increasingly deploying

phosphorous incendiary devices to start fires that spread rapidly, and Hamburg was to suffer hugely from them. The specific intentions for Hamburg revealed the wider rationale of, and perceived justification for, the area bombing of German cities. On 27 May 1943 Bomber Command's Operations Order No. 173 made it clear that the importance of Hamburg as the second city of Germany with a population of over 1.5 million 'needs no further emphasis':

The total destruction of this city would achieve immeasurable results in reducing the industrial capacity of the enemy's war machine. This, together with the effect on German morale, which would be felt throughout the country, would play a very important part in shortening and winning the war.

The 'Battle of Hamburg' cannot be won in a single night. It is estimated that at least 10,000 tons of bombs will have to be dropped to complete the process of elimination. To achieve the maximum effect of air bombardment this city should be subjected to sustained attack.

Intention: To destroy Hamburg.¹⁸⁰

Bomber Command and the RAF were to operate under cover of darkness, while the strategy called for the USAAF to follow through with 'heavy daylight attacks.'¹⁸¹ Given the strength of German air defences, and the vagaries of the weather, meticulous planning preceded the sustained bombing of Hamburg. Lancaster, Halifax and Stirling bombers carried sizeable loads of powerful HE bombs but 'a large number of incendiaries are to be carried in order to saturate the Fire Service. The proportion of high explosive bombs to be carried may be increased after widespread fire damage has been achieved.'¹⁸²

The tragic and defining consequence of the raids on Hamburg was the terrible overnight firestorm that consumed the city and



Figure 6: Statue to Sir Arthur Harris, St. Clement's Danes, Aldwych, London. The inscription reads: 'In memory of a great commander and of the brave crews of Bomber Command, more than 55,000 of whom lost their lives in the cause of freedom. The nation owes them all an immense debt' (photograph by author, 2017).

its population. As Musgrove argues, Harris was delighted with the scale of the devastation wrought by the RAF, quoting from the Bible that the Germans ‘had sewn the wind, and now they reaped the whirlwind.’¹⁸³ The Hamburg raids lasted for a week and resulted in about 40,000 civilian deaths. Much of Hamburg was razed to the ground by the terrible firestorms which raged through the city.¹⁸⁴ People were burnt to ashes, suffocated by the lack of oxygen, or died from heat exposure which raised their body temperature to intolerable levels. The city was strewn with corpses, and the authorities faced a monumental task in clearing them away while dealing with practical problems such as gaining clean water for the survivors, and rendering buildings safe.¹⁸⁵

Many German cities were badly damaged and others bombed close to complete destruction by the Allies. Yet the destruction of Dresden in eastern Germany, the seventh largest city in the country, has been the subject of intense historical attention. The ‘Florence of the Elbe’ was subjected to bombing raids on 13–14 February 1945, just a few months before the war in Europe came to an end. ‘Operation Thunderclap’ had been planned since July 1944 as a late knockout blow to the German city, further evidence of Harris’s unwavering belief that air power was a key force in winning wars.¹⁸⁶ In the novel *Slaughterhouse 5* by Kurt Vonnegut, the narrator Billy Pilgrim is an American ex-prisoner of war who was in Dresden when the bombs fell. Years later Pilgrim flicks through a copy of the *Gideon Bible* he finds in his motel room, to look for ‘tales of great destruction’ reading ‘Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of Heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.’¹⁸⁷

Vonnegut must have been aware that the raid on Hamburg in 1943 was code-named Operation Gomorrah. Dresden was to suffer a similar cataclysm. From their bases in Britain nearly 800 RAF Lancaster Bombers delivered over 2,646 tons of bombs over Dresden, including 1,180 tons of incendiaries, while USAAF B-17 Flying Fortresses unloaded over 460 tons of bombs the following day. The resulting firestorm devastated its cultural treasures as over 15 square miles of the city were devoured by flames. Over 75,000 out of 220,000 homes were destroyed.¹⁸⁸ The German military was forced to use fire in mass cremations of the dead, in order to avoid the spread of disease, and to quell the stench of putrefying burnt flesh.

