

THE BOMBER WAR
THE ALLIED AIR OFFENSIVE AGAINST NAZI GERMANY

By Robin Neillands

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Anonymous student

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Grade Estimate A

In *The Bomber War The Allied Air Offensive Against Nazi Germany*, Robin Neillands argues that the B-24, B-17 and the Avro Lancer bombers were effective weapons for the Allies during World War II. He uses factual summaries of bombing missions and the recollected memories of specific raids from some of the pilots, navigators and other personnel. The mix of facts and personal stories is well done.

The bombers were an effective weapon because they allowed the Allied Forces to destroy important targets well within German and Japanese territories. These planes dropped bombs on manufacturing facilities, disrupting the production of vital supplies for the opposition. These bombing missions, deep inside the enemy territory, caused the destruction of supply lines and manufacturing abilities, even though the Allied Armies were miles away from the target. The planes fought their way into enemy territory, bombed the targets and returned to their home base in spite of German efforts to stop them with flak guns and fighter planes. The planes dropped troops within enemy territory. Also, the planes bombed targets to soften up the enemy so that the Allied armies could succeed without much of a traditional battle.

The author noted that the multiple uses of the bombers made them effective weapons. They could supply troops with necessary equipment, ammunition, and food. Boxes supplies were dropped with parachutes. The bombers could identify new targets, track enemy movements and protect convoys in route to Europe. As bombers hunted for submarines in the Atlantic Ocean, they attempted to destroy the ships. The bombers rescued crews of damaged ships and rescued pilots or flight crews from damaged planes.

Neillands argues that the bombers were seen as strategic weapons because they could bomb targets that supplied needed materials to the enemy. For example, the Germans had to be careful on how they used their gasoline. In the battle of the Bulge one of the key factors that

lead to the defeat of the German Army is that the tanks ran out of gas. The German's concerns about gasoline were caused in part because bombers had destroyed oil refineries which the Germans used to provide gasoline to the military.

These planes were also strategic weapons because they bombed targets that hurt the morale of the enemy. When the bombers dropped bombs on a city the people would feel threatened and in danger. These raids caused the people to worry and caused the soldiers concern because the soldier would be worried about his family.

Robin Neilland effectively demonstrates how the bombers struck targets deep within enemy territories; the bombers could fly distances up to 5,000 miles. Some could travel approximately 200 m.p.h. carrying a bomb load of 2,000 pounds or more. He gives several examples where bombers effectively destroyed targets such as factories. Numerous accounts details how bombers damaging the enemy's ability to fight well before the Allied armies arrive.

Neillands discusses well the importance of navigation along with the problems and dangers with it. Although navigators could tell their positions by checking the forecast winds before takeoff, the changing winds could sometimes push a plane off course. Navigators tried to make sure they stayed on course by flying over towns or other recognized objects on the ground. Frequently, the navigators would drop a flare and ask the rear gunner which way the smoke was blowing. Sometimes, the wireless operator could pick up radio signals from stations in the United Kingdom and give the bearing to the navigator. While this worked for finding targets, it sometimes made the bomber formation loose, giving German fighters an opportunity to knock down some planes. Eventually the bombers were outfitted with a Gee, Oboe, or a H2S which would receive radio beams from England that would help the navigator identify the target location. These technological advancements helped!

Robin Neillands further strengthens his book with personal stories from the men who flew the bombers. He provides a good mix of factual data and personal recollections. He uses the memories of individuals from each position of the plane: pilots, navigators, bombardiers, and gunners. Each story contains examples of heroism, courage, and hope. The reader realizes that it takes the efforts and talents of each to make each mission successful.

Neillands fails to describe the construction materials of early planes and alterations made as the war continued. While he describes the progress in navigation, no mention is made of the changes in armaments and protection for the crew of the plane. It would have been interesting if the author had described some of the changes that were made during the war to help protect the planes and crews.

Another weakness is that Neillands never describes in detail what the Gee, Oboe, or H2S looked like and how they worked. A more complete description of how these devices received radio beam singles from England would have been helpful. Similarly, the author never describes how the navigators were trained and how they factored the wind into their charts and their flight path. Some additional detail about how navigators were trained and how they kept the plane on course would have been interesting.

A third weakness is that Neilland never tells what happened to all of the men that he interviewed. The short story or recollection of a crew member would not include any reference to how the crew member survived, or how the flight ended. When bad weather or malfunctioned equipment caused a mission to fail, did the crew turn around and come back or did they go ahead and try to drop their bombs? Those additional details would improve the book.

Overall, Robin Neillands argues well that bombers were a very important strategic weapon during World War II. The use of the personal stories of the crewmen made the book

more interesting and more human. If you have an interest in World War II or airplanes this is a good book to read!