



Routledge Studies in Second World War History

ALLIED AIR ATTACKS AND CIVILIAN HARM IN ITALY, 1940–1945

BOMBING AMONG FRIENDS

Matthew Evangelista



Allied Air Attacks and Civilian Harm in Italy, 1940–1945

Tens of thousands of Italian civilians perished in the Allied bombing raids of World War II. More of them died *after* the Armistice of September 1943 than before, when the air attacks were intended to induce Italy's surrender.

Allied Air Attacks and Civilian Harm in Italy, 1940–1945 addresses this seeming paradox, by examining the views of Allied political and military leaders, Allied air crews, and Italians on the ground. It tells the stories of a little-known diplomat (Myron Charles Taylor), military strategist (Solly Zuckerman), resistance fighter (Aldo Quaranta), and peace activist (Vera Brittain) – architects and opponents of the bombing strategies. It describes the fate of ordinary civilians, drawing on a wealth of local and digital archival sources, memoir accounts, novels, and films, including Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro*.

The book will be of interest to readers concerned about the ethical, legal, and human dimensions of bombing and its effects on civilians, to students of military strategy and Italian history, and to World War II buffs. All will benefit from a people-focused history that draws on a range of eclectic and rarely used sources in English and Italian.

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Routledge Studies in Second World War History

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Bombing among Friends

Matthew Evangelista



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To Joanie



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Preface and Acknowledgments

The idea for this book came years ago during the first extended period my family and I lived in Italy. I read the wartime diary of Iris Origo, an Anglo-American woman who married into the Italian aristocracy and spent the Second World War on an estate in rural Tuscany. Origo's reports of civilians bombed by Allied aircraft and strafed by machine guns from the air caught my attention. Following the Armistice of 8 September 1943, Italy was no longer an enemy. Why attack ordinary people going about their daily work—a horse-drawn bus or a civilian train (full of Allied prisoners of war, as it turned out)? I wondered what the Allied air crews were thinking as they fired at a woman with her children on the beach or a teacher driving her pony cart to school, and whether their attitudes toward the Italians reflected higher-level views—of the Allied political and military leadership. And what about the Italians on the ground? What did they think of the people ostensibly there to liberate them from fascist dictatorship and Nazi occupation, while at the same time putting civilian lives and livelihoods at risk?

My curiosity about the history of Italy during World War II coincided with a debate that emerged with the end of the Cold War about the use of military force for humanitarian purposes. My family and I had been on vacation in Italy in March 1999, when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization launched its first war ever—against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia over Serbian repression of the inhabitants of the province of Kosovo. We knew the war had begun when we saw the bombers flying overhead from the Aviano air base. They were on their way to attack Belgrade and other Serbian cities, along with military convoys in Kosovo, in an air campaign that lasted some 78 days. US officials dubbed it a “no-casualty” war, but that was only true for the pilots and crews (there were no NATO “boots on the ground”). Down below, hundreds of civilians were killed and thousands wounded. One of the goals of the war was to stem the ethnic violence that was causing Kosovar Albanians to flee for their lives, but the bombing only exacerbated the refugee crisis. I wondered what the Kosovars thought of their liberators and whether the Serb victims of the bombing—some of them longtime opponents of the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević—appreciated NATO's military efforts to influence *him* by putting pressure on *them*.

These questions about current events inspired my historical inquiry as I began collecting materials on the Allied bombing campaign against Italy. I came up with a title to characterize the paradoxical situation I had glimpsed, even before I had

drafted a chapter: *Bombing among Friends*. The exigencies of publishing and the need for descriptive searchable keywords have turned it into a subtitle, but it still makes my point: Victims of the fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini, and later of a Nazi occupation, the Italian people were not enemies. In Allied propaganda, leaflets and broadcasts urging them to pressure Mussolini to sever his alliance with Nazi Germany or abdicate so that his successors could do so, they were called friends. Yet some 60,000 Italian civilians died under Allied bombardment, more than two-thirds of them after the Armistice that took the Italian armed forces out of the war. More than 60 Italian towns and cities were bombed—Rome was attacked more than 50 times—and some were completely obliterated, such as Cassino and the nearby abbey.

I wanted to understand better what had happened and why. Many people and institutions helped me to do that, and I apologize if I have left any of them out of these acknowledgments. The Institute for European Studies, then directed by Professor Valerie Bunce, saw promise in my project and provided a seed grant to fund some of the early research. In the fall of 2012 I received a Fulbright fellowship to spend a semester in Rome, hosted by Professor Leopoldo Nuti at the Università di Roma Tre. I had naively proposed to spend my time in the archives, conducting research on the consequences of the Allied bombing campaign. Instead, I discovered an enormous secondary literature in Italian on my topic. I spent my semester tracking down and reading a dozen books and teaching a graduate seminar to Poldo's excellent students. Antonio Tiseo, one of those students, offered to serve, along with Francesca Pollini, as my host to visit Monte Cassino and San Pietro Infine in their home region of Caserta. Antonio was the first to suggest to me the idea that Italian views on the Allied bombing could vary by region, depending on how much the inhabitants suffered under German occupation compared to under American bombardment. I was not able to pursue the hypothesis systematically, but my historical reconstruction seems consistent with it. Antonio introduced me to the mayor of Cassino, Antonio Grazio Ferrara, who offered a warm welcome to a citizen of the country whose air forces and army had thoroughly destroyed his native city; he gave me two of his books about the reconstruction efforts and the city's postwar transnational activism in favor of peace.

I thank Nicola Nardelli, who offered a private tour of the museum, the ruins, and the caves at Parco della Memoria Storica at San Pietro Infine; Professor Giuseppe Angelone, scientific director of the same museum, who generously shared material and information; Professor Lance Bertelsen, for sending me electronically a scanned version of his pioneering article on John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro* and accompanying images while I was working in Italy without access to a copy; Maestro Giuseppe Rolfo, who told me stories of the partisans of the Alta Langa and showed me the collection of materials in the Monumento alla Resistenza in Somano; and Francesco Cacciatore and his colleagues for inviting me to present early versions of some of this work at Salerno and Battipaglia.

I am grateful to my late and much-missed father-in-law Maurice Filler, for encouraging me to explore his vast library for work relevant to my topic; to Barry Strauss, who shared his fondness for Italy and suggestions of books to read; and to Milton Leitenberg, who sent a steady stream of valuable sources and citations.

Thanks to Jonathan and Esty for their friendship and encouragement of our gradual expatriation to Italy, so essential to this project, even at the cost of seeing less of them. Late in the project, I corresponded with two historians—Daniel Setzer and Roger Juglair—whose work had been influential in my discussion of Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* and one particular real-world incident it described. I am grateful for their support of the project and their permission to use photos from their work. Dr Marco Ruzzi and his colleagues at the Istituto storico della Resistenza e della società contemporanea in provincia di Cuneo “Dante Livio Bianco” were also generous in providing photos, permissions, and suggestions. I thank the staff at Routledge, including Robert Langham, Louis Nicholson-Pallett, and Saritha Srinivasan, my copy editor Keith Povey, and the anonymous reviewers who offered enthusiastic support for the project.

Two scholars—one I have known for over 40 years and the other I have never met—have influenced this work in different ways. My friend Neta Crawford has long been an inspiration as a scholar-activist, with her indispensable research into the costs of war, her profound ethical and legal analyses, and her apparently unshakable faith in human progress. Claudia Baldoli is the foremost specialist, writing in Italian and English, on the Allied bombing campaign against Italy. Her thorough archival research has provided the foundation for nearly every topic I cover, and her interest in figures such as Vera Brittain reinforced my own.

Much of the research represented here owes to serendipity, and not only because the internet offers a staggering array of historical materials relevant to my topic, all dependent on what the search engines turn up. Chance played a role in the real world as well as the virtual one. On a visit to Sale San Giovanni during the *Non Solo Erbe* festival, I met Alessandro Dutto, editor of a small local publishing house, Araba Fenice. Its specialty is literature and history of the Piedmont region, including wartime memoirs. I headed home with an armload of books that provided core material on several of the book’s themes. Cornell University Library and its staff were a great help. The archives of Myron Taylor and Sidney Schneider provided some of the most original material I use. Even during the pandemic, the staff members were generous with their time and expertise. Sarah How discovered and ordered for the library several publications by and about Aldo Quaranta; more than I realized existed. Eisha Neely helped me learn about the time Vera Brittain and George Catlin spent in Ithaca. I am grateful to Professor Fred Schneider for his support of my research into his father’s archive and to him and his sister for permission to publish materials from it.

Some of the material in these chapters draws from previous publications. I thank the editors and publishers of *Diplomacy & Strategy*, *Film & History*, and *Occupied Italy* for permission to use it here.

Many Italian friends have encouraged my interest in their country over more than 20 years and made me and my family feel welcome on our frequent visits: Alessandro and Linda, Andrea and Alessandra, Fabio and Anna, Vittorio and Teresita, Fabrizio, Giampiero, Michele. I want to thank our neighbors, Vito and Anna Montanaro, who sold us a small apartment in their house at the edge of the woods in Somano, which I used as the base for my research and writing. Unless

the book is translated into Italian or Piedmontese, they will not be able to read my gratitude for their friendship, but it is no less heartfelt. Our friends Luigi and Carol Einaudi already know how much we value their companionship and the history of the Einaudi family's home region they have shared with us.

I dedicate this book to Joanie who, along with our daughters Clara and Marielle, has shared my love of Italy and Italian language and culture, accompanied me during much of the research on this book, and was the first to read a full draft. After retiring from her psychiatry practice to spend more time in Italy, she pursued her own research—on astronomy, birds, butterflies, knitting patterns, photography, tarot cards, and much else. Her companionship and curiosity and love have enriched my life beyond measure.

My late colleague Isaac Kramnick once claimed that “there are few euphoric highs, sheer ecstatic joys, that compare with how one feels after a good day of writing.” Although I feel uncomfortable admitting it, during a period when so many suffered and died, the pandemic that began in 2020 provided me many such days of good writing. I fully endorse the sentiment expressed by the writer Susan Orlean: “For me, writing is really just learning about things that interest me, and then trying to convince you to find them as interesting as I do.” I hope this book convinces.



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1 Introduction

Throughout World War II, US and British air forces bombed Italy, killing over 60,000 civilians, destroying the homes of hundreds of thousands more and sending many fleeing into the countryside where they died of hunger and disease. Civilians in the other enemy countries, Germany and Japan, suffered much worse, and their history is thus better known: the destruction of Berlin, Dresden, and Tokyo by firebombing, the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Italy is unusual in that it joined the war late, with an opportunistic attack against France in June 1940, nine months after Nazi Germany invaded Poland. And it left early—or tried to leave—in September 1943, when the government that replaced the fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini signed an armistice with the Allied powers as they conquered Sicily and assaulted the peninsula. Yet Italy remained a target of aerial bombardment, as German forces occupied the country, rescued Mussolini, and resisted an Allied invasion until the final surrender in May 1945. Two-thirds of Italian civilian victims of bombing were killed *after* the Armistice, when Italy was no longer an enemy country, as the Allies sought to defeat the German occupiers.¹

“*Amici italiani!* Italian friends! We do not want to bomb you, we are not fighting with you, we only want peace.” Such friendly sentiments fell from the sky, in leaflets dropped by Allied warplanes, and were broadcast by radio: “We are coming to your rescue, we are coming to you as liberators.” Yet each message contained an explicit ultimatum: refuse cooperation with the Germans, overthrow Mussolini, or face destruction from aerial bombardment. One leaflet depicted a map showing Italian cities vulnerable to Allied air raids, with a caption that read, “Mussolini asked for it.”² The messages came as preludes to the inevitable attacks—often carried out by the B-24 heavy bomber known as the Liberator.³

The language of friendship and liberation for people suffering under dictatorship and foreign occupation implies a concern for their welfare. It resonates with the objectives of more recent “humanitarian interventions” that have characterized some wars of the late 20th and early 21st centuries: the 78-day bombing campaign by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) against Serbia in 1999—NATO’s first war ever—to rescue Kosovar Albanians from massacre by Slobodan Milošević’s troops, or the 2011 air attacks against Libya that witnessed more than a hundred Tomahawk cruise missiles and over 25,000 sorties by NATO fighter

2 Introduction

aircraft launched against the forces of Muammar Gaddafi's regime. Critics have argued that their consciences eased by humanitarian motives, US and European leaders paid insufficient attention to the civilian harm caused by these military interventions that relied so heavily on bombing.⁴ One scholar proposed a corrective—an “international law of everyday life” that would consider such attacks “from the perspective of the people on whose behalf the intervention took place.”⁵

In the context of the “total war” that characterized World War II and seemed to erase the civilian–military distinction, did ordinary Italians figure into the calculations of Allied political and military leaders? Did the Allies target civilians deliberately as part of their military strategy, as Russian forces did in Syria in 2015 or in the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, or did they consider them—to use the more recent terminology—unintended “collateral damage”? What of the air crews that dropped the bombs on Italian cities? Did they suffer remorse for the civilian casualties they caused, or did they consider their actions to be justified revenge for the crimes of the Axis powers, including the tens of thousands of British civilians killed in the bombing of London? What about the Italian victims of the Allied bombs? Did they welcome the attacks as a way to bring an end to the war or did they resent the actions of the supposed liberators?

There is a rich historical literature on the Allied bombing campaigns against Germany and Japan during World War II and the development of air power strategies. Much of it has focused on the legality and morality of the bombing, especially the harm it caused to civilians, as well as its effectiveness in contributing to victory.⁶ Only recently, however, have scholars writing in English turned their attention to cases where the Allies bombed co-belligerents of Nazi Germany, such as Bulgaria, countries occupied by the Germans, such as France, or the example that fell into both categories, one after the other: Italy.⁷ Lack of attention to the Italian case is particularly surprising, as Richard Overy points out, given that “Italy was bombed for only a month less than Germany during the Second World War” and “as many Italians were killed by bombing as died in the Blitz on Britain; more tons were dropped on Rome than on all British cities put together.”⁸

Less surprising is that Italian historians have devoted considerable attention to the bombs that wrought such damage on their country; indeed, nearly every city bombed—they number over 60—boasts some combination of an extensively documented study (or more than one) of the consequences, firsthand accounts drawn from contemporary diaries, or websites that maintain lists of places hit and people killed.⁹ Yet, as Italian scholars have noted, a certain

“historical localism” has developed which has led to the emergence of foci of interest and research in the individual local realities which, while deepening the events of certain places, are often disconnected from each other, and missing the organic treatment of wider scope which is instead the norm in other nations involved in the Second World War.¹⁰

This book draws on these untapped Italian–language sources, along with numerous other primary and secondary materials, including military unit histories, memoirs, archives, novels, short stories, and films. Although focusing at times on particular

localities, it avoids “historical localism” by pursuing an “organic” theme: the impact of the Allied bombing campaign on Italian civilians and the perceptions of those carrying out the attacks. To set the stage, this introductory chapter provides an overview of Italy’s role in the war, with an emphasis on the course of the Allied bombing campaign and its shifting objectives. The rest of the book is divided into chapters highlighting five dimensions of the war: Diplomacy, Strategy, Resistance, Humanity, and Memory. Each chapter focuses on the role of particular individuals who influenced, or sought to influence, the course of the war, and especially the harm caused to Italian civilians by the Allies’ bombs. The conclusion revisits those individuals after the war, highlights the *Rashomon* effect of perceptions of bombing that forms a thread throughout the book, and ends with a discussion of the legacy of the Allied air campaign for contemporary Italian opinion on matters of war and peace as well as the bombing strategies of the war-making states of our era.

