

Introduction

As Churchill said *"There is only one thing that will bring Hitler down, and that is an absolutely devastating exterminating attack by very heavy bombers from this country upon the Nazi homeland."*¹ The bomber offensive was going to be used to help Britain win the war and to destroy Nazi Germany. The bombing offensive took up a lot of the British military as well as the German military with men having to pilot the bombers, the amount spent on aircrafts and the use of weapons and men to defend against the bombers. The air raids did not start until May of 1940. There are differing views on whether the bombing offensive was worth everything that was put into it. 55,573 men lost their lives and a lot of money and resources were put into it. Bombing effected three main areas for both Britain and Germany those areas being the military, the economy and the morale of the citizens. Richard Overy argues that the bomber offensive was necessary and is very positive about it. He believes that the bombing placed a ceiling on the output of German production, that it destroyed people's morale and that the resources utilised were worth the outcome of the bombing. Hew Strachan also holds the view that the bomber offensive was worth the costs arguing that the industrial production would be higher if it wasn't for the air raids.

Not all believe the bombing offensive made a big impact. Many believe that the resources would have been better used in other parts of the military such as the army and navy.

Historians such as A.J.P Taylor and Max Hastings believe the bomber offensive was not

¹ Winston S Churchill 'The Second World War' (Volume 2 Their Finest Hour Appendix A)

worth the costs and was a failure. A.J.P Taylor argues that the bombing offensive used 30% of Britain's war effort and believes it wasn't worth it due to the German economy not decreasing.

However Liddell Hart, a military historian, argues that the bomber offensive did have errors and the strategy used wasn't good but overall it was worth the costs saying "*Despite the errors in strategy and disregard for basic morality, the bombing campaign unquestionably played a vital part in the defeat of Hitler's Germany.*"² This dissertation agrees with Liddell Hart with that the Bomber offensive was not perfect and had errors but overall it was worth the costs of men and resources put into it.

395 words

² Basil Liddell Hart 'A History of the Second World War' page 612

Military

Both the German and British military was effected by the bombing offensive. The British bomber hoped to weaken the German military by attacking military bases and then going on to target cities making the Germans lessen their offensive to make their defensive stronger. With many British pilots dying, the effects the lack of oil had on the Luftwaffe and the effects of Germany focussing on defence against the bombing had to be substantial. While some believe the bombing offensive did effect the German military like Mark Connelly others such as Jonathan Dimbleby argue that bomber command had misplaced priorities. The bombing offensive did have an impact on the German military making it worth the cost of resources and men put into it.

Early in the war Britain focussed on bombing specific targets however one-third of bombers never attacked their targets and one-third of those that did never got within five miles of it. This shows that the aim of the crew was poor and they were not doing as much damage as they should have due to them missing the targets. Britain also moved from bombing during the day to bombing at night. The RAF pilots were trained during the day and did not have training at night leading to it being even more difficult for them to hit their targets. Moving to focus on bombing cities was better as they had a larger target to hit and it would be easier for the pilots. This made the bomber offensive less worth the cost of men and

resources as the pilots were not trained well enough for the missions they had to do leading to deaths and waste of resources by the bombers being inaccurate and missing their targets most of the time. Many such as Dimpleby argue that it would have been more effective for the RAF to support the navy or have a strategy like America and target the fuel supplies. The Royal navy were also struggling with fighting the German U-boats. The navy were fighting the Battle of the Atlantic and were losing a lot of resources, ships and men. Dimpleby argues that if the RAF helped the navy with the Battle of the Atlantic it would have made the allied victory come a lot faster than it did as the U-boats did not have to fear detection or attacks from the air. This shows that the bomber offensive was not fully effective as we were not having the same impact as America had and we could have been better with supporting the navy and winning the Battle of the Atlantic sooner.

