



MASTERS
OF THE
AIR

OR
WHEELS & WINGS: BOYS WHO FIGHTED
THE WAR THAT CHANGED THE WORLD



CAPTAIN JOHN D. ...
...
...
...
...

I like to know I'm leaving a little something behind

I was on the return leg of my eleventh combat mission as the captain of a B-17 bomber when my plane took a direct hit. It was 1944, and we had been on a mission over Berlin. A 140-mph headwind slowed our return to base, and then we came under fire.

The B-17 careened into a snap roll, pinning my crew to the walls of the aircraft. Then my co-pilot took some shrapnel to his arm. Our left engine went dead and half of our tail, including our stabilizer, was shot off. I pulled the plane out of its spin, but it resumed careening around before too long. With that much damage and with that strong a headwind, you don't stand much of a chance.



In this photo of the POW camp where Fred Rector was held, white patches on the windows of the barracks are pieces of cardboard taken from Red Cross parcels to replace broken glass.

I bailed out and parachuted to the snowy ground. My goal was to somehow make it back to the Allied lines. I hid during the day and walked at night. I was captured later in the week while searching a railyard for water. My hands and feet were frostbitten, and I was hungry and thirsty. I, along with dozens of other Allied airmen, was transported to a prisoner of war (POW) camp in Barth, Germany. Our train stopped in Frankfurt, and a Red Cross nurse handed us some steaming gruel, the first warm meal I'd had in four days. I'd seen Red Cross workers in action at my airbase, and I was thrilled to see the Red Cross emblem in Germany, watching out for me as a captive soldier. It gave me hope.

I spent 15 months as a POW, looking forward to packages from the Red Cross. They were my sustenance. Though I always feared for my life, the Interna-

tional Committee of the Red Cross visited regularly, ensuring that the Germans were adhering to the Geneva Conventions that protect POWs. We still had some narrow shaves—once, when Hitler ordered all POWs to be executed, and, near the end of the war, when troops of the advancing Russian army told us to gather all that we owned (we had nothing) and to fall out for a roll call. It sounded like the beginning of a death march, but we stalled for time, and soon the American army arrived. I'm grateful to this day to the Red Cross for the packages I received, the kindness they bestowed on me and other soldiers, the regular checks on our welfare and the news they brought of my family back home. I was utterly dependent on them during my time in captivity. They were quite literally my lifeline.

I started giving back to the Red Cross when I got back home, and I've never stopped. When I was planning my estate, the Red Cross was uppermost in my mind. What better way of returning the Red Cross gift to me than by leaving a legacy through the Red Cross to help someone else? I've named my local Red Cross chapter as the beneficiary of my G.I. life insurance. It's just my small way of saying thanks.

I might not be here today if it were not for the Red Cross. I see their work with service members and their families today, as well as with civilians affected by war. Our local chapter had people out in California, offering relief to those individuals whose homes were burned in the recent wildfires. That's not to mention all the times they're here in my South Carolina county helping every time a house burns or we have a flood. I like to know I'm leaving a little something behind to help them continue their good work, long after I'm gone.

Fred Rector, Endowment Donor
Upstate South Carolina Chapter
Greenville, South Carolina



...ives are developed.
...ore oil drilling is
...ty and expensive.
...g to the Energy
...ion Administra-
...erica's offshore oil
...s could not signifi-
...ect oil production
...0. Even then, any
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...ution to high gas
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...ally, I look for-
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...e July Fourth.

Colin Hagan
Travelers Rest

Low transit

...es meet and
...r gallon, I was
...Greenville
...finally jump
...ransit band-
...ide adequate
...for all of the
...the county,
...come areas. I
...ppointed.
...g to the
...of the county
...s ago, we
...to be pa-

**Thanks to all
who love the U.S.**

After reading letters
commenting on our mili-

Janie Ray
Greenville

WANT HANDELSMAN
Greenville News

FOURTH OF JULY TRAVEL PLANS...

