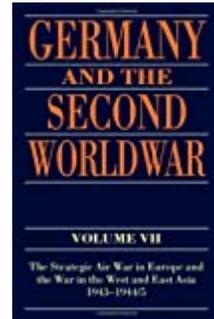




**Horst Boog, Gerhard Krebs, Detlef Vogel.** *Germany and the Second World War, Volume VII: The Strategic Air War in Europe and the War in the West and East Asia 1943-1944/5.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. xxxvi + 892 pp. \$425.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-822889-9.



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### An Epic Series Continues

This volume continues Oxford's excellent translation of the ongoing work of Germany's *Militaergeschichtliches Forschungsamt*, and its massive series, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, now well into its fourth decade. Many readers may by now be familiar with the format of the volumes, with several noted scholars contributing sections to make up the whole. In this regard, this volume employs a stellar cast, engaged in a monumental project now nearing completion. Of the major belligerents of the Second World War, only Germany continues to produce an extensive and ongoing historical investigation of its actions and this volume continues an impressive and honest, though high-level, appraisal of the horrific nature of the conflict. The seventh volume traces Germany's loss of the air war against the Western Allies, Allied troop landings in France and their advance to the German border, and the second half of the war in Asia, culminating in the surrender of Japan.

The first section of the volume, following a typically erudite introduction from Hans Umbreit, is entitled "The Strategic Air War in Europe and Air Defence of the Reich, 1943-1944." Here the author, Horst Boog, brings his ven-

erable experience in aviation scholarship to bear, producing a rich and powerful analytical narrative that brings together English and German literature in a masterful synthesis. Both comfortably familiar and full of new insights, Boog's work instantly becomes essential reading for those interested in the world's largest and most brutal war in the air. Beginning with the strategic directions set at Casablanca on January 21, 1943, American and British civilian and military leaders agreed to join forces in an expanded strategic air offensive against Germany. The "Casablanca Directive" set directions for Allied offensive operations in Western Europe until the amphibious operations of OVERLORD and DRAGOON in summer 1944. Boog emphasizes that although both air forces carried out operations differently, with American forces favoring daylight "precision" raids and British forces operating at night in "area bombing" operations, close coordination at the operational command level meant that the two air arms at first haltingly, then increasingly effectively launched combined attacks against hundreds of targets across Europe during this period. Technology's role as a crucial component of the air war receives due attention from Boog, who notes that Allied awareness of the

importance of technological support for the strategic air war was an important factor in explaining their superiority in the skies of Europe by early 1944. Boog also points out that support for the air war came from many sources and operations, including some, such as the Dieppe raid of 1942, traditionally considered failures. Contingent deployment of technology was also a crucial factor, as was the case in the use of WINDOW, aluminum foil strips used to jam German defensive radar. "The story of WINDOW...illustrates the extent to which the moment for using a new technical weapon is a matter not just of its availability but also of expediency and strategy" (p.19-20). The air war also generated important successes in Italy, with raids by Allied air forces against northern Italian industrial targets a significant factor in encouraging workers uprisings against fascist forces in March 1943.

Importantly, Boog also reminds readers of the limits of the strategic air war, and the often mistaken Allied estimates of German industrial strength. He points to British operations against targets in the Ruhr Valley region between Spring 1943 and Spring 1944, an area believed by Bomber Command to be the heart of German industrial production but, as Boog indicates, actually responsible for producing relatively little of Germany's war materiel: "If one disregards the synthetic fuel plants on the outskirts of a few of its towns, only little was produced in the Ruhr that was of immediate use or essential for the German war effort. Its contribution to arms production amounted to no more than 25 percent or thereabouts; in tank manufacture it was only 10 per cent; and there was only one aircraft factory. Furthermore, the machine tools equipping the Ruhr factories were fairly immune to destruction" (p. 27).

Boog also spends several pages dissecting at length the moral and ethical implications of the bombing offensive, noting that while the British government "deliberately misled" the public and even the aircrews about the true character of the air war, the chief of Bomber Command, Arthur Harris, "was more honest (and)...refused to take the hypocritical attitude of claiming that the bombing of cities was not necessarily a direct attack on civilians" (p. 33). He also contends that the argument that area bombing was the only option due to technological and meteorological constraints is somewhat inaccurate, as the Allies possessed an extremely accurate light bomber, the Mosquito, which proved its ability to hit and destroy precision targets by mid-1943 in daylight raids. Conservative thinking was also evident in Harris's continued belief that the war could not only be won from the air, but that after the war air power could be the chief

component of keeping Germany "in check...with minimal support from a small expeditionary force," a perspective that Boog identifies as "reminiscent of the 'air' or 'imperial' policing of colonial peoples in the inter-war years" (p.45-46). This sentiment is no surprise given Harris's background in the colonies during this earlier period, notably in Iraq.[1] To this end, Harris resisted diverting his forces away from German targets to those in France in support of the invasion plans until pressure from above forced him to do so.