★ ★ ★

World War II began in Europe with Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, a week after the signing of a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. France and Britain had pursued an unsuccessful policy of appeasement as Hitler violated the treaties of Versailles and Locarno, reoccupied the Rhineland, incorporated Austria into the German Reich in the *Anschluss*, annexed the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia as part of the Munich Agreement, and then violated it by seizing Bohemia and Moravia and dissolving the Czechoslovak Republic. In belated response to the Nazi menace, France and Britain had sought to deter further expansion by offering a security guarantee to Poland at the end of March 1939. A week later Italy invaded Albania. Mussolini declined, however, to commit to supporting Hitler’s aggression against Poland. When France and Britain declared war against Germany in the wake of the invasion, Italy stood aside, claiming a policy of “non-belligerence.”

Il Duce changed his mind when the Germans invaded Belgium, the Netherlands, and France in May 1940 and the Nazi onslaught drove the British from the Continent in the hasty evacuation from Dunkirk by early June. In mid-May Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian foreign minister, had intimated to William Phillips, the US ambassador, that war was imminent. Phillips told his goddaughter Iris Origo that a month earlier Ciano had suggested “that the chances of Italy’s intervention were 50-50; yesterday he said they were 90%.” On 2 June Origo presciently wrote in her diary,

Mussolini, profoundly convinced of the inevitable defeat of England and France, is determined to seize this opportunity not only of realizing his original aspirations but of dealing a final and crushing blow to the democracies. He is aiming, not only at new territorial acquisitions, but at a new Europe.¹¹

Just over a week later, as she had predicted, Mussolini declared war on France and Britain, expecting the conflict to end soon, and hoping to win some of their African colonies in a postwar settlement. The Italian Army invaded southern

France on 10 June as the French government was abandoning Paris. Britain responded to Italy's entry into the war the very next day with air attacks against three Italian industrial cities: Genoa, Milan, and Turin. By the time the French government capitulated to Germany two weeks later and established the puppet regime at Vichy, the Italians had secured an occupation zone along their western border, administered from Menton. That same month British and Italian forces clashed in Libya, Egypt, Sudan, and Kenya. In October Mussolini ordered Italian troops to attack Greece from Albania, thereby threatening Britain's position in the Mediterranean.

With its ground forces evacuated from Europe, Britain relied on air attacks to prosecute the war against Germany and Italy. Its aerial war plans for Italy combined two motives. Bombing urban industrial facilities and railroad junctions in heavily populated neighborhoods could materially affect military operations and simultaneously shatter morale by killing, wounding, and rendering homeless ordinary citizens in the belligerent country. The British Air Staff had begun planning air operations against Italy during the spring of 1940—before Mussolini had declared war—with precisely these motives in mind: an emphasis on undermining civilian morale by attacking ostensibly legitimate military targets. Destroying civilian housing was key. In the understated formulation of Frederick Lindemann (Lord Cherwell), Prime Minister Winston Churchill's scientific adviser, "investigation seems to show that having one's house demolished is most damaging to morale."¹² Italy was spared the firebombing that destroyed cities such as Dresden and Tokyo thanks in part to studies which showed that the architectural structure of Italian housing—multi-story buildings around a central courtyard—were less susceptible to incendiary raids than to conventional high explosives.¹³

Already in a report of 29 April 1940, British planners had identified Italian civilians as an appropriate object of aerial bombardment, precisely because of their *opposition* to war. The report found it improbable that the majority of Italians would favor Mussolini's war, especially in the industrial North, a hotbed of communist-inspired labor activism. Attacking by air would convince Italian workers that the Allies were neither weak nor exhausted, as fascist propaganda proclaimed. Moreover, aerial attacks were what Italian civilians most feared and for which they were least prepared.¹⁴

Attacking military-industrial facilities, including aircraft factories, would simultaneously appear legally justified and cause widespread harm to civilians living near the main industrial sites ("for example Fiat in Turin, Breda in Milan, Piaggio in Genoa").¹⁵ Not for the last time, the Allies would deliberately hurt the segment of the population already most antagonistic to the Fascist regime—industrial workers of communist and anarchist sympathies—in order to convince them to overthrow it. Indeed, a US intelligence analysis from mid-July 1943 predicted that "heavy air bombardment might possibly bring about a leftist revolution."¹⁶ As Claudia Baldoli has documented, bombing indeed played a key role in mobilizing workers to strike in the spring of 1943.¹⁷

As a practical matter, when the British found daylight precision bombing too costly in planes shot down and crew members killed, they turned to night raids,

although in cities under blackout the targets could only be approximate. Even as British forces engaged in direct combat with Italians in the Mediterranean, the Royal Air Force (RAF) remained preoccupied with bombing cities. In November 1940 Chief Air Marshal Charles Portal wrote to his deputy, Arthur “Bomber” Harris, and “directed that even though *Italian* aircraft continued to aim for military targets, *British* bombers should bomb ‘in centres of Italian population’ if a primary target could not be located.”¹⁸ “From February 1942,” argues Gabriella Gribaudo, British “strategy shifted to the area bombing of cities, with a view to wrecking the morale of civilians and particularly of industrial workers.”¹⁹

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December brought two new allies into the war on Britain’s side: the USSR and the United States. Both Stalin and Roosevelt were eager to open a second front in Nazi-occupied France to put pressure on Germany from the West. Churchill, however, preferred that Allied efforts focus first on driving German and Italian forces out of North Africa. Roosevelt’s military officials, Generals George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower, remained unenthusiastic about the British strategy, and Henry Stimson, his secretary of war, “had always hated the Northwest Africa plan—preferring the idea of a single Anglo-American thrust across the English Channel” into France.²⁰ Churchill countered that a “substantial” invasion could not be mounted in 1942 and “was certain to lead to disaster.”²¹ Referring to the president, Stimson accurately predicted (in his diary) that Churchill “will have his way with our Chief, and the careful and deliberate plans of our staff will be overridden.”²² Roosevelt agreed to send US forces to Egypt—without consulting Stimson—following a devastating British loss at Tobruk in June 1942, when some 33 thousand soldiers surrendered with barely a fight.

The intensity of British bombing of Italian cities picked up in the autumn of 1942, even as the Allies were embarking on Operation Torch, the invasion of French North Africa. In November, Foreign Minister Anthony Eden issued a “most secret” memorandum, “to be kept under lock and key,” to advocate “*provoking* an internal collapse” in Italy by bombing its cities. He acknowledged that “reports that the indiscriminate bombing which has resulted in large civilian casualties in the recent heavy raids has aroused bitterness and anti-British feeling.” “On the other hand,” he reasoned, “the demoralisation and panic produced by intensive heavy air bombardments no doubt outweigh any increase in anti-British feeling. On balance, therefore, there is everything to be said for keeping up and increasing our heavy indiscriminate raids on Italian cities.”²³ Eden’s analysis simply confirmed the policy that Churchill had already adopted and conveyed two days earlier to President Roosevelt: “All the industrial centers should be attacked in an intense fashion, every effort being made to render them *uninhabitable* and to *terrorize* and paralyse [*sic*] the population.”²⁴

Subsequent air strategy conformed to the policy articulated by Eden and Churchill. As Overy reports, “the bombing from the winter of 1942–3 was on an unprecedented scale,” having increased from 1,592 tons in 1942 to “110,474 tons in 1943, twice the tonnage dropped in the Blitz on Britain. From modest losses in the early raids, the destruction of housing escalated dramatically, [to] 122,000

buildings by March 1943.”²⁵ The extensive bombing of Turin led to spontaneous evacuations of the residents, and then a half-hearted attempt by the local authorities to convince people to return.

The appeal had little effect. Half of the population of Turin remained away from the city at night, 55 per cent in the hinterland, 45 per cent in other provinces. A second wave of evacuation occurred in the summer of 1943, reaching two-thirds of the city population, many of the newcomers sleeping in woods and fields in conditions of deteriorating hygiene and widespread hunger.²⁶

British leaders’ preoccupation with knocking Italy out of the war by terrorizing the population did not preclude strictly military roles for the RAF. In fact, a prerequisite for any extensive use of air power was destruction of the Italian and German air capability—air bases and planes on the ground as well as aircraft factories—so as to achieve air superiority and operate without hindrance. Not surprisingly, the British had launched attacks against Italian air resources within hours of Italy’s declaration of war on 10 June 1940. “Inexplicably,” however, as Robert Ehlers writes, “Italian commanders had not received word. Air raids did grievous damage to the Italian Air Force,” including air bases and fuel in Italian East Africa.²⁷ The Italians lost some 1,200 planes in their retreat from Libya during Operation Torch.²⁸ The British continued to attack German air assets, even while bombing Italian cities, in preparation for further advances in the Mediterranean. As Andrew Brookes describes, “to all intents and purposes the *Luftwaffe* was defeated before the Allied invasion of Sicily began.”²⁹

Operation Husky, the Sicilian invasion, was another British initiative imposed on the reluctant Americans. General George S. Patton complained in his diary that “being connected with the British is bad. So far this war is being fought for the benefit of the British Empire and for post-war considerations.”³⁰ US military advisers preferred to maintain their ground forces for opening a second front in France, and in the meantime to demoralize the German population by launching long-range air attacks against German cities from British bases.³¹ Churchill, instead, wanted to invade Italy and gain control of the Mediterranean. He convinced Roosevelt to join an invasion first of Sicily in July 1943 and then of the Italian mainland—again over the objections of US military leaders, who feared getting bogged down there. The Army’s Operations Division issued a report, which reached President Roosevelt’s desk, including this assessment: “The allocation of additional resources to the Mediterranean is uneconomical and assists Germany to create a strategic stalemate in Europe.”³² On the contrary, claimed Churchill, an Italian campaign would divert German troops from the Eastern Front and take some pressure off of Stalin and the Russians.

General Eisenhower “reconciled the differing Anglo-American views” by proposing a limited Italian invasion to seize the airfields at Foggia, “and thereby to launch a new air offensive on Germany from the south.” Supplying the airfield required control of a major port and “Naples was the obvious choice. The operation was code-named *Avalanche*.”³³ Little did the Americans realize that they

would be fighting Germans on the ground in Italy for another year and a half, although that seems to be what Churchill had in mind. As Matthew Jones summarizes,

In several senses the campaign in Italy represented for Churchill the centre-piece of British efforts in the war in Europe. Indeed for many British it contained almost a symbolic value, generally out of proportion to its overall strategic worth. Through its attritional, grinding nature, the campaign also constituted a logical conclusion to the British-inspired Mediterranean strategy—Italy providing an arena in which the Allies could “burn and bleed” German forces (in a favourite phrase of the Prime Minister’s), and fatally weaken the enemy. Material and psychological investments in Italy were heavy, as were the casualties. Units engaged under British control were drawn from all corners of the Empire—India, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand—giving the campaign to Churchillian eyes the aspect of an imperial crusade holding post-war implications.³⁴

Patton’s interpretation of British motives seems to have been right on the mark.

In the wake of the Allied invasion of Sicily and the bombing of Rome on 19 July, the Fascist leadership deposed and arrested Mussolini on 25 July. Italians were eager to see the end of fascism and war. Many had hoped that Mussolini’s arrest would signal the end of the war. In Caroline Moorehead’s words, “almost all ordinary Italians” greeted the news of Mussolini’s downfall “with an explosion of joy.” Rome erupted in a “frenzy of celebration.”³⁵ Carla Capponi, 25 years old at the time, remembered “hundreds and hundreds” of people pouring into Piazza Venezia cheering the fall of fascism. Yet, “once the euphoria passed, we remembered that we were still at war, that the Germans were in our house, and that the future was an agonizing unknown.”³⁶ She was reacting to the announcement of Marshal Pietro Badoglio, Mussolini’s successor, of Italy’s continued participation in the war. From London, Churchill offered his own reaction in the House of Commons, in characteristic fashion:

The only consequence of the Italian Government staying under the German yoke will be that in the next few months Italy will be seared and scarred and blackened from one end to the other...we should let the Italians, to use a homely phrase, ‘stew in their own juice’ for a bit and hot up the fire to the utmost.³⁷

Following a second Allied air attack against Rome in August, Badoglio’s representatives opened discussions with Allied officials to negotiate Italy’s withdrawal from the war. The expectation was that the Allies would seize Rome with the support of Italian troops. Capponi and her friends expressed the hopes of many Italians as they speculated what would happen next. The Allied invasion had already begun the liberation of Italian territory. “Now it will continue with our contribution. It’s the only solution that can restore our dignity and honor.” They hoped that Badoglio “had organized an effective defense of the frontier,” to prevent German reinforcements.³⁸

Vittorio Foa, an activist with the *Giustizia e Libertà* antifascist movement, knew better. Arrested in 1935 in his native Turin, he remained imprisoned at Civitavecchia, near Rome, for weeks following the fall of Mussolini. Badoglio dithered about what to do with Mussolini's political prisoners, reflecting the same ambivalence he manifested toward the Allies. Only when Foa and his prison mates carried out a hunger strike did the government release them, on 23 August 1943.

Vittorio and the others were met at the prison gates by a group of antifascists, who took them to have sandwiches and wine. As they celebrated their release, they were treated to a sobering spectacle. "We saw a huge motorized German division, the Hermann Göring division, heading south. The soldiers were all very young—the Germans were at the bottom of the barrel—but it was a very powerful division. So this moment of liberation was accompanied by an impressive show of German military might. That tended to make us very realistic. It was clear that the exit from the war was going to be extremely difficult."³⁹

Carla Capponi and her comrades were more optimistic, convinced that the Italian Army would be fighting with the Allies, who were "already advancing toward Rome," and that "from here to Brenner" (the border with Austria) they would expel the enemy together.⁴⁰

In fact, the plan was for the Americans to parachute into Rome as the Italians switched sides. The US war correspondent Richard Tregaskis recorded in his diary on 7 September what he had learned from his sources:

There will be two landings on two different air fields. The first waves will land by parachute to make sure that beacons are lighted for the bulk of the planes which are to follow later. There will probably be a triumphal procession into Rome. Then the Italian divisions in the Rome area will group themselves with the 82nd Airborne for the defense of the city."⁴¹

A US soldier from that division later wrote to his family of the original plan (some of it censored), unhappy that it had been called off:

We had gone back to Africa from Sicily to prepare for another combat mission—an astounding one. We were to jump 12 miles from Rome and take that city, just as the Italians were to surrender. It would have really made history. However, either the Germans got wind of it or something but they got there first. It was close. One of our battalions was already in their planes... (CENSORED)...Meanwhile, of course, the 5th Army invaded Italy. We were all disappointed at not being in it.⁴²

As the letter writer indicated, the parachute drop on Rome was supposed to coincide with the Italian surrender. On 8 September, Badoglio was expected to announce an armistice, the unconditional surrender to which his representatives had agreed a few days earlier, as the Allies were carrying out a surprise landing at Salerno. But the Italians got cold feet, the culmination of a series of mishaps.