...tient, mass transit was
...coming. I am tired of being
...patient. The northern part
...of the county is growing by
...leaps and bounds, but we
...must drive into Greenville
...to attend the wonderful
...events the city provides.
...We must drive to the mar-
...ket, to the doctor, to all
...necessary, and unneces-
...sary, resources. We are
...also home to several higher
...education facilities, includ-
...ing Furman University, not
...serviced by mass transit.

...We need public transit
...now, not some unforeseen
...time in the future, if and
...when light rail ever comes
...to Travelers Rest. I be-
...lieve that increased bus
...routes and decreased wait
...times would encourage
...more riders — and more
...income for the bus system
...— not to mention the gas
...saved, the dollars saved,
...and associated environ-
...mental factors.

...I beg the county to find a
...way to extend public tran-
...sit service to us — and
...soon.

...tary forces, I would like to
...reflect. While I am not in
...favor of all of the actions
...we as a nation have ven-
...tured into in my lifetime,
...and highly opposed to some
...— especially recently, I
...claim no absolutes to our
...modern problems.

...Yes, I am one of those
...boomers whose draft num-
...ber was too high to send
...me to Vietnam. However, I
...can vividly remember the
...biggest fear I had in high
...school — ending up face-
...down in a rice field, drafted
...and dead.

...I should say some of the
...people today whom I most
...respect are folks like my
...father-in-law who was on a
...halftrack fighting his way
...over Germany liberating
...small towns, and my 90-
...year-old friend from Greer
...who was shot down and
...spent 15 months in a POW
...camp. These men have sto-
...ries of bravery and heroism
...I cannot even fathom.

...Today, some of my best
...friends have children en-
...tering the service to go to a
...war with which they may
...not agree, or whose chil-
...dren are opposed to the
...war their cousins will fight.
...This letter is in favor of no
...candidate or party, and re-
...spects and honors those
...who adamantly seek peace.

...On a weekend dedicated
...to freedom, I seek to pay
...honor to people who serve.
...I have never known any
...veteran who ever came
...home who was not dedi-
...cated to the country he or
...she served. Thank you to
...those who love our country
...and strive at home for
...peace. And thank you to
...those who serve to protect
...it.

T. Van Matthews
Simpsonville

**Military letter
was demeaning**

...A letter published in the
...June 16 issue of *The
...Greenville News* states,
...without citing a source,
...that most of the United
...States military joined be-
...cause "they could not find
...a job in the civilian sector,
...were criminals, or both."
...The writer continues,
...again without giving a
...source, that the United
...States military "has a high-
...er number of criminals
...than ever before."

...These statements are
...demeaning to every per-
...son who has served his or
...her country in the military
...and to their families. I
...wonder whether *The
...Greenville News* did any
...research into the underly-

...All letters are subject to
...editing. Please limit your let-
...ter to fewer than 250 words.
...Because of the high volume
...of letters submitted, we are
...unable to acknowledge or
...return unpublished letters.

...All letters to the editor and
...guest columns may be pub-
...lished or distributed in print,
...electronic, online or other
...forms in perpetuity.

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...29602
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...**Email:**
...Letters@greenvillenews.com

...ing facts before publishing
...such a broad condemna-
...tion of our military forces.

...For the record, all
...branches of the United
...States military have
...screening procedures in
...place for "moral qualifica-
...tions" (criminal history)
...for all applicants. Accord-
...ing to the screening proto-
...cols, some criminal of-
...fenses can be waived, but
...others cannot.

...My son is a captain in
...the United States Air
...Force, a former Air Force
...instructor pilot, and now a
...trainee on the C-130J air-
...craft. He is a graduate of
...Riverside High School,
...Furman University and
...Emory University. Prior
...to his being admitted into
...the Air Force and to the
...pilot training program, he
...was subjected to rigorous
...screening requirements,
...including a thorough back-
...ground check. He and his
...fellow pilots are the finest
...examples of the young
...adults of this country, and
...letters such as this do
...nothing to support them.