Churchill used the bomber offensive to keep Stalin willing to work with Britain. Russia was a powerful ally as they had a lot of manpower. Stalin wanted Britain to open a second front in France to move German troops away from the east to the west to fight. However Churchill was against this not wanting to open a second front instead Churchill stressed the bombing offensive was a second front. He claimed that the bombing was taking up German equipment and men away from the Eastern front. The anti-air guns could also be used as anti-tank guns and the men needed to man the weapons were all taken away from the eastern front. This shows that the bombing offensive was effective as it helped Britain to avoid a second front and still keep Russia as an ally.

The British military were affected by the bombing as they used a lot of pilots to fly the bombers over. The bomber offensive had a 46% death rate of pilots and crew. 55,573 allied

airmen were killed during the raids. Britain conducted 1000 bomber raids that took place in 1942. They hit three major cities in Germany those being Cologne, Essen and Bremen. They were done to secure priority for the bomber offensive over other things such as the coastal command and to try and boost the British public opinion on the bomber. The destruction done to the cities was not comparable to the losses faced by the RAF with the cities repairing within two weeks and the raids being stopped because of how many men were killed. This has an impact on the military as the bombers could have been used for something that would have a bigger impact and effect on the Germans. This makes the bomber offensive less worth the cost in men and resources put into it as the bombers could have been used more effectively. However it doesn't make it completely not worth the resources as they were able to increase the public's support and morale with the raids.

However a defence can be made of the bombing offensive. The Germans suffered a lot of losses in their armies with soldiers having to man anti air guns and focus on defence against the raids instead of fighting on the front. In 1942 there was only 439,000 men and women used in air defence services and by 1944 it had risen to 889,000. In spring of 1944 64% of Germany's fighters were on home defence.³ This shows that the bomber offensive was worth all that was put into it as it raised the number of German soldiers focused on defence against the bombers than offensive on the front lines. This is backed up by H. Strachan stating "*It required 2 million Germans to man the anti-aircraft defences rather than fight in the armies*"⁴. When talking about the effects of the bomber offensive in 1942. As well as soldiers being used for home defence many planes were used for defence and production

³ Mark Connelly 'Reaching for the Stars' pages 160-161

⁴ Hew Strachan 'European Armies and the Conduct of War' page 177

changed so more planes were made for defending Germany and not for offensive purposes. H. Strachan backs this up saying "It forced the German Air Force to use its fighters for the protection of Germans, instead of supporting their armies". This shows that there was a lack of planes to help with the other parts of the military as they were being used to try and protect the country from the bombing. With Germany focusing more on defence they built fewer bombers leading to them bombing Britain less meaning less British citizens died from the German bombing. This makes the bomber offensive worth the resources put into it as the bomber diverted the air force from the front lines preventing as many losses.

With Germany focussing on defence against the bomber this meant that they had to transfer men and equipment away from the army and the navy. Germany had to change a lot of their offensive output to defensive output. This led the armies and navy to suffer from a lack of equipment. Mark Connelly saying "Most importantly, it diverted the German war effort from the offensive production to defensive" Highlighting the change in production was Anti-air guns used 20% of all ammunition produced and one-third of all artillery production was used for defence against the bombers. If it wasn't for the bombers the ammunition could have been used for offensive purposes and anti-air guns could be used for artillery against ground troops and tanks. The German navy suffered from a lack of equipment as it was being used against the bombers. This shows that the British bombing offensive was worth the costs as it made Germany put resources into defence instead of in other areas of the army. When it came to D-Day in 1944 the Germans struggled to retaliate as before the British bombers had successfully attacked railways stopping reinforcements from coming. They also attacked the German defences making it easier for the allies to land on the beaches as they were faced with little resistance. This made the operation much

easier and reduced the amount of deaths that there would have been in the Germans managed to get reinforcements out and had defences up.

