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# The Round Table

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

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**Welcome to the first March session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.** Tonight's speaker is Richard Muller from the United States Air Force School of Advanced Air and Space Studies at Maxwell Air Force Base, speaking on a new look on the Combined Bomber Offensive. He will be joined by veterans of the air campaign.

Many technological innovations were first employed during World War I, and one, the use of the airplane, really complicated military planning throughout the inter-war years. Military aviation issues ran the spectrum from tactical air support to strategic bombing. Many airpower theorists (especially Gen. Giulio Douhet) believed that military aviation would dramatically change warfare and make land armies and surface fleet navies obsolete.

The US air power prophets of the 1920s believed that airplanes would decide future conflicts. The Army and Navy each had their own air advocates, most notably Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell, and Adms. William Fullam, Bradley Fiske, and William Sims. Each service had a dedicated force of flying officers who believed in the need to develop air power for the nation's defense, even to the exclusion of other weapon systems. Recognizing the need for military aviation, the Army and Navy Joint Board of Aeronautics stressed the tactical importance of air support for land and sea operations but did not champion the notion that air power might win wars.

The debate between aviators and conventional land and sea forces proponents raged throughout the inter-war years. The air advocates scored some successes, though not an independent air force or the unification of all military aviation. The Army did upgrade its 'Air Service' to an 'Air Corps' and added an Assistant Secretary of War (Air). The Navy did likewise and ordered that only naval aviators could command carriers, and other aviation-oriented posts.

When the Second World War in Europe began the Allied air power advocates believed it the time to prove the superiority of air power: that it alone would win the war. Great Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) and the US Army Air Forces

(USAAF) had developed air doctrines on how to conduct aerial bombing which had much in common. Each believed that airplanes were the decisive weapons and strategic bombers attacking population centers and industrial targets would lead to a quick victory and avoid the attrition of trench warfare. In addition, smaller enemy fighter aircraft could not interfere with a bomber offensive and any diversion of resources to other services would seriously impair the bombers effectiveness.

As bombing operations progressed, differences in practice separated the two allies. The British soon realized that German fighters put up a far stronger defense in daytime than expected and bombing accuracy was pathetically poor. The RAF came to believe that (night time) 'area' bombing of population centers would demoralize the German civilians and inspire internal dissent. American air commanders believed they could destroy Germany's ability to wage war using daylight precision bombing (the Norden bombsight) in a strategic focus on Germany's industrial capacities, such as ballbearing factories.

Unfortunately, neither idea proved viable. The German government developed an air defense system combining fighters, radar systems, and anti-aircraft guns that demonstrated both German government's ability to protect its population, and that bomber formations *were* terribly vulnerable to fighter attack. Moreover, bombing of craft-oriented (hand-made) German war forced the dispersal of plants, often underground, and a shift more mass production, though German airmen, sailors, and tankers complained of the poorer finish and quality. As the Allies destroyed Germany's industry, her war production *increased*.

At the Casablanca conference in January 1943, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and the Combined Chiefs of Staff included strategic bombing as part of their overall plan for Germany's defeat. While skeptical of the bombing results up to that point, the Allies presented it as a "second front in the air" to a grumbling Josef Stalin. They proposed a Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) which was to destroy and dislocate Germany's industrial and economic system and demoralize the population, making both the coming invasion and ground operations easier.

The development of long range fighters, like the P-51, that could protect the bomber fleets,

**If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns** – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)

allowed far more accurate strikes and enabled the destruction of German resources, especially oil, and transport nets, notably railroads. Albert Speer, German armaments minister, considered the degradation of the German oil industry by bombing the greatest threat to the Reich's economic war fighting capacity. However, just as the Nazi Blitz had failed to force Britain to surrender in 1940, the civilian morale of Germany was not broken by the bombing, although Goebbels was very sensitive to civilian reactions to the increasingly intense air strikes on German cities, especially amongst Berliners. Strategic bombing was a major factor in the war effort, but the air power advocates greatly overshot the mark in their claims for air power.

The legacy of the bombing campaign was questioned by contemporary historians. American air planners had an evolved ethical position against area bombing but were forced by circumstances to join the British, who had no moral objections in the mass killing of civilians, "collateral damage," in the process of attacking Germany's war potential. During and just after the war, the brutal killing of civilians by air attack was considered justifiable as the price of victory. More recently, the morality of targeting civilian centers has been subject to considerable criticism, and thus the image of the "Good War" has become a more complex ethical issue. The bombing campaigns against Britain, Japan, Germany, and the French (the Transportation Plan) each failed to destroy public will to fight and led to changes in contemporary strategic bombing doctrine and the ethics of air power use.