Dianne S. Riley
Greenville

"The boisterous sea

STALAG LUFT ONE

BARTH, GERMANY

FEB. 3, 1945

IT WAS FULL 6 YEARS AGO TONIGHT
AND THEY'VE SEEMED SHORT SOMEHOW
A CHOICE WAS MADE - I KNEW THAT WAS RIGHT -
AND TOOK A SOLEMN VOW

A SOLEMN VOW, A SACRED ~~VOW~~ BOND
TO BE HER OWN SWEETHEART
TO LIVE AND LOVE UNTIL DEATH DO US PART

TIL DEATH US PART, WHEN-ERE THAT BE
MAY HEAVEN BLESS HER NOW CARESS
WHO'S FOND EMBRACE OFT TIMES AND WARM ~~EMBRACE~~
HAVE SOOTHED MY BROW
~~HAVE~~ SOOTHED MY BROW - AND SHALL ~~AGAIN~~ AGAIN

WHEN GOD'S WILL DO TH PROVIDE
MY HONGING HEART SHALL ^{THEN} PROCLAIM -
SWEET PEACE - FULL SATISFA ^{FIED!!!}

AMEN ! AMEN !

T WAS FULL SIX YEARS AGO TONIGHT
AND THEY'VE SEEMED SHORT SOMEHOW
A CHOICE WAS MADE - I KNEW T WAS RIGHT,
AND TOOK A SOLEMN VOW
A SOLEMN VOW - A SACRED BOND TO BE HER
OWN SWEETHEART TO LIVE AND LOVE

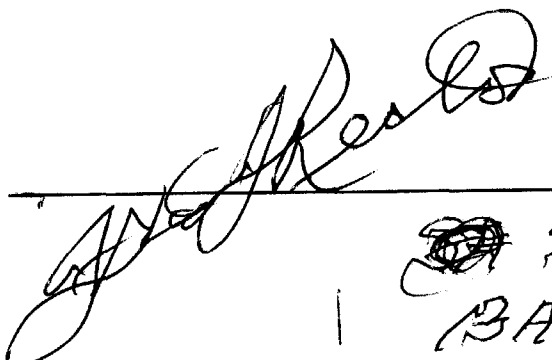
AND BE AS ONE UNTIL DEATH DO US PART
TIL DEATH US PART WHEN-ERE THAT BE
MAY HEAVEN BLESS HER NOW - WHO'S FOND
EMBRACE AND WARM CARESS OFT TIMES
HATH SOOTHED MY BROW
HATH SOOTHED, ~~AM~~ MY BROW

AND SHALL AGAIN WHEN GOD'S WILL DOETH
PROVIDE

MY LONGING HEART WILL THEN
PROCLAIM: SWEET PEACE!!

FULL SATISFIED !!!

AMEN - AMEN


STALAG LUFT ONE
BARTH GERMANY

FEB. 3, 1945

Forceful “Argument”

In the famous “Big Week” bombing campaign, America’s crushing advantage was leadership.

By Walter J. Boyne

It’s official military title was Operation Argument. The Combined Bomber Offensive unfolded over a stretch of six days in 1944, starting on Feb. 20 and running through Feb. 25. Nobody knew it at the time, but Argument would shove the powerful Luftwaffe into an irreversible decline, and make possible the June 6, 1944 Normandy invasion.

No wonder everyone now refers to that famous bombing campaign simply as “Big Week.”

Big Week was led by the heroic men who manned the bombers and fighters that relentlessly pounded Germany with a simple goal in mind: Destroy the enemy air force. Behind the airmen is a story of upended doctrine, logistics

mastery, courageous decision making, and unprecedented supremacy in intelligence gathering.

The most important consequences of Big Week were not understood by Allied commanders until after the war had ended. Newly gathered information on the German effort was analyzed, and it revealed vast differences in German and American perceptions of the scale on which air warfare should be conducted. It laid bare the superiority of the Army Air Forces leadership over that of the Luftwaffe.

Three elements of the AAF leadership deserve special notice.