General Giuseppe Castellano, Badoglio's representative, had met General Harold Alexander, the Allied ground forces commander in Sicily on 3 September, but claimed not to have authority to sign the Armistice. Because the claim seemingly contradicted the approval Badoglio had conveyed by telegram, Alexander threatened to arrest Castellano as a spy and vowed that "within twenty-four hours, Rome would be destroyed in reprisal for Italian recalcitrance." At that point Castellano agreed to Alexander's terms: that Badoglio would publicly announce the Armistice on the eve of D-Day, the Allied invasion of the Italian mainland. Yet, pressing for the precise date, Castellano was told only that the invasion would come within two weeks. Thus, he informed Badoglio that the Italians would have that much time to prepare.⁴³

To check on those preparations, General Maxwell Taylor and Colonel William Gardiner, two US officers fluent in French, were smuggled into Rome in an ambulance on the night of 7 September. They sought to verify that the air bases would be secured for the parachutists of the 82nd Airborne. Instead, they were shocked to discover that the Italians had lost their nerve and were unprepared to join the fight. General Giacomo Carboni, in charge of the army corps intended to defend Rome, claimed that the Germans had blocked provision of fuel and weapons so his forces could no longer fulfill that mission. As Gardiner later recounted the meeting, Carboni slyly sought to deflect blame onto the Americans themselves for their earlier attacks:

When I asked Carboni about getting more ammunition, his only reply was that we had destroyed the largest factory. He said that he had the facilities for only a few hours' fighting...His view was that if an armistice were declared, the Germans would at once march on and take Rome and restore a Fascist government. His only solution was for us to make a large landing north of Rome. He said that Salerno was too far south; that the natural line of defense for the Germans was across Italy through Formia or Minterna [*sic*: Minturno], near Gaeta. Of course, the Italians were not supposed to know that our landing was going to come off in the Gulf of Salerno.⁴⁴

The Allies had failed to keep the invasion plans secret, even as they misled the Italians on the precise date and contributed to their lack of preparation. Taylor and Gardiner insisted on meeting with Marshal Badoglio that night, despite the fact that Carboni claimed he was asleep and would see them the next morning instead. The Americans again threatened the destruction of Rome if Badoglio refused to cooperate. Taylor asked the Marshal

if he feared the possible occupation of Rome by the Germans more than the renewed attacks of the Allied air forces which would certainly come if he rejected the Armistice. He answered with considerable emotion that he hoped the Allies would not attack their friends.

Badoglio suggested instead that the Allies "bomb the passes in the mountains to the north and cut the German lines."⁴⁵

Taylor contacted Allied headquarters to advise cancelling the parachute drop on Rome, undoubtedly to the relief of General Matthew Ridgway, commander of the 82nd, who already considered the operation “harebrained” and doomed to fail.⁴⁶ To force the Italians’ hand, General Eisenhower announced Italy’s unconditional surrender over Radio Algiers at 6:30 pm on 8 September. An hour later Badoglio headed to the studios of Radio Roma and declared that the Italian forces were withdrawing from the war and would no longer attack the Allies. He provided no instructions for the Italian troops to oppose the Germans, however, indicating only that they were allowed to defend themselves. At that point, as Carboni had predicted, German troops seized Rome and reinforcements poured across the northern border through the Brenner Pass. “It has taken us a long time to lose the war, but thank heaven we have lost it at last, and there is no use in denying it.” So concluded Private Angelo, the reluctant soldier of Eric Linklater’s 1946 eponymous tragicomic novel, based on the author’s own experiences with the British Army in Italy the year before. To the Americans, Angelo issued thanks and a plea: “We are very grateful to you for coming to liberate us, but I hope you will not find it necessary to liberate us out of existence.”⁴⁷

Subsequent events soon shattered any remaining popular expectations that surrender to the Allies would bring peace. As the king and his retinue, including Badoglio, escaped Rome for the American occupation zone in the south, Italian soldiers and civilians alike were left to their own devices. Badoglio had not issued orders for Italian troops to attack the Germans in coordination with the Allied landing, in part because of the confusion over the timing of the Armistice. “We thought it would be about the twelfth,” he explained, at a press conference in Naples in late October. “It was the eighth. That surprised me,” he claimed, “But it was quite natural that there should be some misunderstanding in such matters.”⁴⁸

It was a costly misunderstanding. With no word from their superiors, Italian military officers reacted in various ways to the silence of the high command. Some dismissed their troops to find their own way home and released their Allied prisoners of war; some tried to reach Allied lines; others formed partisan bands to continue the fight against the Germans on their own; still others hesitated, only to find themselves arrested and disarmed by the German forces and sent by train to Germany to serve in harsh labor battalions. The Germans ultimately deported some 700,000 Italians. Many Italian *sbanditi*, disbanded soldiers, escaped that fate thanks to the initiative of antifascist women, who urged them to flee and helped them to hide.⁴⁹

Hitler arranged for Mussolini’s rescue from prison and had him establish a puppet regime, known as the Italian Social Republic, based in Salò on Lake Garda. Dedicated fascists who stayed loyal to Mussolini formed military units whose atrocities against the civilian population rivaled those of the Nazi occupiers. Meanwhile the German armies fought off the Allied drive up the peninsula for another 19 months. Civilians, caught in the cross fire, impatiently awaited liberation by the Allies, but the campaign to take Rome from the south was slow and uncertain—literally an uphill battle against determined German resistance. Italians celebrated the fall of Rome in June 1944. “What a day it was,” recalled an elderly

Roman man in Alfred Hayes' 1949 novel to a US soldier who had participated in the liberation, "the day you took Rome. What a celebration." "Perhaps we celebrated too soon," replied his son.⁵⁰ Indeed, the fighting continued for nearly another year, as olive groves and vegetable gardens became battlefields, and villages, towns, and cities were bombed to rubble.

As early as November 1942, in a cable to Roosevelt, Churchill had referred to Italy as the "soft underbelly" of Europe.⁵¹ He seemed enamored of the metaphor, however inaccurate it turned out to be. Martha Gellhorn, the writer and war correspondent who covered the Italian campaign, offered a more prescient understanding of the impact of Italy's geography in her summary of the war:

Historians will think about this campaign far better than we can who have seen it. Historians will note that in the first year of the Italian campaign, in 365 days of steady fighting, the Allied armies advanced 315 miles. It is the first time in history that any armies have invaded Italy from the south and fought up the endless mountain ranges toward the Alps. The historians will be able to explain with authority what it meant to break three fortified lines, attacking up mountains, and the historians will also describe how Italy became a giant mine field and that no weapon is uglier, for it waits in silence, small and secret, and it can kill any day, not only on the day of battle.⁵²

In fact, widespread international attention to the postwar civilian consequences of landmines would not come for another several decades, culminating in the campaign to ban them through the Ottawa Treaty of 1997. Up to 1993, Italy was one of the main producers and exporters of antipersonnel mines, despite its experience during the war. In the years following the war, some 200 million square meters of land and 6,721 municipalities were cleared of over 13 million unexploded ordnances; it was a costly process in money and human lives, as 390 people died carrying it out and over 500 were injured. One can still find the danger of postwar mine fields commemorated in popular Italian culture.⁵³ During the war itself, though, it was the Allied bombing of their cities and towns and the immediate threat to survival that most preoccupied Italian civilians.

Italians came under bombardment continuously from the day after their country entered the war on 10 June 1940 until 4 May 1945, two days *after* the German forces surrendered in Italy.⁵⁴ The Italian government's Central Institute of Statistics in 1957 estimated a death toll from aerial bombardment of 18,376 civilians (and 4,397 military) during the period from June 1940 until the Armistice in September 1943. Using the sum of estimates made by local governments would yield an even higher figure.⁵⁵ After the Armistice, civilians should have been protected from direct attack, according to the prevailing norms of warfare, and from that point most Italians (aside from the fascists) welcomed the Allies as friends and liberators. Yet civilians continued to die in large numbers from Allied air raids—more than 40,000, or two-thirds of the war's total, between the Armistice and the final defeat of Nazi Germany.⁵⁶

In the first years of the war, as the British expanded the list of Italian cities targeted for destruction, fears arose that Rome might also be on it. Churchill had

made his position clear as early as October 1941, when he told the House of Commons, “we should not hesitate to bomb Rome to the best of our ability and as heavily as possible if the course of the war should render such action convenient and helpful.”⁵⁷ As we have seen, once the United States had joined the war, its military and political leaders came to accept Churchill’s position. The bombings of Rome in July and August 1943 marked a turning point in one sense: They contributed to driving Italy out of the war—at least as a culmination of factors, including popular frustration with the 20-year fascist experiment, the economic, social, and psychological toll of Mussolini’s “wars of choice” in Africa, the Balkans, and Russia, and the shock of the Allied invasion of Sicily. In another sense, bombing Rome represented continuity, as it and so many other Italian cities would face further Allied bombardment throughout the period of German occupation.



The bombing of Rome is the focus of the next chapter, *Diplomacy*. Churchill’s threats early in the war to attack Italy’s capital had particularly alarmed the Vatican. Diplomats from the Holy See pursued a campaign to persuade the British to spare the Eternal City, but it made no headway. London accused the Vatican of hypocrisy for making no effort to get Italy’s ally Nazi Germany to halt its depredations against civilian life and property throughout the territories it had attacked or invaded. As Chapter Two describes, President Franklin Roosevelt entered the fray by dispatching Myron Taylor, his personal envoy to Pope Pius XII, to Rome. Taylor’s assigned tasks were many: to persuade the Pope to speak out against Germany’s anti-Semitic atrocities; to obtain the Vatican’s blessing for supplying US lend-lease aid to the Soviet Union in the wake of the German invasion of June 1941, despite a religious injunction that forbade Catholics from dealing with an atheistic communist state; and to soften the Vatican’s opposition to the Allies’ demand for Italy’s unconditional surrender. The task to which Taylor committed himself with particular energy was not one assigned by Roosevelt but one that most concerned the Pope: to convince the Allies not to bomb Rome. The chapter traces Taylor’s many efforts to influence the US government and to intercede directly with Churchill to convince him to spare Rome from bombardment or at least publicly commit to avoiding civilian harm. He failed utterly. In a sense Rome should have been an easy case for successful diplomacy. If the ancient center of religion, culture, history, and art could not be spared—by, for example, declaring it an “open city”—how could the rest of Italy escape aerial destruction?

Chapter Three on *Strategy* seeks to explain how the deployment of Allied air forces produced such large numbers of civilian victims. To be clear, there was no single strategy for the use of air power in Italy, no coherent “air campaign.” Missions ranged from bombing industrial population centers, urban railroad junctions, and ports in the early British attacks, to close air support of troops and attempts to disrupt enemy supply routes before and during the main ground offensives, to destruction of railroad bridges along the Austrian border in the last days.⁵⁸

The emphasis on attacking railroad junctions and marshaling yards owes much to Solly Zuckerman, a leading adviser on bombing to Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Zuckerman features prominently in our discussion, along with the critics of his preferred strategy—one that caused extensive harm to civilians in urban areas, but less than would have been caused by the indiscriminate area attacks inflicted on Germany and Japan. The chapter reviews postwar debates about the relative military ineffectiveness of Zuckerman’s approach. Martha Gellhorn presciently described one such Zuckerman-inspired mission in autumn 1943 in her essay on “The Bomber Boys.”

They were going to fly over France, over known and loved cities, cities they would not see and that did not now concern them. They were going south to bomb marshaling yards, to destroy if possible and however briefly one of the two rail connections between France and Italy. If they succeeded, the infantry in southern Italy would have an easier job for a little while.⁵⁹

As Gellhorn understood, the strategy of bombing rail junctions and marshaling yards provided at best temporary benefits. At worst, it wasted resources that could have been used more effectively in direct support of the ground forces, as the chapter explains.

The Armistice announced on 8 September 1943 prompted major changes in the Allied war against Italy. The country was no longer an enemy, but instead became a “co-belligerent” against Hitler and the *Wehrmacht* forces occupying the country. After fleeing Rome with the king, Badoglio belatedly declared war on Nazi Germany on 13 October. Yet the Allies continued bombing Italy in an effort to hinder the German war effort and eventually liberate the Italians from Nazi domination. In the meantime, the Italians began liberating themselves, especially in the northern parts of the country where they formed partisan bands to conduct sabotage and directly engage the German forces and their fascist Italian allies. The story of *Resistance* told in Chapter Four describes the ambivalent attitude of Italian partisans toward the Allied air operations through the eyes of Aldo Quaranta, a partisan leader in the northwestern mountains of Piedmont. The region witnessed the earliest and most numerous bands of resistance fighters. Their relationship with the Allies included not only efforts to coordinate air raids with their own ground combat but also to forestall attacks on urban areas by destroying important targets so that the Allies would not need to bomb them.

What Allied military and political leaders, ordinary soldiers and air crews, and journalists covering the Italian campaign thought about civilian bombing victims is the topic of Chapter Five, *Humanity*. It draws upon the writings of Vera Brittain, one of the most eloquent critics of the Allied campaign of area bombing of Axis cities. Brittain had served as a nurse in France during World War I, treating German prisoners of war maimed by bombs and crippled by poison gas, as well as soldiers from her own country, England. All of the men of her generation closest to her lost their lives in that war: her fiancé, her brother, and their dearest friends. Brittain emerged from the war committed to nonviolence, a conviction she maintained despite her recognition of the threat posed by the rise of Italian fascism and

German Nazism. She did not believe that defeating that threat required denigrating the humanity of people on the other side. As a member of the Bombing Restriction Committee, she published pamphlets describing the human consequences of Allied bombing against urban populations, city by city. This chapter uses Brittain's writing as a kind of template for what constitutes a humane depiction of the civilian consequences of the bombing of Italy and the subsequent Allied occupation. It then reviews a range of materials—statements of political and military leaders, accounts by journalists and novelists who witnessed the Italian campaigns firsthand, and reminiscences and interviews with members of the air crews that dropped the bombs from above and those of Italian victims below. The picture that emerges contains elements of dehumanizing racism as well as empathy and recognition of the common humanity of Italians caught in a war that few of them wanted.

Italians were already sick of the war by the time the Allies invaded Sicily in the summer of 1943—one of the many reasons Mussolini got the boot in July. Yet, even after the Armistice ended Italy's conflict with the Allies, Italians endured another 600 days of war, followed by an Allied occupation characterized by desperate poverty and homelessness, as Italians struggled to survive in cities and towns destroyed by the liberators' artillery and bombs. How have ordinary Italians remembered the war and subsequent liberation? They have often done so not only on the basis of their own direct experiences, for those who lived through the ordeals, but also through cinematic representations. Chapter Six, *Memory*, examines the impact of one such film, John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro*, the story of the simultaneous destruction and liberation of a small town in the Liri Valley, near Cassino, along the route to Rome. Promoted as a documentary, the film was later revealed to be a reconstruction of the battle scenes, enacted several weeks after the town's liberation. The chapter draws on accounts by Huston and his crew as well as careful analysis of the film by Italian historians and media specialists who discovered the original unedited footage. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the role San Pietro—the town and the movie—has played in forming popular Italian understandings of the war and the Allied bombing campaigns, and how those understandings have contributed to a strong pacifist orientation in contemporary Italian public opinion.

The concluding chapter attempts three tasks: First, it traces the legacy of the war in the lives of the individuals who represent each of the book's themes—Myron Taylor, Solly Zuckerman, Aldo Quaranta, Vera Brittain, and John Huston. Second, it summarizes the *Rashomon* nature of the experience of bombing among friends. It does so through the juxtaposition of the perspectives of the air crews with those of the civilians below in two particular attacks: the infamous destruction of the Abbey of Monte Cassino and the nearby town of Cassino in February and March 1944 and the barely known air raids against the small Piedmontese city of Alba in July of the same year. Finally it offers some observations about the continuing influence of the Allied air attacks on contemporary Italy and its citizens' views on issues of war and peace, as well as echoes of the Allies' strategy in current thinking about air power in the 21st century.