#### FURTHER READINGS:

Robert S. Ehlers Jr. *Targeting the Third Reich: Air Intelligence and the Allied Bombing Campaigns*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009.  
 Conrad C. Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in World War II: Bombs, Cities, Civilians, and Oil*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2016.  
 Donald Miller, *Masters of the Sky: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006.  
 John McManus, *Deadly Sky: The American Combat Airmen in World War II*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 2000.  
 Herman Knell, *To Destroy a City: Strategic Bombing and its Human Consequences in World War II*. Cambridge MA: Da Capo Press, 2003.  
 Frederick Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2004.  
 Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

#### Announcements:

Vietnam War Roundtable - 18 Mar. 2019 - *Women Nurses in Vietnam* - [mnvietnam.org](http://mnvietnam.org) - [rldietrich@mnmilitarymuseum.org](mailto:rldietrich@mnmilitarymuseum.org)  
 Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -19 Mar. 2019 - *F*

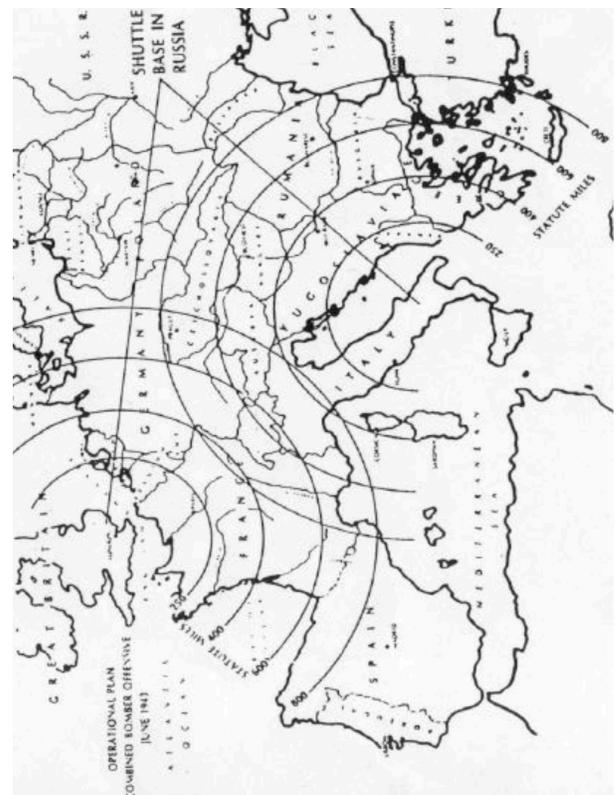
*Scott Fitzgerald & Civil War* - [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)  
 St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 25 Mar. 2019 - *Remains of Glory*, Urdahl - 715-386-1268 - [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)  
 Civil War Symposium - 6 Apr. 2019 - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)  
 Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 - 320-616-6050 - <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>  
 Minnesota Air Guard Museum - 612-713-2523 - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org)  
**8th AF Historical Society of MN**, KC Hall Bloomington, Wednesdays at 1130 - <https://www.8thmn.org>.  
 Friends of Ft. Snelling - [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)  
 World Without Genocide - 651-695-7621 - <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>  
 Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show - 20 June 2020 - 320-564-6644 - <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.  
 Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie - 13-14 July 2019 - 952-746-6100 - [www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org)  
 Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble - 27 Feb. 2019 - Horne, *Hubris: The Tragedy of War ...* - [sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com](mailto:sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com)  
 Winston Churchill Book Club - [lin.hopkins@hotmail.com](mailto:lin.hopkins@hotmail.com)  
 Alliance Francaise 612-332-0436 - [www.afmsp.org](http://www.afmsp.org) -  
 Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - [crazyjer45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjer45@hotmail.com)  
 CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org)

**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

#### Round Table Schedule 2019

28 Mar. WASPs  
 11 Apr. General with Six Stars: J. H. C. Lee  
 9 May D-Day

**The Round Table is a 501.c.3 non-profit.  
 We would greatly appreciate your supporting the HCDWW2RT!**



Goetz, "Determination and Effectiveness of WWII Strategic Bombing Strategy," UAAWC, Carlisle, PA, 2003