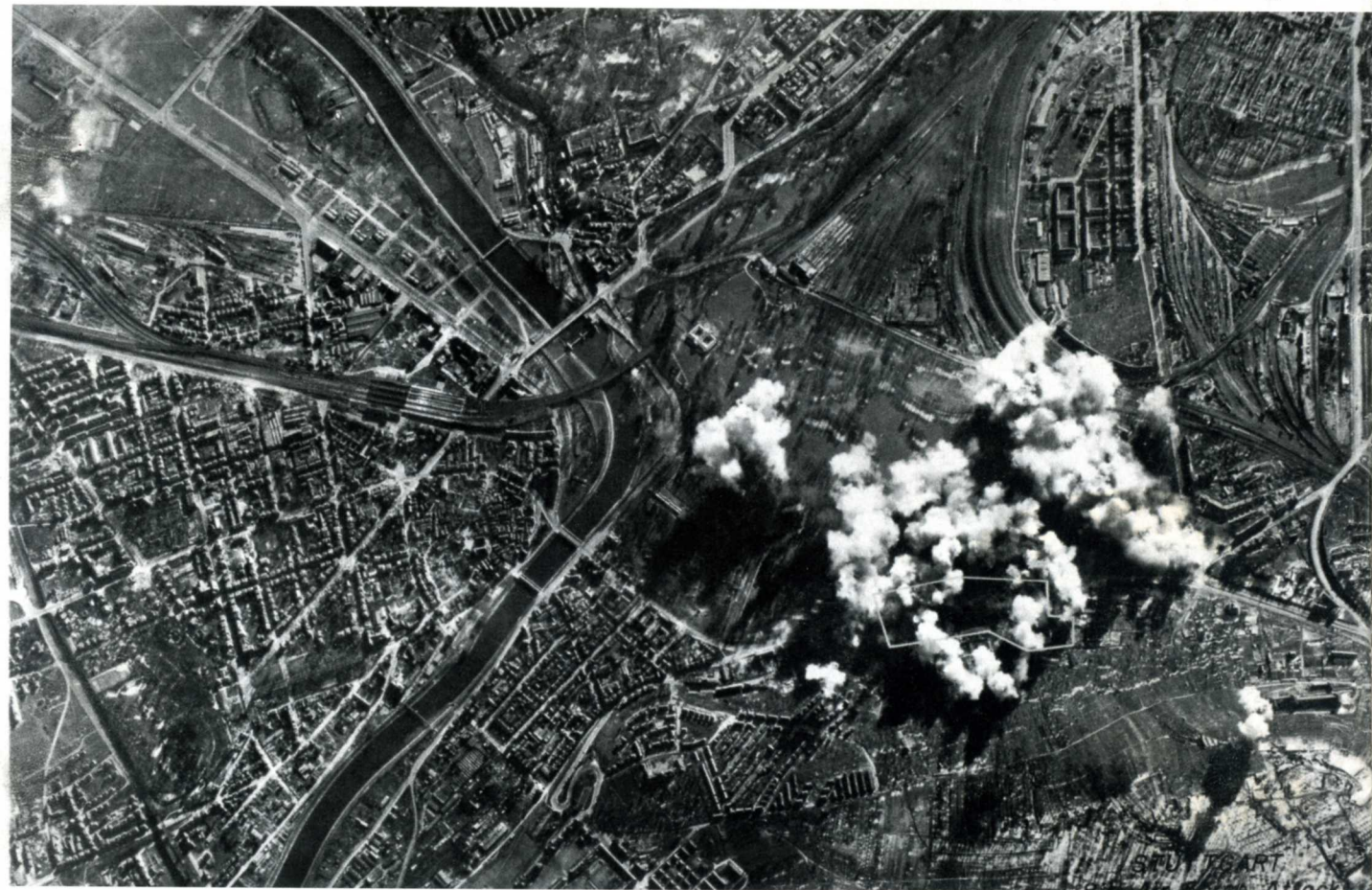
First was the brilliant planning behind Air War Plans Division 1 (AWPD-1),

which so correctly estimated the necessary size of the AAF—and its losses. The planners did their important work in a few days, based on long experience.