Notes

- 1 Marco Gioannini and Giulio Massobrio, *Bombardate l'Italia: storia della guerra di distruzione aerea, 1940–1945* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2007), 12.
- 2 Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 56.
- 3 These close paraphrases come from leaflets quoted in Claudia Baldoli, “I bombardamenti sull’Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Strategia anglo-americana e propaganda rivolta alla popolazione civile,” *Deportate, esuli, profughe*, n. 13–14, 2010, 34–49, and Helena Janeczek, *Le Rondini di Montecassino* (Parma: Ugo Guanda Editore, 2010), 47; and the radio broadcasts, including from General Dwight Eisenhower, quoted in Eric Morris, *Circles of Hell: The War in Italy, 1943–1945* (New York: Crown, 1993), 97, 136. See also John Horne Burns, *The Gallery*, originally published in 1947 (New York: New York Review of Books, 2004), 215.
- 4 C.J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, “In Strikes on Libya by NATO, an Unspoken Civilian Toll,” *New York Times*, 17 December 2011; Stephen Zunes, “Lessons and False Lessons from Libya,” 31 August 2011.
- 5 Hilary Charlesworth, “International Law: A Discipline of Crisis,” *The Modern Law Review Limited*, vol. 65, no. 3 (May 2002), 391.
- 6 Robert C. Batchelder, *The Irreversible Decision, 1939–1950* (New York: Macmillan, 1961); Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Pierre-Etienne Bourneuf, *Bombarder l’Allemagne: L’offensive alliée sur les villes pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 2014); Conrad C. Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in World War II: Bombs, Cities, Civilians, and Oil* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2016); A.C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan* (New York: Walker, 2006); Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing* (London: Granta Books, 2001); Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1985); W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York: Modern Library, 2004); Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young, *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth Century History* (New York: New Press, 2009). For a study of the civilian consequences of the war, close in spirit to this one, although focusing mainly on countries other than Italy, see William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: Free Press, 2008).
- 7 For an excellent overview of the war, see Atkinson, *Day of Battle*. For traditional military analyses, see Andrew J. Brookes, *Air War over Italy* (Sittingbourne, UK: Ian Allan Publishing, 2000); Robert S. Ehlers, Jr., *The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015); David Hapgood and David Richardson, *Monte Cassino: The Story of the Most Controversial Battle of World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002); Maurice G. Lihou, *Out of the Italian Night: Wellington Bomber Operations 1944–45* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Books, 2008); F.M. Sallagar, *Operation “Strangle” (Italy, Spring 1944): A Case Study of Tactical Air Interdiction*, US Air Force Project Rand Report R-851-PR, February 1972. For more recent studies that incorporate the consequences for civilians, see Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp, and Richard Overy, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe 1940–1945* (London: Continuum, 2011); Claudia Baldoli and Andrew Knapp, *Forgotten Blitzes: France and Italy under Allied Air Attack, 1940–1945* (London: Continuum, 2012); Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Penguin, 2014).
- 8 Overy, *Bombing War*, 1573–1574 (Apple ebook version).
- 9 The most comprehensive overall study is Gioannini and Massobrio, *Bombardate l’Italia*, which also provides an extensive bibliography, including studies grouped by 58 cities

- whose bombing was documented. This note offers some representative work, including some of the main city studies, and adds several towns and sources not listed in Gioannini and Massobrio. The most complete list of bombings of Italian cities and towns of which I am aware was compiled by Giovanni Lafirenze for his website: <http://biografiadiunabomba.anvce.it/seconda-guerra-mondiale/> (hereafter, Lafirenze, Bombing list). For general overviews of the bombing of Italy: Giorgio Bonacina, *Obiettivo: Italia. I bombardamenti aerei delle città italiane dal 1940 al 1945* (Milan: Mursia, 1970); Claudia Baldoli, "I bombardamenti sull'Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale: Strategia anglo-americana e propaganda rivolta alla popolazione civile," *Deportati, esuli, profughe*, n. 13–14 (2010); Paolo Ferrari, "Un'arma versatile: I bombardamenti strategici angloamericani e l'industria italiana," in Paolo Ferrari, *L'aeronautica italiana. Una storia del Novecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004); Marco Patricelli, *L'Italia sotto le bombe: Guerra aerea e vita civile, 1940–1945* (Rome: Laterza, 2007); Achille Rastelli, "Le operazioni aeree angloamericane in Italia," in Paolo Ferrari, *L'aeronautica italiana. Una storia del Novecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004). On Alba: Oscar Pressenda, *Diario albese 1944–1945* (Boves: Araba Fenice, 2014). On Alessandria: Renzo Penna, "Le vittime dimenticate dei bombardamenti alleati," <http://www.labour.it/le-vittime-dimenticate-dei-bombardamenti-alleati/>. On Aversa: Salvatore De Chiara, *Aversa sotto le bombe* (Aversa: Associazione Gioventù Aversana, 2013). On Bologna: Gastone Mazzanti, *Obiettivo Bologna "Open the doors: bombs away" Dagli archivi segreti angloamericani i bombardamenti della Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Bologna: Costa Editore, 2001); "Bombardamenti su Bologna," <http://bombofobologna.blogspot.com>. On Cassino: Faustino Avagliano, ed., *Il bombardamento di Montecassino: Diario di guerra di E. Grossetti e M. Matronola con altre testimonianze e documenti* (Monte Cassino: Pubblicazioni Cassinesi, 2011); Antonio Grazio Ferraro, *Cassino: dalla distruzione della guerra alla rinascita nella pace* (Cassino: Francesco Ciolfi editore, 2007); On Cuneo: Sergio Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo 1943–1945: Attacchi dal cielo. Le missioni segrete della Special Force Number One* (Boves: Araba Fenice, 2016). On Genoa: Carlo Brizzolari, *Genova nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Genova: Valenti, 1982); On Isernia: Giuseppe Angelone, "Bombs on Target. Isernia, 1943," in Giovanni Cerchia, ed., *Il Molise e la guerra totale* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2011); On Macerata: <https://bombardamentomc3aprile44.altervista.org>. On Mantua: Giada Bologni and Giorgio Casamatti, *Bombe su Mantova: La città e la provincia durante i bombardamenti (1943–1945)* (Parma: Monte Università di Parma, 2009); On Milan: Camilla Cederna, Martina Lombardi, and Marilena Somaré, *Milano in guerra* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1979); Rosa Auletta Marrucci, *Bombe sulla città. Milano in guerra 1942–1944* (Milan: Skira, 2004); Achille Rastelli, *Bombe sulla città: Gli attacchi alleati: le vittime civili a Milano* (Milan: Mursia, 2000). On Naples: Gabriella Gribaudo, *Guerra totale: tra bombe alleate e violenze naziste. Napoli e il fronte meridionale 1940–1944* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2005); On Rome and the Vatican: Cesare De Simone, *Venti angeli sotto Roma: I bombardamenti aerei sulla città eterna (il 19 luglio e il 13 agosto 1943)* (Turin: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2007); Corrado Di Pompeo, *Più della fame e più dei bombardamenti. Diario dell'occupazione di Roma* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010); Umberto Gentiloni Silveri and Maddalena Carli, *Bombardare Roma: Gli Alleati e la "Città aperta" (1940–1944)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007); Ugo Mancini, *Guerra nelle terre del papa: I bombardamenti alleati tra Roma e Montecassino attraversando i Castelli Romani* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011); On San Pietro Infine: Angelo Pellegrino and Maurizio Zambardi, eds. *San Pietro Infine: L'avanzata delle truppe alleate verso Roma da San Pietro Infine a Porta San Paolo* (Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, 2006). On Turin: Pier Luigi Bassignana, *Torino sotto le bombe: Nei rapporti inediti dell'aviazione alleata* (Turin: Edizioni del Capricorno, 2008).
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- 24 Cable of 18 November 1942, quoted in “Air Phase of the Italian Campaign to 1 January 1944,” AAFRH-15, Army Air Force Historical Office, Headquarters Army Air Forces, June 1946, 2–3, in Philip A. Smith, *Bombing to Surrender: The Contribution of Airpower to the Collapse of Italy, 1943* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1998), 7, emphasis added.
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- 30 US Library of Congress, George S. Patton Papers: Diaries, 1910–1945; Annotated transcripts; 1943–1945; 20 April 1943, 2, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss35634027/>
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- 42 Letter of 12 October 1943 from Alexander Suer, in Isaac E. Rontch, ed., *Jewish Youth at War: Letters from American Soldiers* (New York: Marsten Press, 1945), 214–215.

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- 52 Martha Gellhorn, “The Gothic Line,” September 1944, reprinted in her *The Face of War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988), 137.
- 53 “Italy, Mine Ban Policy,” *Land Mine and Cluster Munition Monitor*, <http://archives.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/1999/italy.html#fnB3026>. The topic of landmines figures, for example, in the episode “L’estate torbida” of the prize-winning TV miniseries, *Il commissario De Luca* from 2008.
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- 58 *Battle of the Brenner*, report compiled by the 57th Bombardment Wing of the US Twelfth Air Force, <https://doczz.net/doc/8422959/february-1945---57th-bomb-wing>. For an informative discussion of the attacks against the Brenner Pass from the perspective of the air crews, see Thomas McKelvey Cleaver, *The Bridgebusters: The True Story of the Catch-22 Bomb Wing* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2016).
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2 Diplomacy

On the evening of 22 December 1939 President Franklin Roosevelt telephoned Myron Taylor, a retired business magnate and graduate of Cornell Law School, to offer him a position as the President's Personal Representative to the Pope.¹ The role of "personal representative" of the President was familiar to Taylor, who had performed it as a member of the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees, through which he came to know various Vatican officials. In fact Taylor had met Eugenio Pacelli, who in 1936, while serving as the Vatican's Secretary of State, was a guest in Taylor's home in New York. Three years later, on 2 March 1939, Cardinal Pacelli was elected Pope Pius XII. Among the Pope's primary goals in relations with the United States was to prevent Allied air attacks against Italy and, in particular, to spare Rome from aerial bombardment. Although Taylor seemed well suited to the task of convincing Roosevelt to spare Rome—a goal the President's representative personally favored—his mission cannot be judged a success. As we saw in the previous chapter, US and British air forces bombed Italy, including its capital, throughout the war, with a cumulative death toll of over 60,000 civilians, two-thirds of whom were killed after the Armistice of 8 September 1943, when Italy withdrew from the war.²

Despite the failure of Taylor's mission—and of the Vatican's attempt to spare Italy from bombing—the case is a worthy study because of the continuing relevance of the issues it raises. We live in an age when "humanitarian intervention" to prevent abuses of human rights frequently entails military means, primarily bombing, as cases such as Bosnia, Serbia, Libya, and Syria illustrate. What legal and ethical obligations do the interveners owe the civilians? Many of them, after all, are the unwilling subjects of dictatorial regimes that embarked on war in the face of public ambivalence, if not opposition. These are the sorts of questions Myron Taylor faced as he summoned his (limited) knowledge of international law, his own moral impulses, and his familiarity with Italy to offer creative—if ultimately futile—diplomatic and military alternatives to bombing Rome. Although much has changed, especially in the legal understanding and technical possibilities of air warfare, many of Taylor's insights endure, despite the failure of his mission.

This chapter begins with a brief history of the legal status and military doctrine governing aerial bombardment to explain how Rome became a potential target of the Allies within well less than a year after the outbreak of World War II. It then

turns to Myron Taylor's background and personality and the extent to which they suited his diplomatic mission. Formally, Taylor served as intermediary between President Roosevelt and the Pope, but when it came to the issue of protecting Rome from bombing, he unreservedly advocated the Vatican's position. Taylor also attempted to influence the British government to spare Rome. In Italy he confronted hostility from a prominent fascist politician who sought to use him to undermine the Vatican and who ultimately managed to convince Mussolini to bar Taylor's further visits to the country. Taylor embraced the Vatican's efforts to declare Rome a demilitarized "open city," and thereby prevent Allied air raids, and Taylor himself made some original suggestions concerning an alternative military strategy to avoid bombing civilians. Yet the Allies attacked Rome nonetheless, in the largest air raid to date, on 19 July 1943, again on 13 August, and more than 50 times thereafter.

Why Bomb Rome?

Why would the Allies want to bomb Rome anyway? One answer is that in the years preceding World War II, both the United States and Britain had developed doctrines favoring the use of air power against cities—doctrines that an Italian strategist, Giulio Douhet, had pioneered in the 1920s. Moreover, from autumn 1940, Italy and Britain were already attacking each other's cities, and Nazi Germany, Italy's ally, was bombing London in the Blitz. A more appropriate question, then, might be: Why should Rome be spared? The Vatican emphasized Rome's religious status as the seat of the Catholic Church and as a city rich in history and in cultural and architectural treasures. Yet, as two of Italy's leading historians of the bombing of Rome point out, "Rome was not only a spiritual and historical capital, but also the capital of fascist Italy, also the capital of the country that claimed the Mediterranean as *Mare Nostrum*."³ As we saw in the previous chapter, control of the Mediterranean was a particularly compelling reason for Britain's interest in defeating and occupying Italy.

Before World War II, the practice of bombing cities was rare, owing in part to limitations on the relevant technology and in part to legal and ethical restraints on deliberately targeting civilians.⁴ In 1923, the major powers had negotiated a draft treaty at The Hague regulating air warfare by forbidding "aerial bombardment for the purpose of terrorizing the civilian population," damaging private property, or injuring noncombatants, and by restricting attacks to specific military objectives.⁵ By providing an exhaustive list of the military targets considered permissible, the proposed new treaty supplemented the provisions of the 1907 Hague Convention that generally forbade bombing of undefended cities and indicated objects that should be immune from attack.⁶

Although never implemented, the draft treaty reflected the basic understanding of international law's restrictions on air warfare in that era.⁷ At the outbreak of World War II, for example, US President Roosevelt invoked both the legal prohibition of The Hague Convention and the broader moral principle of civilian immunity when he addressed "an urgent appeal to every government, which may be engaged in hostilities, publicly to affirm its determination that its armed forces

shall in no event and in no circumstances undertake the bombardment from the air of civilian populations or of unfortified cities, upon the understanding that the same rules of warfare will be scrupulously observed by all their opponents.”⁸

The question of the “unfortified” nature of a population center became relevant when Taylor and his Vatican interlocutors sought to have Rome declared an “open city” to spare it from Allied bombs.

The prevailing legal and ethical restraints on air attack account for why the German bombing of Guernica in April 1937 on behalf of General Francisco Franco’s side during the Spanish Civil War came as such a shock. At the same time, however, a contrary position on the merits and morality of bombing had developed since the 1920s—even though it defied the legal consensus. It portrayed the threat of destruction of cities as an effective deterrent to war and the deliberate terrorizing of civilians as the most efficient way to end a war quickly if it nevertheless broke out. Among the most famous theorists of air power taking this position was the Italian, General Douhet, whose 1921 treatise, *Il dominio dell’aria* (Command of the Air), was widely translated and read and whose counterparts, Hugh Trenchard in Britain and Billy Mitchell in the United States, espoused similar views.⁹

In some respects, theory was following practice—particularly the European practice of warfare in colonial areas for control of rebellious populations. The first known bombardment from an airplane came in 1911, during Italy’s war with the Ottoman Turks in Libya, when Italian Lieutenant Giulio Gavotti launched his bombs—more like hand grenades—against armed fighters and the villagers among whom they lived.¹⁰ If Gavotti made any distinction between the rebels and the populations that supported them, it soon began to blur in the subsequent practice of other states. Consider the British example. During the period 1919–1922 Winston Churchill served as Britain’s Secretary of State for War, Secretary of State for Air, and Secretary of State for the Colonies, and was tasked with enforcing order among people who resisted British rule. One of the tools he advocated was aerial bombardment of tribal areas by poison gas, particularly in Iraq, but also in India and Afghanistan—even when his advisers warned him that gas attacks could “kill children and sickly persons.” “I am strongly in favour of using poison gas against uncivilised tribes,” wrote Churchill to Trenchard, chief of the Air Staff. In the event, the British used aerial bombardment against many villages in Kurdistan and gas against Iraqi rebels (although not delivered by air) with, in Churchill’s words, “excellent moral effect,” by which he meant effect on *morale*.¹¹ As we saw in Chapter One, bombing to undermine the morale of civilians in a belligerent country became a key feature of Churchill’s strategy during World War II, and he enjoyed some success in convincing his US ally to adopt his view.