One of the earliest historians to interpret the bombing of Dresden as an unnecessary atrocity by the Allies was the now-discredited British writer David Irving. *The Destruction of Dresden* (1963) claimed that the firestorms in Dresden were the culmination of the allied war on Germany's cities and civilians. Irving estimated that 135,000 people were killed in the February air raids, an unscientific estimate that he later revised, and that other historians have also questioned. Exact mortality rates are impossible to verify due to the unaccounted number of refugees and the number of almost completely incinerated corpses that did, or did not, receive mass burials. In *Slaughterhouse 5* Vonnegut references Irving, and as Billy Pilgrim emerges from the underground abattoir, where he had heard the bombing overnight, he observes that '135,000 Hansels and Gretels' had been 'baked like gingerbread men'.¹⁸⁹ As Overy argues, however, the original estimate by the President of Police for Dresden of about 25,000 mortalities is probably the most accurate estimate, although a further 1,858 skeletons were dug up during the reconstruction of the city after 1945.¹⁹⁰

Dresden was so comprehensively wrecked that little of the city was left standing at the end of the war. Thousands of refugees had also made their way there from the Eastern Front, and this influx amplified the death toll. Leading politicians in Britain, including the Prime Minister, now questioned the validity of blanket bombing. Cynics may view the following assessment by Churchill as one based upon public relations and utilitarian consideration, rather than any humane sense of remorse:

It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed. Otherwise we shall come into control of an utterly ruined land. We shall not, for example, be able to get housing materials out of Germany for our own needs because some temporary provision would have to be made for the Germans themselves. The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of allied bombing.¹⁹¹

But it also asked a serious question of the corruption and selfishness of local Nazi officials whom, as Kevin Wilson argues, were lax when setting up air and civil defence facilities for Dresden: ‘The city authorities had woefully neglected the building of shelters except for themselves.’¹⁹² This failing should be accounted for when assessing the mortality rate after the February raids, and the devastation to the built environment. The bombing of German cities represented an intensive campaign of conventional air raids deploying HE bombs of varying payloads, parachute mines, and incendiary devices. For Bomber Command, as for Churchill, Eisenhower and Truman, aerial warfare hastened the end of the German war, degrading the urban infrastructure and demoralising its citizens. The Blitz on Britain had demonstrated the failure of

intentions by Nazi military planners, and there was little hard evidence to support the Allied interpretation of German capitulation. As Beck argues, 'it seems clear that the bombings tended to draw people together in a community of striving against adversity.'¹⁹³ Nicholas Stargardt presents a more nuanced picture of German morale and responses to air raids, showing how many used the language of 'taking it' as did the British during the Blitz. Some tried to sleep through the raids, others immediately set about clearing away rubble or broken glass from their homes, some demonstrated 'strong hearts' and 'even developed a kind of pride in what they endured'. Others displayed their 'nerves' more readily.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, many Germans manifested anti-Jewish feeling during the air raids, blaming the responsibility for them on 'World Jewry', unsurprising given the anti-Semitic ideology of the Nazi regime. Yet many ordinary Germans simply did not believe the raids on the dams were a consequence of 'Jewish terror' despite what the Nazi Party told them, and blamed the English instead.¹⁹⁵

Conclusion

Writing during the early post-war years, the esteemed military historian Michael Howard argued that air raids, if anything, initially strengthened morale by increasing a sense of defiance and hatred of the enemy. He admitted, however, that bombing in the later stages of war created apathy and war-weariness, but rarely the ultimate defeat of civilian fortitude.¹⁹⁶ The air raids and their consequences discussed in this chapter appear to confirm this judgement, even for heavily-bombed Germany.

So whither the reputation of 'Bomber Harris'? Max Hastings views him as sometimes vulgar and narrow-minded, but also as a driven and shrewd Commander in Chief, whose indifference to

German suffering during the area bombing campaigns contrasted with his passionate commitment to his aircrew. He was deeply saddened at the losses incurred by the often terrifying raids, and often given to bouts of emotional anger.¹⁹⁷ For Henry Messenger, Harris may have been 'blinkerered, boorish and stubborn' but he inspired his crews to take enormous risks.¹⁹⁸ In similar vein to Hastings, Messenger argues that the strategy of continuous area bombing has been subsequently proven to have been a mistake, 'but during much of the war there was no way of knowing this.'¹⁹⁹ Henry Probert, in his study of Harris, even includes an evaluation made in 1959 by the Nazi architect and confidante of Hitler, Albert Speer, that the unpredictability and sustained heaviness of the raids caused Germany enormous problems, possibly more so than defeat on the Russian Front.²⁰⁰ Whether the comparison stands or not, within the context of a bitter, continuing and unwon war, tactics and tragedy were united in the unwavering belief of Harris that area bombing was a successful strategy.

Despite the complexity of morale and its ultimately resilient nature, some lessons learned or at least believed to have been learned from the air raids on Germany were applied by the Americans to the bombing of Japan from late 1944. Incendiaries had a huge and destructive potential in a land known for its traditional use of lightweight building materials, and its high concentrations of buildings and populations in mountainous country where settlements were only possible on a large scale on the coastal plains and some inland areas. The campaigns in Japan were to prove that air power could assist the winning of wars.