Second was the massive AAF effort to catch up on previously overlooked logistics requirements. This buildup was achieved over a much longer time.

Third was the flexibility of AAF leadership. When the air campaign leaders recognized their offensive doctrine was wrong, they reversed course and quickly executed new methods.

Key planners included Lt. Gen. Carl A. “Tooe” Spaatz, commander, US Strategic Air Forces in Europe (USSTAF), who selected an able orga-

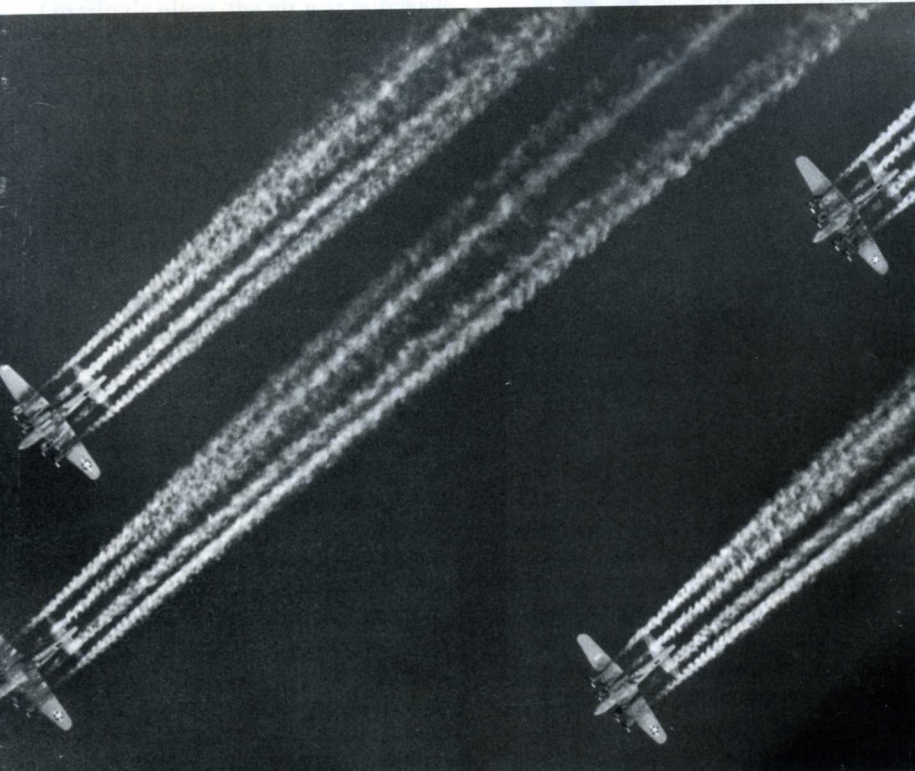


nizer, Maj. Gen. Frederick L. Anderson Jr., as his deputy.

Soon-to-be Lt. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle had succeeded Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker as commander, Eighth Air Force. (Eaker accepted an assignment as commander in chief, Mediterranean Allied Air

to factories in the Leipzig (which had been heavily bombed by the RAF the previous night), Bernburg, and Brunswick areas.

Three men earned the Medal of Honor for this mission. One went to a badly wounded pilot, 1st Lt. Wil-



Left: Bombs dropped by USAAF's Eighth Air Force pound a German ball-bearing factory in Stuttgart. Above: Fifteenth Air Force B-17s streak toward a bombing target.

Forces.) Maj. Gen. Nathan F. Twin- ing was commander of Fifteenth Air Force.

Big Week began with a big gamble on Feb. 20, when weather forecasts were so bad that the "master of the calculated risk," Doolittle, advised against launching. He and other commanders were concerned about losses that might be incurred by icing and collisions as thousands of aircraft made a long climb.

Yet Spaatz did not waver and gave the order to go.