Yet it was the Italians, following Douhet’s logic, who were among the first to employ terror bombing against a European city, when Italian air forces joined the Germans in destroying Guernica. Less than a year later Mussolini ordered an attack against Barcelona, clearly intending to terrorize civilians:

The bombing of Barcelona from 16 to 18 March 1938 followed Mussolini’s direct order from Rome to bomb “the demographic centre” of the city. The

future chief of staff of the Italian Air Force, General Francesco Pricolo, wrote in 1938 that “the effective arm of the air fleet is terror.” Like Douhet, Pricolo was attracted to the “decisive power” of an air force to secure victory.¹²

Although the attack against Guernica is better known, owing to Pablo Picasso’s powerful depiction, the Italian raid on Barcelona was designed to produce comparable effects—the deliberate killing of hundreds of civilians.

When Britain entered the war in response to the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, the government and populace expected an immediate German air offensive against London. After all, the Nazi onslaught included air attacks against Warsaw, and the influential interwar air theorists had always advocated an early knock-out blow against civilians at the onset of a war. The Germans instead focused on tactical use of aircraft in France in support of the *Wehrmacht* as it drove the British and French troops from Dunkirk in May and June 1940. German military successes finally convinced a wavering Mussolini—whose own people were wary of the Germans and hopeful of avoiding the war—to issue Italy’s declaration of war against France and Britain on 10 June 1940. That very day, Cardinal Luigi Maglione, the Vatican’s Secretary of State, contacted British representatives in Rome, and the next day the French ambassador there, to seek assurances that neither countries’ air forces would bomb the Eternal City. The French immediately promised not to bomb Rome. The British, however, according to William Godfrey, the apostolic delegate in London, claimed no intention to bomb Vatican City, but “for the city of Rome, on the contrary, it reserved full latitude, according to the manner in which the Italian government for its part observed the laws of war.”¹³ In fact, British decisions about what to bomb in Italy had little to do with Italian compliance with the laws of war.

The British bombing campaign began with air raids from bases in Britain and southern France against targets in Turin over the night of 11–12 June, Genoa over 15–16 June, and Milan over 16–17 June.¹⁴ Particularly damaging from a military standpoint were British attacks against Italian air resources, launched within hours of Italy’s declaration of war.¹⁵ In August 1940, the *Luftwaffe* initiated its own air attacks during what became known as the Battle of Britain. Mussolini was eager to have the Italian air forces join in, although their participation was more a matter of symbolism than military effectiveness. As Overy described, “between October 1940 and January 1941, a handful of Italian fighter and bomber squadrons flew a number of desultory raids from Belgian bases, dropping 54 tonnes of bombs on East Anglian ports.”¹⁶ No more than 170 Italian planes participated, some five percent of the Axis total, and they never made it to London, despite Mussolini and Churchill’s claims to the contrary.¹⁷

On the night of 12 June 1940, Rome experienced its first air-raid alarms, with propaganda leaflets rather than bombs dropped from British planes. As Iris Origo described in her diary, “the noise deafening, as the anti-aircraft fire was unceasing, causing the only damage by their own shells, which fell all over the city. Everyone’s nerves considerably shaken and the station packed with people leaving.”¹⁸ The British subsequently carried out a “leaflet war” as they tried to foster an uprising in Malta, where important air bases were under Italian control, and offered citizens in southern

Italian cities a choice: “Mussolini or bombs?”¹⁹ Britain’s attempts to dissuade Italy from further military action proved unsuccessful, as Mussolini deliberately escalated the confrontation and challenged British interests by sending the Italian Army to invade Egypt in September and Greece in October. The Royal Air Force began bombing the ports of Naples and Taranto. On 6 November, British Air Marshal Philip Joubert declared that the British air forces “certainly shall attack Rome as and when it suits us.”²⁰ A more explicit threat came in April 1941, when the British government threatened a “systematic bombing” of Rome if the Axis forces bombed Cairo or Athens.²¹ The Royal Air Force repeated the threat with a new leaflet dropped on the Italian capital under the headline “ROME IS IN DANGER.”²²

On 24 August 1941, a BBC broadcast monitored by the Vatican conveyed the views of a British air marshal that “Bomber Command held no false sentiment about the bombing of Rome.”²³ Three days later Monsignor Domenico Tardini, a Vatican representative, sought clarification from Francis D’Arcy Godolphin Osborne, the British envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the Holy See. He was not happy with what he heard. D’Arcy Osborne asserted that “Rome could always be bombed for strategic reasons” because of its military objectives, such as the train station and airfields. As Tardini reported, D’Arcy Osborne claimed to be “astonished that these targets hadn’t already been attacked.”²⁴

Convinced he had no chance of influencing British official views directly, in September 1941 the Pope sought to engage the United States—still two months away from joining the war in the wake of the Pearl Harbor attack—in the effort to preserve Rome from aerial destruction. He took advantage of the first visit to the Vatican of President Roosevelt’s personal representative, Myron Taylor, on 10 September.

Taylor as Diplomat

Myron Taylor was not a typical diplomat. After graduating from Cornell with a law degree in 1894, he practiced for five years in his hometown of Lyons, New York, before moving to Wall Street. He soon began to pursue business instead of law. He took an interest in the textile industry and quickly made a substantial fortune producing mail pouches for the US postal service—he also invented the clear plastic return-address windows on envelopes. By the mid-1920s he was pondering early retirement with his wife Anabel to their villa in Tuscany. Instead, bankers J.P. Morgan, Jr. and George F. Baker persuaded Taylor to join the board of United States Steel. There, as chair of the finance committee, he managed to eliminate much of the company’s \$400 million debt, just in time for the onset of the Great Depression. Later, as chief executive officer, he implemented an innovative share-the-work program that succeeded in maintaining the workforce of US Steel by continuing to pay workers their regular hourly wages but reducing their hours as the firm operated at only 17 percent of capacity during the worst period of the economic crisis. Initially unsympathetic to organized labor, Taylor made headlines when he met with John L. Lewis of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1937 and agreed to let the union represent workers at US Steel—the first major US corporation to do so. Although never an ardent New Dealer, Taylor was a registered Democrat and had run unsuccessfully for elected office on

a couple of occasions.²⁵ His negotiating skills and foreign travel experiences made him a suitable choice as the President's personal representative.

Certain personal attributes hindered Taylor's work as a diplomat, whereas others helped. He was not always in good health, for example, and his illness contributed to another limitation: how much time he could spend in Italy. His longest stay was his first, from 27 February to 22 August 1940, followed by six subsequent shorter visits, some as brief as a week or two. The momentous period following Italy's entry into the war in June 1940 Taylor spent in a Rome medical clinic, recovering from his second gallstones operation in a year. A visit in September 1942, nine months after Italy declared war against the United States in the wake of the Pearl Harbor attacks, preceded a period of intense bombing of Italy's northern industrial cities. The Italian government subsequently barred Taylor from visiting Italy. He was unable to return until 21 June 1944.²⁶ Taylor carried out much of his diplomatic work from the Saranac Lake resort in the Adirondacks, the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, DC, and a home in Palm Beach, Florida.

Taylor's religion was an advantage. Born into a Quaker family, Taylor became an Episcopalian, like the President.²⁷ Given the controversy his appointment occasioned, that was probably a good thing. Had Taylor been Roman Catholic, opposition would have been intense. As *Time* magazine recounted in June 1940, Taylor's appointment was already prompting criticism from "Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists" who viewed official representation of the United States to the leader of a (rival) religion as an encroachment on the separation of church and state.²⁸

Taylor's knowledge of Italy was not extensive, but, in his words, he "had frequently spent brief periods of time there," especially in Fiesole, near Florence, where he owned a residence, the Villa Schifanoia.²⁹ Fortunately Taylor the diplomat received considerable assistance from an experienced career Foreign Service officer, Harold H. Tittmann, Jr. Posted to the US embassy in Rome in 1925, Tittmann remained for the next 11 years and became a prominent expert on fascist Italy. Although appointed Consul General in Geneva, Switzerland in August 1939, weeks before the outbreak of war in Europe, Tittmann did double duty starting in February 1940, as part-time personal assistant to Taylor in Rome—his *cicerone* (guide), as he told his mother when he received the assignment. At the end of that year, the State Department transferred Tittmann to Rome full time, first as Counselor at the embassy and then to join Taylor's mission as chargé d'affaires in Vatican City, where he and his family spent the next two and a half years.³⁰ Tittmann worked closely with British envoy D'Arcy Osborne who had been stationed at the Holy See since 1936. When Italy declared war on Britain in June 1940, D'Arcy Osborne relocated from his lodgings in Rome to Vatican City for the duration of the conflict. When in residence at the Vatican, and in good health, Myron Taylor "was an indefatigable worker," in Tittmann's words. He would wake at 5 am and work for three hours before breakfast, then "meet a constant stream of visitors, with spurts of dictating in between." The pace "left us exhausted," reported Tittmann, "but he continued fresh as a daisy."³¹

One further advantage Taylor enjoyed was his relationship to the President. As Tittmann described, "Taylor would constantly emphasize the unusual and unofficial

aspects of his position, letting it be known that all his reports were addressed directly to the President outside official government channels.³² This was not technically correct, as Taylor usually copied his memoranda and letters to Secretary of State Cordell Hull or Undersecretary Sumner Welles, with whom he also corresponded bilaterally and, when in Italy, he was obliged to communicate via the embassy. Taylor was on good terms with the Vatican's representative (known as the apostolic delegate) in the United States, Archbishop Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, and with Cardinal Luigi Maglione, the Vatican's Secretary of State, to whom Cicognani reported. Roosevelt himself had met Eugenio Pacelli during the same visit in 1936 when Taylor hosted him at his home. Pacelli dined with Roosevelt at Hyde Park, and thereafter the President often referred to him as "his old and good friend," even after Pacelli had become Pope—a rather unusual practice in the history of Vatican diplomacy.³³ In any event, personal circumstances seemed auspicious for the sort of back-channel relationship Roosevelt favored.

Yet if successful diplomacy is defined by its results, Taylor failed as a diplomat, both in his previous mission to deal with refugees and as envoy to the Pope. That harsh judgment must, however, be qualified by acknowledging the nearly impossible tasks Taylor was assigned—notably, dealing with the consequences of Nazi Germany's Nuremberg laws and the persecution of the country's Jews. At the suggestion of Sumner Welles, Roosevelt had called for an international conference to persuade countries to accept Jewish refugees from Germany. As FDR's personal representative to and chair of the Évian Conference in France in July 1938, Taylor failed to convince any of the 32 countries participating (except the Dominican Republic) to accept refugees. He did, however, manage to persuade the other delegates to establish an International Committee on Refugees, which over the next couple of years arranged for a few more countries—the United States, Britain, and Costa Rica—to take some tens of thousands of Jews, a fraction of those in need. Lack of political will on the part of recipient countries was reflected, as one account described, in a "failure to underwrite the cost of the emigration (FDR had been offhandedly confident that 'the thousand richest Jews in the United States' would pay for the entire process)." As Welles himself acknowledged, "notwithstanding the tireless work" of Taylor, "the final results amounted to little more than zero."³⁴

Taylor's assigned tasks as Roosevelt's representative to the Pope were equally daunting. Among them were to:

- urge the Pope to use his influence to dissuade Mussolini from joining the war with Nazi Germany and remain neutral instead;
- request the Pope's endorsement of US military aid to the Soviet Union following the German invasion of June 1941, despite his predecessor's 1937 encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris* which "expressly forbade Catholics from collaboration of any kind with communism" and could stimulate opposition from US Catholics to FDR's policies³⁵;
- persuade the Pope to denounce Nazi persecution of the Jews;
- convince the Pope that the Allies' demand for unconditional surrender did not contradict the Vatican's insistence on a peace of "justice and charity" which might lead the Pope to support a negotiated settlement.³⁶

To a considerable degree, Taylor's failures were less his personal responsibility than a reflection of flaws in Roosevelt's approach. Taylor's reputation was tarnished by Roosevelt's unsuccessful efforts to use him to enlist the Pope's aid in convincing Mussolini not to join Hitler's war in the wake of the invasion of Poland. Roosevelt had issued seven appeals to Mussolini, in "parallel action" (Taylor's words) with the Pope's efforts to convince *il Duce* to maintain Italy's neutrality. Three were delivered in May 1940 alone. Mussolini's attitude should have been clear by then, as he had refused even to see the US ambassador, William Phillips.³⁷ The latter's efforts to engage the king, including by personally delivering and reading a letter from Roosevelt to Victor Emmanuel III at his fishing lodge in Piedmont, bore no fruit. "You must remember, Ambassador," the king told Phillips, "I'm a constitutional monarch, like the Kings of England and Belgium. I must refer everything to my government."³⁸ Later, in 1942, once the United States found itself at war with Italy, Taylor was assigned yet another impossible task: to try to arrange for Italy to negotiate a separate peace by working through the Vatican with Princess Marie-José, the king's daughter-in-law.³⁹

Roosevelt's entreaties to the Pope to endorse Allied aid to the Soviet Union posed a challenge for his envoy. They were combined with such unrealistically optimistic claims about the status of religion under Stalin that anyone would have had difficulty presenting them—especially to this particular Pope. Eugenio Pacelli was fiercely anticommunist, dating at least to his days as papal nuncio to Bavaria, when participants in the short-lived revolution of 1919 invaded his residence to requisition his limousine and personally threatened him with a rifle. "Horrified by the invasion" of the communists, as David Kertzer explains, Pacelli "was especially pained by their demand for the car, since he had a soft spot for his Mercedes-Benz, describing it fondly as a 'splendid carriage, with pontifical coat of arms'."⁴⁰

Roosevelt faced some competition from Mussolini's government in seeking to determine the Vatican's position toward the USSR. Italy declared war on 22 June 1941 and began sending Italian troops to the Eastern Front in August. Counting on the Vatican's antipathy for the Soviet Union and its atheism, the Italian ambassador met with Monsignor Tardini in early September, just before the anticipated arrival of Myron Taylor. Bernardo Attolico criticized the Vatican's silence on the war:

Wouldn't it be better to make some words against Bolshevism heard? Especially since the war against Russia will be long and hard and the Italian participation will become increasingly broad, wouldn't it be good for the Italian people, who oppose Bolshevism in their soul, to hear a word from the Holy See?

Tardini responded that the Vatican's hostility to communism went without saying. Making an explicit statement would give the appearance that the Pope was susceptible to pressure from ideologues such as Roberto Farinacci, editor of *Regime Fascista*. "For my part," Tardini reassured the ambassador, "I would be very happy to see communism put out of action. It's the worst enemy of the Church. But not the only one," he added. Nazi Germany also persecuted Catholics. Attolico, who had served as ambassador to both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, summoned

his experience to claim that “in Russia the religious situation is much worse than in Germany, because there worship is forbidden, whereas in Germany worship is free.”⁴¹ Tardini made no promises on the Vatican’s position, but the stage had been set to make Taylor’s mission even more difficult.