Overall the bombing offensive had an impact on the military. Although a lot of the RAF were not hitting their targets they still took soldiers that could be fighting on the front lines to help defend against the bombers. This took not only men away but also equipment such as anti-aircraft guns and ammunition that could have been used for the army and navy who were suffering from a lack of equipment. This makes the bomber offensive worth the cost of men and resources put into it as it had a major impact of the German military.

1403 words

Economy

The bomber offensive effected the British economy and the German economy. The effects on the British economy including the price of making a Lancaster and if they were worth the amount spent on them and effecting the German economy with the bombing of factories and the impact that had. The bombing did not have a major impact on the German economy with Richard Overy saying *"The popular expectation that bombing alone would cripple the German economy, destroy the morale of its people and bring about German surrender was*

never seriously entertained by British and American leaders.”⁵ The bombing offensive did have an impact on the German economy but not as much as it did on their morale and military.

Churchill in October 1940 said *“Our object must be to inflict the maximum harm on her war-making capacity. That is the only object that we shall pursue.”⁶* Showing that Churchill believed that focussing on bombing factories is what Britain should be doing and not focussing on the towns. This makes the British bombing offensive not completely worth the men and resources put into it as Britain could have made a bigger impact if they had a better strategy of hitting oil plants and factories more and towns less.

The bomber reduced the production of the German economy. Albert Speer, the minister of armaments for Hitler’s government concluded that in January 1945 Germany had 35% fewer tanks than planned, 31% fewer aircrafts and 42% fewer lorries. This shows that the bombing offensive did have an impact on the economy. Richard Overy supports the point that it had a big impact saying *“The denial of these huge resources to German forces in 1944 fatally weakened their response to bombing and invasion, and eased the path of Allied armies”⁷.*

Although Germany still managed to produce a lot of equipment despite the bombing it shows that it did reduce the amount produced proving the bombing offensive was worth the cost that was invested into it. However after 40,000 tons of bombs were dropped in Germany in 1942 there wasn’t high results. The damage done to German industries was near nothing and armaments production index rose from 100 in January 1942 to 153 in July

⁵ Richard Overy ‘Why the Allies Won’, page 20

⁶Winston Churchill, Hansard October 8th 1940 column 293

⁷ Richard Overy ‘Why the Allies Won’, page 131

1943 and continued to rise to 332 in July 1944⁸. The production of armaments such as aircrafts and tanks increased between 1940 and 1944 for Germany. Military aircrafts produced increased from 10,200 in 1940 to 39,600 in 1944 while tanks went from 1,600 to 19,000.⁹ Speer also saying *"The total damage suffered by the armament programme as a result of air attack during the year 1943 was not considerable"*¹⁰. This shows that the bombing did not have a great impact on the German economy as they still had an increase in production and that the bombing had not made a great impact on the economy and the production of armaments and it was estimated that only 10% was lost of Germany's production in 1944. However it was still worth the cost put into it as although the armaments production index had increased and there was still an increase in production it would have been much higher without the bomber offensive. With Speer claiming that they built fewer tanks, aircrafts and lorries than planned. The output would have been much higher without the bombing.

For Britain the price of one Lancaster was around £100,000 overall with the price of making the plane, training the pilot and the price of the bombs. This money could have been used in other areas and to build other equipment needed. Richard Overy saying *"The view has persisted ever since that bombing was a strategic liability, a wasteful diversion of resources that might more fruitfully have been used building tanks or laying down ships."*¹¹ This shows that the money and materials used to build the planes could have been more effective if they were used for building tanks and ships. Although the Lancaster's were expensive to

⁸ Max Hastings 'Bomber Command', page 288

⁹ Ibid, page 481

¹⁰ Albert Speer 'insode the Third Reich

¹¹ Richard Overy 'Why the Allies Won', page 128

make Overy claims it only used 7% of Britain's war effort and 12% at its peak in 1943-44.

This shows that the British bombing offensive was worth the materials put into it as it did not use high numbers of the war effort.