Things began amazingly well. Eighth Air Force dispatched 1,003 bombers and 835 fighters, and the RAF provided 16 fighter squadrons for escort duties.

A total of 2,218 tons of bombs were dropped on 12 designated targets and 145 targets of opportunity.

Against Anderson's doleful fears that 200 bombers might be lost, only 21 were shot down, along with four fighters. The bombing results were good, with heavy damage meted out

liam R. Lawley Jr., who managed to bring his damaged B-17 back to Great Britain, saving seven wounded crew members.



AAF Lt. Gen. Carl Spaatz (r), shown here with Supreme Allied Commander Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, led the planning effort.

Two others were awarded posthu- mously to Sgt. Archibald Mathies, a ball turret gunner, and navigator 2nd Lt. Walter E. Truemper. The two men made a gallant attempt to save their wounded crew members by flying their B-17 back with the pilots killed or disabled. Sadly, Truemper and Mathies were also killed in their attempted landing.

Luftwaffe Response

On Feb. 21, 861 bombers and 679 fighters were launched, but the results were far less satisfactory, largely due to unexpected cloud cover.

Feb. 22 saw the Eighth attack with 799 bombers, but only 255 missions were credited as successful sorties. Two bombardment divisions were recalled, the 2nd because of its inability to establish a coherent formation en route to Germany, the 3rd due to multiple collisions during the climb.

Forty-one Eighth Air Force bombers were shot down that day, more than 17 percent of the effective force. Fifteenth Air Force lost 14, bringing the day's total to 55 aircraft lost.

The Luftwaffe responded to the mas- sive pressure being applied. It drew fighters from the vast Eastern Front for the defense of the Reich. New defensive methods were employed, including attacking formations on their way in, rather than attempting to down them over the target and on the return trip.

The next day, weather brought a stand-down, but on Feb. 24, impor- tant targets were selected at Rostock, Schweinfurt, Gotha, and Eisenach. These were the primary factories pro- ducing the Messerschmitt Bf 110, Focke-Wulf FW 190, and anti-friction bearings.

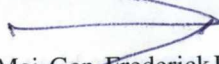
Attrition and wear-and-tear reduced Eighth Air Force bombers to 505, and of these, 451 made successful sor- ties. Losses were heavy again, with 44 bombers lost. Fifteenth Air Force lost 17 bombers in its attack against Steyr, Austria.

The bombing was good at Schwein- furt, but the Germans had already begun their dispersal program. Many German facilities were no longer the rich tar- gets they had been, but defenders still extracted a high toll for attacks.

On Feb. 25, the Allies got a break, with good weather forecast for almost every worthy target in Germany and occupied Europe. Once again Messer- schmitt plants were the primary targets, with the Eighth attacking Regensburg, Augsburg, Stuttgart, and Furth. The

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My TARGET ON FEB 22



retained the strength to blunt Bomber Command's night offensives through the spring of 1944.

But there was one basic truth the Luftwaffe could not overcome: It was too small to deal with air warfare on the scale that the United States now waged.

Thus, the outcome of Big Week was set in motion by contrasting decisions made earlier in the war in Germany and the United States.

In setting the proper doctrine, just four men distilled their Air Corps Tactical School training into AWPD-1. They boldly stated that the AAF would require 250 combat groups, 105,647 aircraft, and 2,164,916 airmen to win the war—and were uncannily accurate. Lt. Col. Harold L. George, Maj. Haywood S. Hansell Jr., Maj. Laurence S. Kuter, and Lt. Col. Kenneth N. Walker (who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in 1943) were all field-grade officers when they wrote the document.

Logistics also had to be prioritized, and for many months the goal of producing entire aircraft had priority over production of adequate spare parts. Many officers struggled to rectify the situation, but Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Knerr exerted perhaps the greatest influence.

Knerr stepped on many toes but knew his logistics and enabled Eighth Air Force to build the vital supply systems, maintenance depots, and statistically valid reporting systems. He greatly enabled Big Week and the subsequent vastly expanded bombing operations of 1944 and 1945 to succeed.