Over time, the combined efforts of the Allies, despite horrendous losses of men and planes, began to exert significant effects on Germany's ability to wage war, particularly in the air. Introduction of escort fighters equipped with auxiliary fuel tanks made a decisive impact and greatly improved bomber crews' morale. On the German side, disagreements over defensive strategies and losses of experienced personnel meant that by the time of the OVERLORD invasion, the Luftwaffe lacked the ability to oppose seriously the Allied air forces, which now outnumbered them by ten to one and enjoyed almost total air superiority. The Reich and the territories it still occupied were now, in Joseph Goebbels' phrase, a "fortress without a roof." For its part, the German Air Force did make efforts to prepare for a strategic bombing campaign in the East that were never realized because their front line receded. Similarly in the West, resumption of the bombing campaign against Britain, based largely on reactions to British "terror bombing," was half-hearted and under-supported, reflecting the rigidity in thinking and structure of much of the Luftwaffe leadership throughout the war, as well as the absence of a reliable four-engine aircraft. Boog argues that the role of Hitler here, as in other questions of strategy, proved decisive: "Hitler was already dreaming of the 15 million Volkswagens that would be on the road in a short time after the war....Next, Hitler's fantasies turned to reprisal and attack weapons for bombing the British homeland and London in particular. Besides, if the German people, faced with the bombing war, were to prove too weak, then it deserved to perish. Such ideas still cause outrage today. But they also reveal the unreal, irresponsible phantom world Germany's Fuehrer was living in while his nation suffered, an anguish from which he escaped into hopes of new cities, new weapons, rockets, torpedoes, new U-boat designs and jet aircraft" (pp. 373-374). Boog's brilliant analysis of Hitler and those around him at this stage of the war, particularly his designated successor Hermann Göring, deserves wide circulation.

The second section, entitled "German and Allied Con-

duct of the War in the West,” by Detlef Vogel, details Allied and German preparations for a cross-Channel invasion. After the Allies asserted control of much of the Atlantic by late 1943, both sides knew the assault was a question of when rather than if. Accordingly, Allied plans centered on deception and massive buildups of resources in order to succeed, while the Germans constructed coastline defenses designed to repel amphibious landings. Vogel succeeds in condensing enormous amounts of primary and secondary material into an engaging series of arguments. A summary section entitled “Excursus” provides comparisons of Allied and German intentions, strategies and outcomes during the invasion. Detailed maps accompany the sections on OVERLORD, the Allied breakout, Operation DRAGOON, and the struggle for the Ardennes. Like Boog, Vogel shows a flair for blending the known with the new and original. Vogel argues German commanders in the West lacked sufficient men, heavy weapons, supplies, and clear strategic priorities, but because of Allied disunity and logistical overstretch, managed to halt the Allied advance along the German border by the end of 1944. By this point, however, it was clear that Hitler had run out of options and ideas and the end of the war was in sight. Vogel also reminds readers of the deterioration of relations between German forces and civilians in the West after the cross-Channel invasions. As their fortunes in the West deteriorated, the conduct of German occupation forces became increasingly brutal and repressive, in many places approaching the more terrible standards of the Eastern Front. Predictably, European civilians responded through increased acts of resistance and sabotage, particularly in France.

The third and final section, entitled, “The War in the Pacific 1943-1945,” written by Gerhard Krebs, analyzes the culmination of the war in Asia. Krebs provides English speakers with a detailed, and welcome, investigation of Japanese sources, which are skillfully integrated with English works to generate an engaging and penetrating narrative. Emperor Hirohito’s role in the conflict, illuminated in recent years by Herbert Bix’s *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (2001), receives due attention from Krebs, as does the complex web of elite factions operating within imperial Japanese politi-

cal, diplomatic, and military circles. Krebs argues that fear of the Soviet Union loomed large in Japanese thinking after 1942, as the war turned against them at Midway and Guadalcanal. Krebs points to several failures in Japanese strategy as responsible for hastening Japan’s ultimate defeat. First, attempts to reduce the size and scope of defensive responsibilities failed, due to disagreements within the services over which regions should be given priority. Second, failure to compel Allied forces to commit to a decisive battle, particularly in the Philippines in 1944, combined with inadequate supplies of shipping and aircraft to render the Japanese powerless to prevent the multi-pronged Allied advance. Like Hitler, elements of the Japanese elites remained convinced until the war’s end that their opponents’ alliance was an anomalous, fragile contingency that could be fractured, although in direct contrast to the Germans, some of Japan’s leadership believed the U.S.S.R. could be convinced to abandon its Anglo-American partners and join with Japan in a new conflict. Ultimately, these fantasies collapsed in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Manchuria and the atomic detonations. As Krebs notes in a thoughtful concluding section focused on postwar developments, it would be pro-American forces that would triumph in the postwar era; men like Shigeru Yoshida, the “Japanese Adenauer,” would cement Japan’s new role in Asia as one foundation of the United States-led anti-communist system (p. 836). These alignments still exert enormous influence on geopolitics in contemporary Asia today.

All sections of the volume, despite their varied foci, complement each other, and the translation, aside from a few awkward spots, flows well. Abundant maps, charts and tables support the text and will be of use to scholars of all levels. This series stands as one of the essential sources of Second World War scholarship and this volume enhances that reputation.

#### Note

[1]. For further details on Harris’s earlier career, as well as connections between events in Iraq’s skies then and now, see Priya Satia, “The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia,” *American Historical Review* 111 (2006): 16-52.

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