Kertzer makes a convincing case that anticommunist animus influenced not only the Vatican’s attitude to the Soviet Union but to Jews as well, owing in part to Eugenio Pacelli’s experience in Germany before he became pope. “In his early days in Munich, he wrote of a ‘grim Russian-Jewish-Revolutionary tyranny’ and during the dozen years he spent in Germany, he made constant mention of the Jewish backgrounds of Socialists and Communists.”⁴² Thus, the Pope was not the ideal recipient of either Roosevelt’s pleas for him to criticize Nazi anti-Semitism nor the President’s incredible claims about the USSR, made in a letter of 3 September 1941 and conveyed by Taylor: “in so far as I am informed, churches in Russia are open” and “there is a real possibility that Russia may as a result of the present conflict recognize freedom of religion” in the country. There was some debate within the State Department at the time as to whether FDR was naïve, tone-deaf, or calculatedly dishonest—so intent was he to forestall Catholic opposition to his policies.⁴³ The Pope’s response of 20 September, which Taylor brought back to Washington, made no mention of Russia or Jews, but expressed appreciation for US efforts to aid “innocent and helpless victims” of the war.⁴⁴ US Catholic bishops eventually came closer to supporting the Government’s policy—making the distinction between the Soviet political authorities and ordinary Russians that they had employed earlier in distinguishing the Nazi regime from the German people—an interpretation of *Divini Redemptoris* that the Vatican reluctantly accepted.⁴⁵

Sparing the Eternal City

The Pope’s main concern was the sanctity of Rome. In a meeting with Taylor on 10 September 1941, Pius XII expressed that concern in the form of a threat. As the memorandum of the conversation describes, the Pope repeated his message conveyed previously to the British and US representatives D’Arcy Osborne and Tittmann, respectively, that “if the Vatican City State or any of the basilicas, churches or pontifical buildings and institutions in Rome” were to be hit, “the Holy See could not remain silent.” The Pope warned that a British attack against Rome (the United States had still not entered the war) could “modify or disturb” the “cordial relations existing between the Holy See and England.”⁴⁶ A note at the bottom of the memo indicates that Taylor “presented this subject” to Churchill at Chequers on 28 September and to British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden on 29 September. Churchill expressed his view the very next day in a report to the House of Commons. He noted that the British had not yet bombed Rome, even though the Axis powers had attacked military outposts on the outskirts of Cairo. He further asserted that

of course we have as much right to bomb Rome as the Italians had to bomb London last year when they thought we were going to collapse, and we should not hesitate to bomb Rome to the best of our ability and as heavily as possible if the course of the war should render such action convenient and helpful.⁴⁷

Even though the Italians had not actually succeeded in bombing *London*, British officials regularly invoked Italian air attacks against England in response to such pleas from the Vatican to spare Rome. In autumn 1940, for example, the Pope had requested that the Portuguese government intercede with British authorities on behalf of the Vatican, and he issued scarcely veiled threats to mobilize criticism among Roman Catholics worldwide if Rome were bombed. The British Foreign Office responded—not for the last time—by accusing the Pope of hypocrisy, as he had remained silent when the *Luftwaffe* rained destruction down on St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and Canterbury Cathedral, among other religious buildings.⁴⁸ Thus it was not surprising that Churchill would reject pleas to spare Rome. That he would do so publicly within two days of Taylor's entreaties highlights the envoy's limited influence.

Taylor returned to Washington, briefed the President on his trip and gave him a copy of the Pope's memorandum. On 5 October 1941 Taylor drafted a memo of his own views "on indiscriminate bombing" that he handed to the President when they met again in November. Reflecting Taylor's unusual status as a friend of the President and his personal representative, the memo conveys a forthright tone atypical of most diplomatic communications. It also forms the basis for a number of proposals Taylor would put forward over the next two years in his effort to spare Rome from destruction—and constitutes *prima facie* evidence of the falsity of a propaganda stunt that Mussolini's allies directed against him the following year. Thus it is worth quoting in full:

The bombing of residential and commercial sections of cities and towns is a horrible business. It reaches in general no military objectives. It is quite inaccurate, taking toll of the innocent, the afflicted, the young and the helpless. It wantonly destroys property, the savings of the hard-working and the provident. It spares neither hospitals, orphanages or churches. It heightens in some countries like England the determination to endure and to repay in kind.

There is only one conceivable form of horror yet unleashed in this war which spreads over Europe and Asia, and that is, gas in any of its hideous forms. The masses of the peoples of all countries, regardless of nationality or race, pray that this, the vilest of weapons, will be withheld from use. He who sinks so low, even in the face of defeat, as to order its use will bear the burden of eternal damnation.⁴⁹

Three elements of Taylor's statement are noteworthy. First, its religious imagery—with the emphasis on suffering of innocents, the sanctity of churches, and punishment of sinners in the afterlife—hints at a source of Taylor's views on bombing in the Christian tradition of Just War. Second is his concern for protection of property, especially property acquired as a result of hard work and savings, as in his own path to material success through business and finance. Third, and most striking, is how much Taylor's statement is at variance with the views of the leader of the only country then carrying out bombing against Italy: Winston Churchill. Even leaving

aside Churchill's enthusiastic deployment of poison gas in British colonies in previous years, the Prime Minister's views on the effects of bombing cities with conventional explosives disagreed with Taylor on both military effectiveness and the impact on the Italian population.

In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Italy had joined Japan in declaring war against the United States. Taylor's position as the President's representative became more complicated, as the only place he was allowed to stay in Italy was on the premises of the Vatican. He undertook a trip there via Lisbon in September 1942 and was met at the airport by Vatican representatives, including a US priest who worked for the Secretariat of State. But the Italian government would not permit Harold Tittmann to leave the Vatican premises to meet Taylor's plane.⁵⁰ Tittmann later described as "extraordinary that Taylor was permitted by the Italian government to travel to the Vatican, particularly since he did not have formal diplomatic status." Taylor offered to meet with Mussolini or his foreign minister (and son-in-law) Galeazzo Ciano to express his gratitude personally, "a surprising display of naiveté on his part," in Tittmann's view, "unless he had in mind some Machiavellian ulterior motive."⁵¹ Naïve is probably the right assessment, given what followed his departure from Rome.



Figure 2.1 Myron Taylor at the Vatican.

Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

Taylor's September 1942 meetings with the Pope mirrored those of the year before when it came to discussing the bombing of Rome, even to the point of Taylor's returning via London to meet with Churchill again. The Pope's appeals, as Tittmann, describes, were "undoubtedly motivated by the recent beginning of large-scale night bombing of Italian cities by the RAF"⁵² In a 17 September memorandum to Taylor, the Pope condemned the belligerents for failing to heed his plea

to show some feeling of pity and charity for the sufferings of civilians, for helpless women and children, for the sick and the aged, on whom a rain of terror, fire, destruction and havoc pours down from a guiltless sky.

He requested Taylor to convey his appeal personally to President Roosevelt that if "aerial bombardments must continue to form part of this harrowing war, let them with all possible care be directed only against objects of military value and spare the homes of non-combatants and the treasured shrines of art and religion."⁵³

This time Taylor pushed back a bit. The official Vatican history described the report Taylor prepared and submitted on 27 September:

The American diplomat asked if the Holy See had intervened against aerial bombardment of London, Warsaw, Rotterdam, Belgrade, Coventry, Manila, Pearl Harbor. He added to his note a series of photographs of English churches affected by Luftwaffe bombs. Now that it was the Royal Air Force and its American allies that were in a condition to carry out the harder strikes, the Holy See's intervention could make one believe that it had given in to pressure exerted by the Axis powers on the Vatican in order to limit the use of a weapon whose decisive power they were the first to know.

Despite his criticism, Taylor promised, nevertheless, to raise the Pope's concerns in London and in Washington.⁵⁴

London was his first stop on the return from Rome. Taylor attended a dinner party on 2 October with Prime Minister Churchill, Mrs Churchill, two of their daughters, and the US Ambassador James Gilbert Winant. He reported his view that the Vatican favored the Allied cause in the war and asked Churchill to spare Rome from bombing. The Prime Minister refused. Taylor then requested that the British leader make a public commitment to limit bombing to military targets. Churchill again refused, pointing out that the British practice of night bombing "does not lend itself to accurate bombing of military objectives only" and he had no intention of discontinuing the practice.⁵⁵

Barely a week after Taylor's return to the States, the RAF carried out bombing raids against Naples, Messina, Crotona, Licata, and Palermo.⁵⁶ The Vatican had apparently expected better results from the Pope's meeting with FDR's personal representative. On 28 October Cicognani, the apostolic delegate based in Washington DC, had received a telegram from the Vatican expressing alarm at remarks Anthony Eden, the British foreign minister, had made clarifying that there was no Allied "agreement not to bomb Rome." Taylor, who was staying at the

Mayflower Hotel, received an urgent message from Cicognani, requesting a meeting. On Friday, 30 October Taylor visited Cicognani at the apostolic nunciature on Massachusetts Avenue and received the Pope's request for his intercession with the President to "avoid destruction in the Eternal City." Secretary of State Cordell Hull agreed to Taylor's request to meet that same afternoon, but he proposed that Taylor take up the matter of bombing Rome directly with FDR.⁵⁷ After meeting with the President a few days later, Taylor headed to Florida for the winter.

In the meantime, criticism from the Vatican intensified. In mid-November Cardinal Maglione, Secretary of State, complained in a conversation with D'Arcy Osborne and Tittmann of the vast destruction carried out in Genoa and Milan by recent British bombing raids. The Archbishop of Genoa had reported to the Pope that 30,000 people had been made homeless, more than 20 churches and seminaries damaged, three hospitals hit, and the archbishop's residence destroyed. Milan's civilian neighborhoods and population also suffered from the attacks. Maglione accused the British of making a grave "psychological error" by "not limiting their bombings in Italy to military objectives." He argued, based on his own personal observations, that the people of Naples remained pro-British despite the bombing, "because it was recognized that only military targets were sought out when the British had bombed their city." In Genoa and Milan, "where populated areas containing no military objectives were hit," the Cardinal argued, people now showed a tendency "to place the British, whom they had always believed more humane, in the same class with the Germans." In his telegram reporting the conversation, Tittmann concludes, "my only remark was that the bombing of military objectives, without hitting the closely populated areas as well, might be difficult because of Genoese topography."⁵⁸ We recall, though, from Chapter One, that Foreign Minister Eden had made precisely the calculation that Maglione noted, just a few days later, and decided that "any increase in anti-British feeling" among the Italian population "produced by intensive heavy air bombardments" was outweighed by "the demoralisation and panic" that could contribute to Italy's withdrawal from the war. Thus, he advocated "keeping up and increasing our heavy indiscriminate raids on Italian cities."⁵⁹ In a cable sent to President Roosevelt that same week, Prime Minister Churchill made the British position on bombing Italy clear: "All the industrial centers should be attacked in an intense fashion, every effort being made to render them *uninhabitable* and to *terrorize* and paralise [*sic*] the population."⁶⁰

The official Allied diplomatic responses to the Vatican's concerns did not acknowledge the terroristic goals of the British politicians. Instead, they highlighted the Vatican's seeming double standards. D'Arcy Osborne, for example, seeking to counter the Vatican's criticism, offered a detailed response to Maglione in the form of a memorandum to be "placed in the hands of the Holy Father and other high Vatican officials." It made five points:

- 1 The Italian people should remember that the Duce, as head of their government and consequently their representative as far as the rest of the world is concerned, requested the Nazis' permission to participate in the Luftwaffe attack on London in the autumn of 1940 with the intention of destroying

British morale and defeating the people of Great Britain. The German and Italian air raids on Great Britain were an application of that total war advocated by the Italian general, Douhet, in his book.

- 2 In two and a half years of war the total casualties of the Italian people from bombing are less than those of various British cities or than those of Belgrade, Rotterdam and Warsaw; probably even less than suffered in a single attack on any one of those cities.
- 3 It is regretted that damage to artistic and historic objects as well as the ecclesiastic and civilian property is inevitable but cannot be an objection in itself.
- 4 The censure for bringing the Italian people into the war and for failing to afford better protection from its consequences should not be placed on the British people but on the Italian government. To distinguish between the Fascist government, which deliberately and unprovoked declared war on Great Britain, and the Italian people, who must suffer for it, is not possible.
- 5 In using the formidable weapon of bombing the British object is to weaken the enemy's ability to continue the war by destroying ports and communications, war industries and military concentrations and establishments.⁶¹

It is not clear how genuinely interested Maglione was in understanding the British position or how much he accepted the implicit charge of hypocrisy lodged against the Vatican for its longstanding support of Mussolini's government. His motives—in addition to the humanitarian ones of sparing civilian lives—were likely influenced by the increasingly delicate relations between the Vatican and the Fascist state, as the latter became increasingly vulnerable to Allied air attacks. As Kertzer has effectively documented, the Italian Catholic Church had heretofore been generally supportive of Mussolini's foreign policy. The Vatican was grateful to Mussolini for having negotiated the 1929 Concordat granting the Church a prominent formal role in Italian society in return for acquiescence in dismantling any political rivals to fascism, including from Catholic parties, cultural groups, and even the Boy Scouts.⁶²

The person who negotiated the Concordat in February 1929 on behalf of the Holy See was Francesco Pacelli, a leading Vatican lawyer and elder brother of Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli. The Pope appointed Eugenio his secretary of state in December of that same year. Cardinal Bonaventura Cerretti, an admirer of Western democracies, whom the Pope had passed over for the position in favor of Pacelli, bitterly described Eugenio and his brother Francesco as “servants and slaves of Fascism, accomplices bought by Mussolini.”⁶³ When Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935, Pope Pius XI “felt powerless in the face of the pro-war zealotry of his own Italian clergy.” It was Eugenio Pacelli, as secretary of state, who sought to justify the action to foreign leaders. “Italy's Catholic clergy did all they could to whip up popular enthusiasm for the war.”⁶⁴ When Italy declared war on France and Britain and invaded Egypt and Palestine, 30 Italian bishops sent Mussolini a telegram, “urging him to crown ‘the unfailling victory of our Army’ by planting the Italian flag over Jerusalem.”⁶⁵

By fall of 1942, however, enthusiasm for Mussolini's war aims waned, even at the Vatican, and the Italian government became increasingly suspicious of the

Pope's contacts with the Allies, and especially Roosevelt's personal representative Myron Taylor. Hostility of the Fascist government and press toward the United States had intensified in the wake of the Allied landings in North Africa starting on 8 November 1942 and the relentless bombing throughout the month of cities in Sicily, Sardinia, and southern Italy, where Naples and Brindisi were particularly badly damaged, with high civilian casualties.⁶⁶ On 15 November, Roberto Farinacci, the fascist boss of Cremona, published an article in his *Regime Fascista* criticizing Taylor and the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*. Farinacci, in Kertzer's words, had long "served the role of Fascist stick in dealing with the Church," and in this case Taylor suffered "collateral damage" in a blow aimed at the Vatican.⁶⁷ In a passage that mixes factual and fake news, Farinacci wrote:

Since it is certain that Myron Taylor was a guest at the Vatican and that upon his return to Washington he stated he had confirmation that it would take only a few bombings to undermine the structure and resistance of the Italian people, we believe we have the right to ask with whom representatives of the Jew Roosevelt talked inside the walls.⁶⁸

The implication was that some combination of Catholic officials, Jewish refugees in the Vatican, or foreign representatives meeting there had conveyed to Taylor sensitive information about popular opinion among Italians under bombardment. That the Vatican should serve as a meeting point for exchange of such intelligence would have constituted a violation of its neutral status, and, in Farinacci's view, *L'Osservatore Romano* should have denounced Taylor. Given what we know of Taylor's sincere opposition to bombing Rome (or anywhere that would harm civilians), it strains credibility that he would offer Roosevelt a prescription for victory that echoes more the views of Churchill, with whom Taylor debated exactly this point. Tellingly, Farinacci does not dispute the information about the fragile state of the Italian public that Taylor supposedly conveyed to Roosevelt to advocate for further bombing of Italian cities.