In vivid contrast, there was a total failure by German leadership to understand the quantities of aircraft and equipment needed. This began with Hitler and extended through Reichsmarschall Hermann W. Goering and Gen. Hans Jeschonnek, Luftwaffe chief of staff.

Jeschonnek exemplified the arrogance and naivete of upper-level Luftwaffe leadership in 1942, when he cheerfully remarked that he would not know what to do with a production of more than 300 fighters per month.

The Luftwaffe was further handicapped by Goering's choice of World War I ace Gen. Ernst Udet to be the Luftwaffe's Generalluftzeugmeister, in charge of production and development. Beset by drugs, alcoholism, and failure, Udet committed suicide on Nov. 17, 1941 after making one incredibly bad decision after another. Jeschonnek also



A B-17 is refueled and re-armed at an airfield in England in 1944 after a bombing raid over Germany.

Fifteenth was assigned targets at Regensburg-Prufening.

The weary Luftwaffe mustered its primary strength against the Fifteenth, and shot down 33 heavy bombers of the 176 on the Regensburg mission. The Eighth, which dispatched 738 successful sorties, lost 31 bombers.

Then, as quickly as it had begun, Big Week was over. The Allies assessed that the Luftwaffe was sufficiently degraded and that it was time to shift attention to other targets.

In sum, 3,300 heavy bomber missions were flown by Eighth Air Force and 500 from Fifteenth.

Almost 10,000 tons of bombs were dropped.

Depending on the source, bomber losses ran from 194 to 247. The Eighth, Ninth, and Fifteenth Air Forces put up nearly 3,700 fighter sorties and lost 28 fighters.

RAF's Bomber Command dropped 9,198 tons of bombs in 2,351 sorties, and lost 157 bombers.

Claims were made for 600 enemy fighters, well over the actual totals, but still posing a severe blow to the now-reeling Luftwaffe.

Allied leaders were satisfied with the number of German aircraft believed to have been shot down or destroyed on the ground on airfields and in factories. Yet the fight with the German Air Force continued until the end of the war. The Luftwaffe became ever smaller and less capable, but never harmless.

The advent of Big Week had found the Luftwaffe at the peak of its strength in many ways. Its flak force had grown in numbers and capability, as had Luftwaffe fighters, recalled from the Eastern Front. Luftwaffe units were well-led by veterans, and up to this point, green pilots were still being given training when they reached operational units. The ratio of experienced leaders to newcomers was still large enough to allow the Luftwaffe to inflict severe casualties.

Despite the enormous losses incurred during Big Week, the Luftwaffe



First Lt. William Lawley Jr. was one of three airmen awarded the Medal of Honor after Big Week.

committed suicide, in 1943, as did Hitler in 1945 and Goering in 1946.

On the Luftwaffe's plus side, the very capable Field Marshal Erhard Milch fought vainly to restore order in both production and maintenance, and to a lesser degree, logistics. Had he been in Goering's place, the air war may have been much more difficult to win.

German planners had been myopic, willing to begin the war with an air force about half the size it possessed at the end of the first World War.

In the United States, when President Roosevelt called for 50,000 aircraft per year, the aviation industry responded eagerly to the call.

In autocratic Germany, when Adolf Hitler called upon the aviation industry to produce 50,000 aircraft a year, he was simply ignored. Even more damaging, the Luftwaffe was often a lower priority than the Army or Navy.

Although AAF bombing was accurate, the Germans were surprised at the hardness of machine tools in the face of high-explosive attacks (fires from incendiary bombs did far more damage). They found that even comparatively sophisticated equipment could be moved to primitive facilities and have productive capability restored in short order.

No Longer a Contest

Dispersal and late mobilization allowed German aircraft production to rise almost in sync with increasing Allied bombing efforts. German production peaked at just over 40,000 aircraft in 1944—but by this point, there were no longer the pilots or the fuel to use them effectively.

