
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the May meeting of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Roundtable. Tonight's guest speaker is Bob Mrazek, author of *A Dawn Like Thunder* and the upcoming work *To Kingdom Come*, along with veterans of the Eighth Army Air Force.

While the potential power of the airplane was only partially exploited during the First World War, the military aviation prophets spent the inter-war years spreading their messages about this new technology. Many believed that the airplane would make land and sea operations obsolete and be able to win the next war by itself. By the time the war began, the Army and Navy had aviation advocates and each service has a separate Assistant Secretary for air forces.

Most air forces evolved a strategic bombing doctrine of some kind, influenced by Giulio Douhet's *The Command of the Air*. The Royal Air Force developed a theory of the strategic offensive using overwhelming power of the bomber that became the basis for a flawed doctrine of strategic bombing which mutated in practice into night bombing of urban areas. The US Army Air Corps developed a theory of strategic bombing that focused on the bombing of critical economic nodes, denying key resources that would cripple the enemy effort. This doctrine guided target selection and heavy bomber operation. As doctrine developed in the 1930s, both the B-17 and B-24 were faster than almost all pursuit aircraft, prompting a belief in their ability to operate unescorted.

The first American bomber units arrived in England in the summer of 1942. The US Army Air Forces (USAAF) began doing daylight operations over Germany.

The USAAF, believed that the B-17 could conduct daylight operations over specific industrial targets, such as airplane factories. The secondary targets would be German economic targets, such as electricity generating plants, petroleum industries, and the transportation systems. The American bombing efforts were too small in 1942 to make an impact, but the AAF, like the RAF, still believed that the bombers would make a land invasion obsolete. Both assumptions about freedom from attack and precision in bombing were erroneous.

Though President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill may have been skeptical of the optimistic promises of the strategic bomber generals, they include a "Combined Bomber Offensive" (Operation POINTBLANK) among the decisions of the January 1943 Casablanca Conference. The bombing campaign, regarded as critical to any successful invasion, also had a political dimension. It was presented to the Soviet leader Josef Stalin as a "second front in the air" – attacks on logistics that would cripple the German armies in Russia.

With Operation POINTBLANK the 8th Air Force focused on naval bases, airfields, and railroad yards. While the bombers usually had fighter escorts, the German Luftwaffe's response was forceful enough that General Ira Eaker ordered attacks on the German aviation industry such as assembly plants, engine and ball-bearing factories. The 8th Air Force was frustrated in its efforts by unpredictable weather as well as crew and aircraft shortages.

As summer approached, the bomber offensive picked up intensity, on August 17th 1943, General Eaker launched massive raids against the Messerschmitt factory in Regensburg and the ball bearing factory at Schweinfurt. The bombs destroyed some of the factory

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complexes but at a great cost, sixty of the 135 bombers were destroyed (each with a crew of 10) and 27 more bombers sustained extensive damage and written off once they returned to England.

Strategic bombing became more effective when the bombers received long-range fighter escorts in increased numbers. During the last week of February 1944, also known as “Big Week,” the 8th AF launched six major raids and reduced its loss ratio to below 10 percent. While Allied losses could be replaced, the Luftwaffe was unable to maintain an acceptable level of skilled pilots and did not have the fuel supplies to train adequate numbers of new ones.

While the bombing campaign never succeeded in solely winning the war it did make major impact on the final collapse of the Nazi regime.

Further Reading:

Robert Mrazek, *A Dawn Like Thunder* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2008).
 Robert Mrazek, *To Kingdom Come: An Epic Saga of Survival in the Air War over Germany* (New York: New American Library, 2011)
 Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (New York: Dial Press, 1979)
 Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987)
 Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985)
 Stephen L. McFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton, *To Command the Sky: The Battle for Air Superiority over Germany, 1942-1944* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991)
 Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II* (Leavenworth, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

Special Note:

April 12th marked the 150th anniversary of the start of the American Civil War. Minnesota, a new state only three years old, fought two Civil Wars, one between the North and the South, and a second more bloody Civil War fought in western Minnesota between between white settlers, the army, and the Dakota. The Minnesota Military Museum at Camp Ripley is remembering these important events in the state's history with a special exhibit, "Minnesota's Two Civil Wars". The Exhibit opens on July 9th with

a special opening event. This event is open to the public. Please consider attending. Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-632-7374

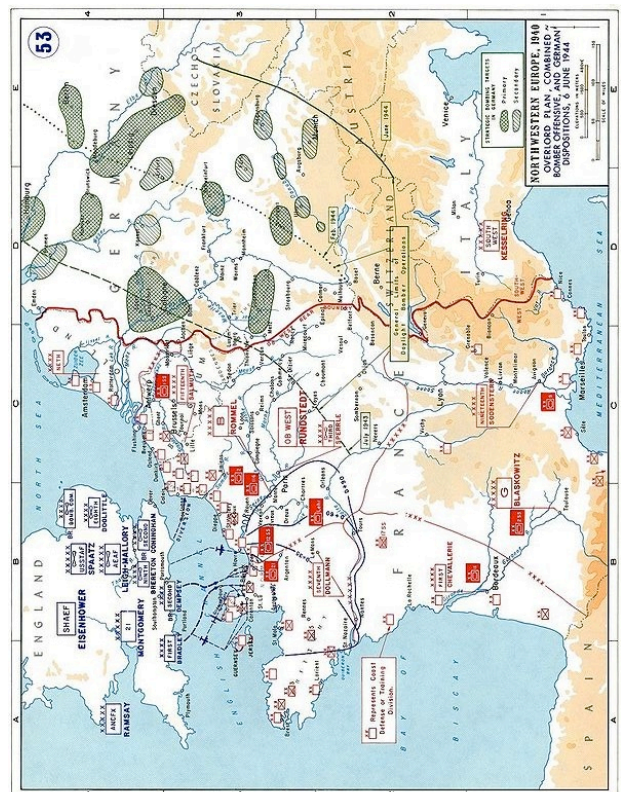
Announcements:

- Twin Cities Civil War Round Table** - May 11, 2011 “Ironclads & Industrialization” Dr. Bill Roberts www.tccwrt.com - 612-724-3849
- St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table** - May 23, 2011 “Gen. George Thomas” June 13, “Making the Movie, *Gettysburg*” Steve Anderson - 715-386-1268
- Rochester WWII History Round Table** 507-280-9970; www.wv2roundtable-rochester.org -
- Air Show - Eden Prairie** - www.wotn.org - 952-746-6100 July 16-17, 2011
- World War II Weekend, Historic Fort Snelling**, June, 11-12 2011, Fee charged.
- Honor Flight** - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
- CAF - Commemorative Air Force** - www.cafmn.org or Bill at 952-201-8400
- Fort Snelling Military (Vehicles) Museum** - www.fsmm.org 651-699-7795
- Minnesota Air Guard Museum** - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-252

Round Table Schedule 2011-2012

- Sep 8 Naval Battle of Guadalcanal
- Oct 13 Children Caught in the Brutality of War
- Oct 27 Bitter Appeasement — Munich
- Nov 10 The Resistance Against the Nazis
- Dec 8 *The GI Offensive in Europe*
- 2012**
- Jan 12 The War on the Eastern Front
- Feb 9 The War in the Pacific
- Mar 8 Code breaking and Computers
- Apr 12 Jedburgs-Jumping Behind Enemy Lines
- May10 Beneath the Waves: Submarines

If you are a veteran of one of these campaigns – or know a veteran, contact Don Patton



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