Overall the bomber offensive did not have as big an impact in economy as it did on morale and the military but it still helped with reducing how much the German production increased by. However making the bombers were expensive and due to the German economy still increasing. This makes the bomber offensive partially worth the cost in men and resources as the damage done to the German economy wasn't very significant however the damage done to morale and the army makes it worth the cost.

791 words

Morale

The bombing offensive was used to raise the morale of the British while demoralising the Germans. Morale was specifically targeted with the War Cabinet in October 1940 deciding *"the civilian population around the target areas must be made to feel the weight of the war"*.¹² The bombing offensive raised British morale with propaganda but at times it lowered the morale with high amounts of losses faced. It did also lower the German morale with absenteeism increasing and loss of sleep faced. The bombing offensive did have an impact on the German morale but only raised the British morale a little.

One goal of the bomber was to reduce morale within the German people and raise the British morale. Rae Smith a former advertiser working for the British Political Warfare Executive talks about the bomber offensive saying *"the strategy was simultaneous to 'build up morale' among the conquered peoples of Europe and to 'break down morale' among the enemy populations"*¹³ Reducing the morale of the Germans would have effects on the war effort and the economy. The constant bombing had a big effect on the German citizens and their morale and day to day life. The Germans were bombed during the day and night leading to people having a lack of sleep. This made people tired and absentee rates increased. Breaking the morale of the people would reduce the effectiveness of the industries. The BMW works in Munich saw the absenteeism reach 20%. This meant that the people did not have the same spirit or drive as before to get through the war. Overly backing

¹² Geoffrey Wheatcroft 'Firestorms darken our past: Those who defend 'Bomber' Harris's destruction of German cities are wrong, Geoffrey Wheatcroft argues', 7th August 1994

¹³ Richard Overly Making and Breaking Morale: British political Warfare and Bomber Command in the Second World War, Twentieth century British History volume 26 issue 3, September page 370

the point that the bombing offensive was effective against morale saying "*Bombing shattered people's lives*"¹⁴. Showing that the bombers were focussing more on destroying the German morale than bombing factories. This proves that the bombing offensive was worth all that was put into it as it reduced Germany's morale to the point it started effected other parts of the country including the economy.

The bomber offensive was also used to boost the British morale. The 1000 bomber raids were used to raise the British morale and lower the Germans. There were three 1000 bomber raids in 1942 focussing on the cities of Cologne, Essen and Bremen. However the RAF faced major losses in these raids and they stopped the raids due to the losses being too high. This effecting the British morale as more men were dying for what seemed like no reason as the damage done to Germany wasn't significant. On the other hand the German cities were getting back to normal quickly with Cologne only taking two weeks until it was back functioning like it was before. This shows the bombing offensive wasn't completely worth the men and resources put into it as they did have raids where there was very little damage done to Germany but a lot of losses on the British side.

Another way Britain used the bomber offensive to raise morale was with the Dam-buster raids or Operation Chastise. Wing Commander Guy Gibson led the most daring bombing raid to destroy three dams located in the Ruhr valley which was a major industrial place in Germany. It was the first time Britain used bouncing bombs that were going to bounce over torpedo nets. Out of the 133 aircrew men that were part of the raids 53 were killed or taken prisoners of war and the industrial production impact was limited. Despite this the raids

¹⁴ Richard Overy 'Why the Allies Won', page 133

were successful in giving Britain a significant rise in morale with newspapers putting it on the front pages. This made the bombing command partially worth the men and resources put into it as it did boost morale in Britain but the men lost was not worth the little impact the raids had on the German economy.

The bombing made Germany change their offensive strategy into more of a defensive one. Germany had to use planes to defend against the British offensive. This led to less German bombers going to bomb Britain meaning the bombing reduced which brought up the morale while the British were bombing the Germans lowering their morale. Richard Overy saying the bombing was "*a uniquely demoralising experience*"¹⁵. This shows that the bomber offensive was worth the cost put into it as it lowered the amount of bombing in Britain which raised morale and would decrease the damage done by the bombing.