The German Air Force was still able to husband its dwindling forces and make occasional savage attacks, however, and managed to introduce a series of new weapons including jet- and rocket-powered fighters.

But the Luftwaffe was now worn down by the battle of attrition. Beset by losses, training difficulties, and fuel shortages, it could no longer contest Eighth Air Force.

Allied fighters now roamed the countryside strafing anything that moved. A battered German populace watched with awe the thousands of AAF bombers soaring over their homeland in parade ground formations, the sun glinting off their polished aluminum surfaces. AAF air superiority had been succeeded by air supremacy that became air dominance in the final weeks of the war.

Laying the Foundation for Big Week

Maj. Gen. Ira C. Eaker had laid the groundwork for Big Week by advocating the Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) with the code name Pointblank at the January 1943 Casablanca conference.

The CBO was intended to progressively destroy the German military industrial and economic system, undermining the will of the German people to resist. The AAF was to strike precision targets by day, while the RAF continued its night area bombing campaign. Pointblank was planned for four phases, each of three months, culminating in the spring of 1944.

As time passed, land campaigns diverted resources from the Eighth Air Force effort, causing dissatisfaction with Eaker's plan. The more refined strategy, Operation Argument, was developed to focus attacks against the highest priority German targets in central and southern Germany. These were the factories producing aircraft, aircraft components, and ball bearings.

The RAF continued to prosecute its night area bombing campaign under Air Chief Marshal Arthur T. Harris, whose goal was to "de-house" the German workforce.

During 1943, the AAF persisted in its belief that heavily armed bomber formations could successfully fight their way to targets without fighter escort.

The loss of a total of 120 aircraft on the Aug. 17 and Oct. 14, 1943 raids on Schweinfurt and Regensburg finally disproved the theory. The Luftwaffe convincingly demonstrated its deadliness when out of the range of Allied fighters. The situation demanded long-range escort fighters.

By the end of 1943, Gen. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold was distinctly dissatisfied. Famous for his pointed instructions, on Dec. 27, 1943, Arnold clarified things for Eaker, the outgoing commander of Eighth Air Force, and Maj. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle, the incoming commander. After assuring them that they now had adequate means at their disposal, he wrote, "Therefore, my personal message to you—this is a MUST—is to destroy the enemy Air Force wherever you find them, in the air, on the ground, and in the factories."

Arnold's assurance of adequate means was not entirely accurate. Eighth Air Force was just beginning to have adequate numbers of maintenance depots, replacement crews, and aircraft. Fifteenth Air Force was in the process of building up, but was in no way yet comparable to the Eighth. And the essential element to achieving Arnold's directive, the P-51 Mustang long-range escort fighter, was just entering service in Europe.

Importantly, American leaders held their commanders to higher standards than either the British or Germans. In but one example, when Arnold lost confidence in Eaker, he unhesitatingly removed him despite their strong personal ties.

The immediate effects of Big Week were important, yet the two most important effects of the heroic operation came later.

The first was the effect of the aircraft production lost. Big Week compelled the German high command to accelerate the decentralization of its aircraft factories.

Where Big Week directly caused an estimated two-month loss in aircraft production, the resultant decentralization caused another four-month loss.

Even more important, extensive decentralization made all German transportation arteries—roads, rail, canals, even bike paths—profitable targets for

far-ranging fighter-bombers. In this ironic denouement, and contrary to AAF doctrine, it was the fighters and not the bombers that delivered the critical final blows that brought German war production to its knees.

The once proud Luftwaffe had lost the war in its planning stage. The provincial German leaders, almost none of whom had the breadth of vision of their AAF counterparts, completely miscalculated the quantity and quality of the forces required for successful air warfare. Big Week proved this when the fully developed Luftwaffe came into combat with the fully developed AAF. ■

Walter J. Boyne, former director of the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D. C., is a retired Air Force colonel and author. He has written more than 600 articles about aviation topics and 40 books, the most recent of which is Supersonic Thunder. His most recent article for Air Force Magazine, "Goering's Big Bungle," appeared in the November issue.