The day after publication of the *Regime Fascista* attack, Secretary of State Maglione sought out the two representatives of the Allied powers and told them exactly the opposite of what Farinacci claimed Taylor had reported to Washington: that the bombings of Genoa and Milan were hardening opinion against the British, rather than weakening support for Mussolini. Given the Fascist government's extensive network of informants within the Vatican, Maglione could well have expected his conversation to make its way to Mussolini, with the clear message, "Don't blame me!" In any event, a week later the Vatican published a declaration on the front page of *L'Osservatore Romano* that Farinacci's claim was "absolutely without foundation" and that Taylor "had categorically denied having uttered the words attributed."⁶⁹

Diplomats at the American Legation in Bern who monitored the Italian press argued that "the principal reason" for the Farinacci article was "to furnish a scapegoat to the regime" in order "to sidetrack public anger leveled at the Government because of the recent RAF air raids."⁷⁰ We now know that it was Mussolini himself

who created the fake news about Taylor, perhaps believing it himself. In his diary entry of 25 October, Foreign Minister Ciano reports that Mussolini

was irritated with Taylor and with the Vatican. He attributes the massive bombing of the cities of upper Italy to the discussions with the American messenger. “That fool,” he said, “returned to America to report that the Italians are at their limit and with a few hard blows it will be easy to knock them out.” Well, he found out these things from the Holy See, where information is gathered through the collecting channel of the parish priests.⁷¹

Like Farinacci, Mussolini does not dispute the accuracy of information about the disillusionment and frustration of the Italian public. But he seems to have imagined that Taylor used that information to advocate increasing the pressure on Italy through targeting civilians—the last thing Taylor would favor. Nevertheless, Mussolini instructed Ciano to let the Vatican know “if Myron Taylor tries to return to Italy he will be put in handcuffs.”⁷²

Taylor spent November working with his Vatican interlocutors to clear his name in the wake of Farinacci’s attacks, but also to inform himself about the charges his British counterparts were making about Vatican hypocrisy regarding aerial bombardment. When Taylor had visited Rome in September 1942, D’Arcy Osborne had told him about a list he had presented to the Vatican of Roman Catholic churches and other institutions damaged or destroyed by Axis bombing during the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. Up to mid-1941 some 74 Catholic churches had been destroyed and a further 158 damaged. Taylor had raised this issue with Vatican officials in his note of 27 September and had added some photos of damaged English churches. But he only scratched the surface. On 6 November 1942, the British Ambassador to Washington sent Taylor the complete list of churches, hospitals, schools, convents, and other institutions of all denominations harmed during that period. The document runs 11 pages, single-spaced, listing each building by name and location and degree of damage. The churches alone include 890 totally destroyed and 2,360 damaged.⁷³ Taylor forwarded the document to Archbishop Cicognani on 7 December, but there is no acknowledgment of its receipt in Taylor’s papers or mention of it in the published Vatican compilations of documents related to the war.⁷⁴

At the end of November 1942, Taylor sought to follow up on his meeting with Roosevelt earlier that month only to find out that the outcome had been less satisfactory than he initially believed. On 30 November, Taylor made a telephone call from Palm Beach to Roosevelt’s secretary Grace Tully to dictate a letter to the President summarizing what he had taken away from their discussion “regarding Bombing of Rome and civilian population outside of military and munitions centers.” In Taylor’s reconstruction, the President had “suggested an independent course of action, subject to your discussion with our own military command.” Taylor suggested:

if you could now instruct me to make that policy clear to the Pope, in confidence, it would have far reaching effect and prevent embarrassment, born of continuing uncertainty, would further improve the favorable position we now occupy at the Vatican, with the Italian people,

and with “segments of the Italian government.” Taylor suggested that in Italy “there are many who would welcome a change of government under American protection.” The British, he averred, “will never be in such a favorable position, because even the Italian public are without enthusiasm for them.” Taylor concluded by stressing that “time is most essential” and that “this is the moment for a move that will further cement our position and reinforce our efforts in parallel action with the Pope.”⁷⁵

Taylor here expressed a view diametrically opposed to the prevailing British one on the nature of the Italian public and how to influence it (and, again, the opposite of the view Farinacci had attributed to him). Taylor wanted to spare Italian civilians unnecessary harm, even though their country and his were at war, whereas Churchill and his advisers sought to punish Italians for their support of the Fascist regime and its war. For Taylor, avoiding civilian harm would make Italians friendly to the United States, causing them harm would make them hostile; for Churchill, causing them harm made them hostile to Mussolini and could drive Italy out of the war.

More striking than Taylor’s apparent animus against the British—understandable, perhaps, given the repeated rude rejections of his pleas to Churchill and Eden on behalf of Rome—is his naïve expectation that Roosevelt would be willing to break with a major ally in order to curry favor with the Vatican. Whatever encouraging remarks FDR had conveyed in their early November meeting—and the President did enjoy a reputation for appearing to tell his visitors what they wanted to hear—he lost no time in disabusing Taylor in the clearest terms (in words drafted by the Secretary of State): “I question the advisability of an independent course different from that of our principal associate in the war” and “I cannot give you the instructions you request even though I recognize the importance of the considerations which you set forth.”⁷⁶

Roosevelt’s negative response must have come as a shock to Taylor. The Vatican was undoubtedly also surprised. Without waiting for confirmation that the President shared his understanding of the outcome of their November meeting, Taylor had evidently been conveying his own interpretation to the apostolic delegate Cicognani, who in turn sent a telegram summarizing it to Cardinal Maglione in Rome on 12 December. Cicognani, at least, had told Maglione that Roosevelt had not yet agreed to Taylor’s proposal. Still, he must have been disappointed, to say the least, to find out that Roosevelt was completely unwilling to disavow the British plan to bomb Rome whenever it seemed most expedient, and that Taylor—the President’s trusted friend and envoy—had been unintentionally misleading Vatican officials and getting their hopes up.⁷⁷

By December 1942, Taylor’s mission to secure a commitment from the Allies to spare Rome had failed. Churchill consistently rejected his pleas, and Roosevelt denied any suggestion of acting independently of Britain. Meanwhile the Fascist government in Rome sought to undermine Taylor’s authority and to weaken the Vatican as a neutral interlocutor. Nevertheless, Roosevelt’s envoy persisted. In the face of continued and intensifying pressure from the Pope and his representatives, Taylor sought a new route to save Rome from bombing: removing its military facilities and declaring it an “open city.”

Rome, Open City?

Vatican efforts to prevent an air attack against Rome accelerated as the Allies bombed other Italian cities in the course of the campaign in North Africa and then the invasion of Sicily. Much of the bombing was intended to affect the land battles by achieving air superiority over the Axis forces.⁷⁸ Yet Churchill and his advisers were still committed to the combined objectives of damaging industrial production in Italian cities and undermining the morale of their residents. When the United States took over much of the bombing of southern Italy starting in December 1942, the violence intensified in anticipation of the landing in Sicily.⁷⁹ Vatican officials concomitantly stepped up their pressure on Myron Taylor to intercede with President Roosevelt. Between them they produced a new plan for protecting Rome, one likewise destined, however, for failure.

As Ugo Mancini has pointed out, the papal holdings in and around Rome had become vulnerable to attack already by the end of November 1941, when a German air command established itself at Frascati, a hill town a short distance to the southeast. It included *Luftwaffe* Air Marshal Albert Kesselring and a staff of 200 officers, 1,000 air force personnel, and 100 aircraft. The *Luftwaffe* sent a further 80 officers to nearby Castel Gandolfo, the Pope's summer residence. On Christmas Day 1941 the locals welcomed the German visitors with presents, including flasks of Frascati wine. In early January, a similar welcoming ceremony took place at the Istituto Salesiano di Villa Sora, a papal property. At that point, the Pope's argument for maintaining the inviolability of the papal territory became increasingly implausible. As foreign minister Ciano acknowledged in his diary, after the papal nunzio protested against the military deployments, the German presence at Frascati would hinder the Vatican from its efforts "to prevent the aerial bombardment of Rome."⁸⁰

Nevertheless, the Vatican officials persisted, working through their intermediary, Myron Taylor. On 4 December 1942 Cardinal Maglione instructed the apostolic delegate in Washington to present Taylor a new memorandum expanding on the Vatican's demands to spare Rome. Maglione argued that not only was Vatican City itself the Pope's responsibility but, as Bishop of Rome, Pius XII was responsible for "the entire city," where any international properties of the Church, including colleges, and religious buildings owned by non-Italian nationals, "are extra-territorial, and enjoy the same immunity as Vatican City State of which they are an integral part."⁸¹ The next day the US legation in Switzerland reinforced the impression that Vatican officials were unnerved by reports from London of the imminent bombing of Rome.⁸² The trigger for their concern was evidently the statement issued by Lord Wedgewood to the House of Lords: "whether in view of the fact that Rome is a bottleneck for transport from Germany to South Italy, and Fascist Headquarters, Rome may soon receive the attentions of the Royal Air Force."⁸³

Taylor in the meantime had held discussions with Archbishop Francis Spellman of New York, President Roosevelt, and Secretary Hull on the possibility of demilitarizing Rome so that it would be considered "undefended" and legally immune from attack. On 12 December he reported to Hull "impatience at the Vatican" that nothing had come of the proposal—but not much had happened on the Vatican

side either.⁸⁴ On 15 December, Maglione claimed that two days earlier the Italian government “gave oral but nonetheless official assurance to the Holy See that the Supreme Command and the General Staff of the [Italian] armed forces, together with the Premier, were about to leave Rome.” The British and US representatives were also to have received the information.⁸⁵ On 20 December, the Italian government put the same assurances in writing and the Vatican conveyed the information to the US and British governments. The British interpreted the Italian gestures as conditional on a commitment by the Allies not to bomb, but D’Arcy Osborne sought and received clarification from Maglione that the initiative was unilateral. Nevertheless, the British remained suspicious and assumed that Mussolini’s government had pushed the Vatican to try to get a commitment not to bomb as a quid pro quo for demilitarizing Rome. Maglione insisted that the proposal for demilitarization was a Vatican initiative, consistent with its longstanding efforts to avoid the bombing of the Eternal City.⁸⁶

On 22 December, Taylor produced an unusual document that he labeled, “Memo made by M.C.T. from a written statement by President Roosevelt to Secretary Hull on December 18, 1942.” It reads in full,

The President in his efforts to avoid the bombing of Rome has been seeking to marshall (*sic*) all possible influences. If the City of Rome be not used in any way, shape or manner, by either the Italians or the Germans, for war purposes, it is unlikely that any attack upon Rome will be made. The Vatican should propose that Rome be demilitarized. If that be accomplished there is no reason for us to bomb it.⁸⁷

In fact, unbeknown to Taylor, the US and British governments had been discussing the prospects for a demilitarized Rome for some time, through their respective ambassadors, with Tittmann providing further information from the legation in Switzerland.⁸⁸ The day before Taylor drafted his memorandum, the British ambassador had discussed with Secretary Hull a proposal to issue an ultimatum to Mussolini’s government including several provisions: that “the King of Italy, the head of the Government, the Government officers, Italian High Command and Military Staff must leave Rome,” along with “all German organizations including, military mission, Naval Liaison Staff, airmen, civilian officials, members of German air transport company (Italuft), German staff at Rome air fields,” and that “evacuation will have to be verified by Swiss officials who must be given facilities to see that the undertakings are fully carried out and kept.”⁸⁹

Ultimately, however, the Allies decided against an ultimatum—not least because it would appear to commit them to bomb when they might not otherwise be inclined to do so if the Italians failed to meet the conditions. The British reiterated the position that they had held pretty much from the start regarding the bombing of Rome:

The British Government’s view has all along been that while maintaining our right to bomb Rome at any time we should in fact carefully choose our moment for such action. This, they have always thought if they did it, would

probably be when the collapse of Italian resistance seemed imminent. Even then they might undertake it only if it was felt that the effect would be decisive in breaking Italian morale and resistance.⁹⁰

Rome's fate seemed sealed by early June 1943. On the 11th, Secretary Hull summoned Taylor to his office and reported a conversation with Admiral William D. Leahy, the President's military adviser. According to Leahy,

the British had proposed to bombard military objectives such as the railroad yards and facilities at Rome in order to damage the transportation system, so as to interfere with the passage of troops and supplies to the south...[O]ur general staff had agreed with the British.

Hull suggested that Taylor convey the information in confidence to the papal delegate "and indicate the imminent danger of this without quoting my authority." Taylor did so within the hour.⁹¹

Cicognani responded to Taylor on 25 June with a two-page letter reiterating the Vatican's arguments against bombing Rome, thanking Taylor for his personal commitment to the cause, and making the most explicit, albeit somewhat redundant, threats yet of the Pope's response if the city were bombarded: "the Holy Father will voice his open protest to the world," the bombing would "arouse the resentment of the whole world, and particularly of Catholics," "there will arise not only in Europe and in Latin America but everywhere a troublesome division of spirits, and most certainly a deep seated antagonism."⁹² Three days later Cicognani sent Taylor another letter conveying further threats from Cardinal Maglione of the consequences of bombardment—"an incited or spontaneous uprising of the people" that would make it "difficult if not impossible for the Holy See to guarantee the security of the Vatican itself and of the Allied diplomatic personnel." Maglione acknowledged that the Nazis might bomb the Vatican even as the Allies were determined to spare it, in order to pin blame on their enemies. Yet he was prepared to give the Germans a pass by asserting that "in the calm judgment of posterity the full responsibility would fall on the Allies if they give occasion for such a tragic disaster by bombing any part of the City of Rome."⁹³

Finally, Cicognani conveyed another attempt by Maglione to revive the "open city" proposal, by citing several efforts of the Vatican to convince the Italian government to remove its military commands from Rome. Maglione claimed more success than the situation merited, that Mussolini had "transferred the Supreme Command and the General Staffs of the Army, Navy and Air Forces," and that the German military liaison offices "have either already followed the respective Italian Commands or are about to do so." In any case, the "local garrison, necessary for the protection and security of the civilian population, must remain in the City."⁹⁴

This was far too little and far too late, and Maglione ignored the main concern of Allied military planners—that Rome served as a major transshipment route for German military supplies heading south to bolster the fight against the British and

US armies. The faithful Taylor nevertheless wrote a note, "Dear Mr. President," to offer a suggestion that the Vatican had notably failed to make:

I am wondering if we were to say to the Vatican that if the Holy See would guarantee that all military installations, activities, and personnel were removed from Rome *and the use of the railroad facilities for all military purposes were abandoned*, the City would not be bombed... You might consider this.⁹⁵

Three days later, on 1 July 1943, Taylor forwarded copies of Maglione's communication to both Secretary Hall and President Roosevelt. He then met with Cicognani to inform him that he had done so. According to a summary of the conversation Taylor sent to Hull on 9 July, Cicognani repeated all of the Vatican's threats of the consequences of bombing, adding a few of his own regarding "dis temper in Catholic circles in America, especially among the Irish," and fostering "cohesion among the Axis powers," and anti-Americanism in Italy, where the United States would come to be seen as "blood-thirsty and ruthless" as the British.⁹⁶

Taylor concluded by informing Hull that his "own view is somewhat similar" to the Vatican's. Then he made a significant departure from his role as diplomatic envoy to offer some military advice that he claimed could forestall and improve upon the bombing of Rome:

To put a stop to the industrial production and railroad facilities in Italy, the bombardment of hydraulic power production in the north would be much more effective. As you know the whole country operates on electric power, hydraulically produced, as they have no coal; and second, the Allies can bomb miles and miles of main railroad track along the routes of the west coast of the interior route, Milan and Bologna to Rome, without resorting to the unpredictable psychological reaction of bombing Rome. We also have to consider the question of the Vatican guaranteeing (*sic*) the removal of all military installations in Rome, as indicated in my recent memorandum.⁹⁷