Also with the increased bombing in Germany more people had to evacuate from their homes. Evacuating takes people away from their homes and work which many people did not want to leave making them unhappy about the war and support it less. Mark Connelly saying "*Absenteeism soared. Evacuation forced massive disruption. The number of evacuated people placed great strain on the reception areas. Over 5 million people were made homeless.*"¹⁶ Showing that the bombing affected the lives of the Germans a lot and demoralised them through evacuation and homelessness which would then effect other areas like the economy as workers will no longer have the same drive and determination as before. This made the bombing offensive worth the cost as left 5 million Germans homeless and disrupted their work.

¹⁵ Ibid, page 132

¹⁶ Mark Connelly 'Reaching for the Stars', page 161

However although people were unhappy with their situation there was never a revolt against the government. People were unhappy with the war and the situation they were living in with the bombing but it never got to the point where they stopped supporting the government and went on strike. Unlike Britain where workers would threaten to strike and some did due to their working conditions. Germany had a nation where the people would not go against Hitler as people saw him as great and trade unions were banned by the Nazis so it was harder for the workers to strike. This had an impact on Britain's economy and war effort as people at times weren't fully behind the government.

Another way the bombing offensive effected the morale of the Germans was with the soldiers. The soldiers were fighting for what was back home like their families. When the bombing made people evacuate or died in the bombing the soldiers were not getting letters from home. This left the soldiers demoralised as they were fighting to protect loved ones but since they didn't know what happened to them they felt they were fighting for nothing. This would lead to the soldiers being less willing to fight. This highlights the fact that the bomber offensive was worth the cost put in it as it not only made the German citizens lose their morale and work effort for the war but also the German soldiers. Although many criticised the strategy of attacking the population instead of the factories historian G. L. Braidwood claims that it is more important to target the morale than the factories saying *"Civilian morale is the most important of all strategic objectives in this war and may ultimately be the crucial one... Berlin and Munich in ruins would shake Nazism more*

*profoundly than the next twelve months bombing of "military targets"*¹⁷ This shows that targeting the citizens would impact Germany more than any damage Britain would do by just bombing military targets. This shows that the bomber offensive was worth the cost as ruining the morale of the German citizens was more effective than hitting military targets.

Overall the bomber offensive had a big impact on the morale of the German people as it disrupted their lives and increased the absentee rates. It also affected the soldiers fighting on the front lines by disrupting the letters from home. This makes the bomber offensive worth the cost of men and resources put into it as not only did it lower the German people's morale but it also raised the British morale.

1290 words

¹⁷ Ibid, page 49

Conclusion

In conclusion the bomber offensive was worth the cost of men and resources put into it despite the errors in strategy. The bomber offensive was worth the cost as within the military it had managed to divert the army from the front lines and many were used to defend Germany in manning anti-aircraft guns and it allowed Britain to stay allies with Russia without having to open a second front in France. Although the pilots didn't have much training they still managed to have an impact on the Military and divert the focus of the German military.

Although the German production of armaments always increased it would have been increasing at a higher rate if the bombing offensive never happened. The British bombing offensive also did have an impact on the German oil supply although it was a small impact. The bombing offensive also did not take up a lot of the British economy allowing other resources to be used for the navy and army.

The bombing also had a huge impact of the German citizens with having them evacuate, lose sleep and make unemployment rates increase.

This all helped Britain win the war and was one of the major factors of why Britain had won the war. Despite the errors in strategy with lack of help for the navy the bomber offensive still managed to damage the German morale, economy and military enough to win the war.

Richard Overy states "*The air offensive was one of the decisive elements in Allied victory*"¹⁸

¹⁸ Richard Overy 'Why The Allies Won', page 133

showing that the British bomber offensive was worth the cost of men and resources that was put into it.

272 words

Total word count 4,151

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