Although seemingly grasping at straws, Taylor offers here an alternative Allied strategy that in retrospect exhibits a considerable degree of military plausibility and a much higher accordance with legal norms than the massive bombing campaign that was conducted instead. Thus, before turning to the decisive evidence of the Taylor mission's failure—the bombing of Rome on 19 July 1943—we devote some attention to Taylor's legal and military advice. As for Rome's status as an "open city," discussions continued among the British, the Americans, the Italians, and the Vatican, even after the first Allied raid, as Maddalena Carli has extensively documented. Allied conditions became more demanding—including requirements such as cessation of "any military or civilian use of the airports in Rome or its immediate surroundings."⁹⁸ In August 1943, as the Allies expected—unrealistically, as it turned out—to take control of Rome soon, they began to have second thoughts about the value of its status as an open city. Once the designation was granted "it would be practically

impossible to remove this status when we would want to use the city, its communications, and its airports” to continue prosecuting the war to the north. The “open city question” became moot once the Allies finally occupied Rome in June 1944.⁹⁹

Taylor on Law, Morality, and Military Strategy

Despite his law degree, the extent of Taylor’s understanding of the international legal issues is not apparent. His transcripts from Cornell Law School indicate that he took a course in international law there during his second year, possibly from Charles Evans Hughes, the future Republican governor of New York State and later chief justice of the US Supreme Court.¹⁰⁰ Hughes himself was not an international legal specialist, but filled in for Herbert Tuttle, who was on sabbatical, to teach a course at Cornell in academic year 1892–1893. As he wrote in his notes for an unfinished autobiography, Hughes failed to persuade the university authorities that he was “too unfamiliar with international law to justify such an assignment,” and undertook extensive self-study in preparation.¹⁰¹ Since Taylor took International Law in winter term 1894, it is not clear whether Hughes or Tuttle was his teacher. In a telegram Hughes sent to be read at the dedication of Myron Taylor Hall at Cornell Law School in October 1932, he does not mention having personally known Taylor, but Taylor considered Hughes a mentor. In 1963, Taylor requested that a new student residence center he donated to the law school be named in Hughes’ honor.¹⁰²

Notwithstanding Taylor’s relative unfamiliarity with international law, including the laws of war, his intuition about aerial bombardment was right. Bombing undefended cities was illegal, so Taylor’s efforts, however futile, to have Rome designated an “open city” was consistent with legal thinking at the time—that is, if virtually nonexistent Italian air defenses make Rome count as “undefended.” The alternative military strategy he boldly offered to Secretary Hull less than two weeks before the first bombing of Rome also conformed better to legal norms than did the practice of bombing facilities in populated areas to undermine civilian morale. Moreover, postwar research on the military effectiveness of the Allied bombing campaign against Italy suggests that Taylor’s proposal “to put a stop to the industrial production and railroad facilities” through “the bombardment of hydraulic power production in the north” could well have worked better than targeting factories and railroad junctures within cities, even though either bombing strategy put civilian lives and property at risk.

What would have been the effect of destroying the hydroelectric power system in Italy? Regarding harm to civilians, if the dams themselves were bombed, the flooding would presumably engulf surrounding areas, including any villages or towns nearby. Italy had in the past experienced the collapse of some of its dams, most recently in the failure of the Pian del Gleno near Bergamo in 1923, with direct fatalities numbering in the hundreds.¹⁰³ A bombing campaign intended to cripple Italy’s electrical grid, if it entailed disabling the dams supplying water for the hydroelectric system, would have cost many lives. Even if the dams themselves were spared—a doubtful prospect, given the proximity of the electrical

generators to the reservoirs and the poor degree of accuracy of aerial bombardment at the time—the toll on civilian lives could have been quite high. Yet it would not likely have reached the tens of thousands who perished in the bombing of Italian cities.

Regarding effectiveness, from the time the first hydroelectric systems were built in the late nineteenth century to supply Milan, Genoa, and Rome, waterpower dominated the production of electricity in Italy, accounting for more than 90 percent of the supply by the late 1930s. It was the main source of electricity until the 1950s, when the United States persuaded Italy to move toward fossil fuels, in part through unwillingness in its economic aid program to help maintain Italian hydroelectric equipment.¹⁰⁴ So a concerted attack against Italy's hydropower system could certainly have rendered great damage to the country's production of electricity, as Taylor had argued.

What would have been the legal status of such attacks? In the late 20th century and after, the deliberate destruction of an enemy country's electrical system—as inflicted by the United States against Iraq in 1991, for example—posed questions of disproportionate harm to civilians, by jeopardizing the provision of clean water, sanitation, and health care, and depriving families of electricity for their homes.¹⁰⁵ In Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022, bombing seemed deliberately intended to create those effects, even if it meant putting nuclear power plants at risk. In Italy at the end of the 1930s, however, domestic use of electricity, mainly hydropower, never accounted for more than five percent of the country's production (in 2011 it was still well less than a quarter), most of which was used for purposes of industry and transportation. In the Apennines and on the Adriatic side of the peninsula, for example, the production of chemicals and iron relied almost exclusively on hydropower.¹⁰⁶ Destruction of the hydro system could have severely damaged industries essential to the production of war materials.

Hydropower was the main source of electricity for running the railroads, and rail transport was a major target of military operations. Because Italy lacked domestic reserves of coal, it tried to transition from steam engines to electric ones much earlier and more persistently than other countries. A spike in the price of coal at the end of World War I provided a major stimulus to the electrification program.¹⁰⁷ In June 1932, the Council of Ministers adopted an ambitious plan to electrify 8,000 kilometers along the country's main lines.¹⁰⁸ As other European countries continued to develop new models of steam engines, Italy concentrated on innovations in electric ones.¹⁰⁹ At the outbreak of World War II, Italy deployed a small force of armored military trains, only three of which—assigned to the Navy—were pulled by steam engines.¹¹⁰

During the war, it was clear to many in the Allied political and military command that disrupting railroad traffic could speed the defeat of Axis forces by hindering reinforcements. Chapter Three recounts the fierce disagreements that erupted between advisers to the US and British commands about how to do so. Noteworthy, however, is that none of the advisers, nor their superiors, appear to have given much attention to Taylor's proposal to attack the source of hydroelectric power for the railroad system. More than a year later, however, in November

1944, the US 57th Bomb Wing, based in Corsica, received orders to destroy electrical transformers supporting the rail system in the northeast of the country, along the line between Sant’Ambrogio and Trento. Evidence suggests that the Germans’ ability to supply their forces diminished to some degree and they were obliged to divert “coal-fired locomotives to the southern front in an attempt to make up the shortage.”¹¹¹ (A strategy of bombing electrical transformers rather than cities might have offered more military effectiveness at less cost to civilians.)

In any event, the most influential political-military leader regarding the bombing of Rome—the President of the United States—failed to heed the proposal Taylor made to Secretary Hull on 9 July 1943. The next day President Roosevelt sent a message to Pope Pius XII, published in the *New York Times*, announcing the landing of Allied troops on Italian soil. He promised “churches and religious institutions will, to the extent that it is within our power, be spared the devastations of war” and that “the neutral status of Vatican City as well as the papal domains throughout Italy will be respected.”¹¹² It was not within Roosevelt’s power to keep those promises, as the world learned nine days later.

“A Blow at Italian Morale”

Richard Tregaskis was among a small group of US war correspondents who learned of the forthcoming bombing of Rome the day before it took place, thanks to a briefing by General Lauris Norstad of the US Army air forces.

“There may be an air attack on Rome very shortly.” He spoke almost casually. An electric silence filled the room. It was broken when Gen. Norstad continued in his meticulous way.

It is very important in this mission that not one of the religious institutions should be damaged. We have selected our crews with the utmost care. When the city is attacked, it will be attacked only by those units which have indicated that they are capable of bombing with great accuracy.

Norstad gave out confidential photographic mosaic maps of Rome.

You will notice that I have marked the Vatican and the other religious monuments with this legend: ‘Must on no account be damaged.’ Here is the St. Paolo Basilica, less than five miles from the San Lorenzo yards. Here is the St. John Lateran. That too must be given a wide berth.¹¹³

What Norstad neglected to mention was another Basilica: San Lorenzo fuori le mura. It was indicated on the Army’s detailed map of Rome (now available online through the US Library of Congress), as adjacent to the Campo Verano Cemetery, in close proximity to the Tiburtino rail station to the north and the San Lorenzo depot to the south, and even closer to buildings marked on the map by the letter F, signaling rail storage facilities of various kinds. The church was just several hundred meters to the west of a building marked F40 “Building-contractor’s yard (unconfirmed)” and roughly the same distance north of the San Lorenzo Goods Depot, with F32 marked as a railway roundhouse and F33 as railway repair shops.¹¹⁴

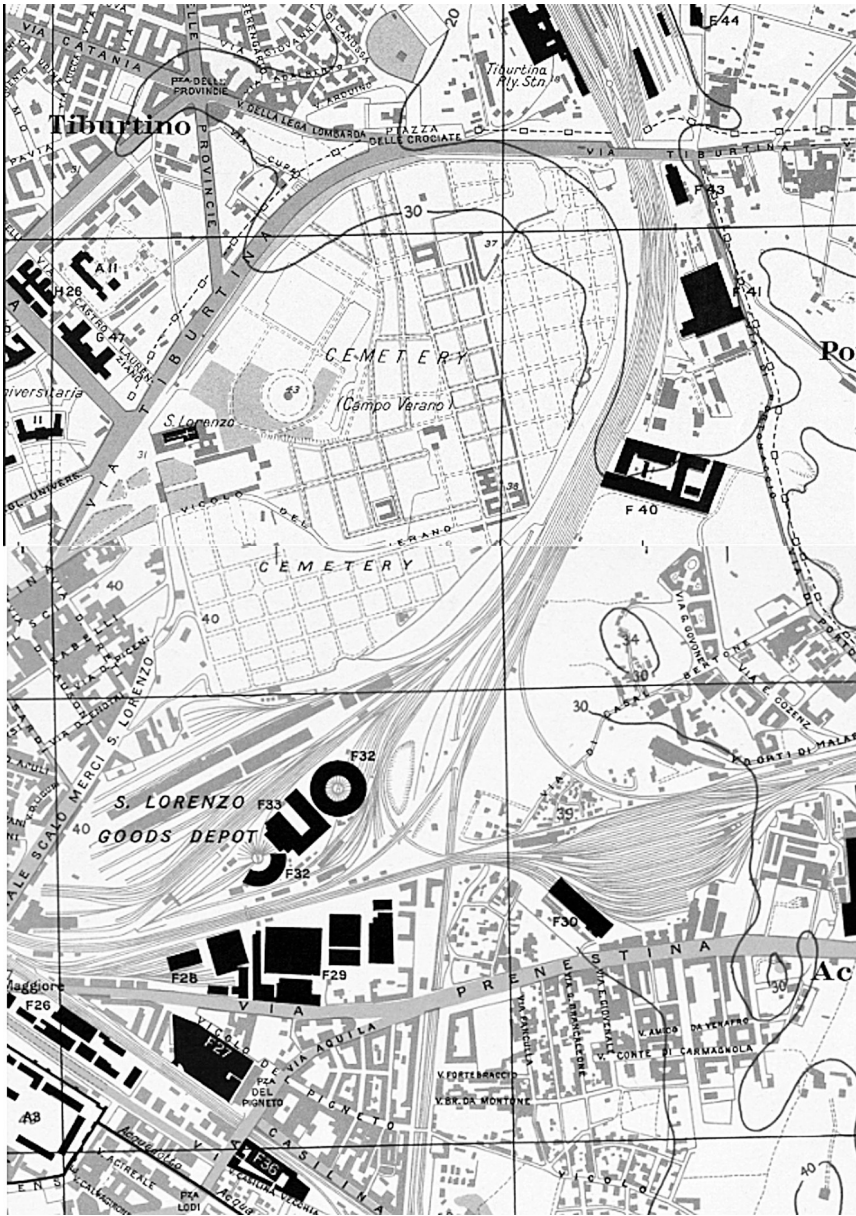


Figure 2.2 US Army map of Rome, 1943. US Library of Congress.

Tregaskis was assigned, along with Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times*, to cover the 304th Bomb Wing of the 15th Air Force. On the morning of 19 July 1943, they listened in as its commander, Colonel Fay R. Upthegrove, instructed his crews, repeating the gist of Norstad's guidance, albeit in an earthier fashion:

This morning we're going to bomb Rome. There is need for great accuracy in this job. I don't want any God-damn individual bombing. If you have to salvo 'em, why, salvo 'em—but get 'em out over the target...If there's any doubt in your mind, don't drop.¹¹⁵

The attack was “the largest single bombing raid in history to date,” as more than 540 aircraft dropped a thousand tons of bombs on four target areas of Rome—the Ciampino and Littorio airfields and the Littorio and San Lorenzo rail marshaling yards.¹¹⁶ According to the newspaper of the US 321st Bombardment Group, returning crews “were quick to reassure that ‘no bombs fell in the area surrounding the Vatican.’” Yet, Axis radio broadcasts, “as expected, were quick to condemn the American air attacks, terming them ‘ruthless and barbarous assaults carried out on a sacred shrine,’” namely the Basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura, the church that Norstad failed to mention in his press briefing.¹¹⁷ In fact, the designers of the raid had not identified the basilica among the major Vatican churches to avoid and had apparently not highlighted it on the crews' maps.¹¹⁸

Tregaskis witnessed the bombing firsthand, flying with Captain Robert F. Elliott and his crew in a B-17 Flying Fortress.

The great mushroom-cloud to the right marked the fires rising murderously from the San Lorenzo marshaling yards. Down there in the midst of the clouds of smoke I could visualize the twisted sidings of the yards and the blown-up buildings of the steel factory and workshops in the area... The planes ahead of ours had passed the target, and their bombs had fallen into the far-spread city. I saw the mushroom-cloud of smoke, where the previous bombs had fallen into San Lorenzo, bubble and regurgitate with hundreds of new bomb explosions...I tried to pick out the Vatican, the St. John Lateran Basilica and the Basilica of St. Paolo. I could spot none of those buildings, but even in the excitement of the moment, I knew that the Tiber lay between the target of the marshaling yards and the Vatican. We were on course...I looked carefully to see whether the bombs had over-ridden their target and might have fallen near the Lateran and St. Paolo basilicas. With my photographic map in one hand and my field glasses in the other, I tried to measure the distance between the yards and the church monuments. It seemed that there was room to spare.¹¹⁹

“I was curious to get the reaction of Capt. Elliott,” wrote the reporter. “I knew that his religious beliefs were Roman Catholic. He did not seem perturbed as he looked back at me and said calmly, ‘It's all right.’”¹²⁰



Figure 2.3 View from a B17 Flying Fortress attacking the San Lorenzo freight yard and surrounding neighborhood, 19 July 1943.

Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

US officials and the press downplayed the civilian harm caused by the bombing. Consistent with Norstad's briefing, the *New York Times* emphasized the extensive training of bombing crews and the care taken so that "religious edifices marked in red on flyer's maps...be avoided at all cost." It mentioned only parenthetically that Vatican radio had reported the Basilica of San Lorenzo as "seriously damaged."¹²¹ *Times* correspondent Herbert Matthews, "embedded" at Allied headquarters in North Africa, sought to cast doubt on the significance of the destruction of the Basilica:

if one bomb out of hundreds did drop there, that is no reflection on the remarkable accuracy of the bombing as a whole. Rome has so many churches in every part of the city that no target could be chosen that did not endanger some church.¹²²

This is precisely the argument that the Pope had made to advocate sparing Rome entirely from bombardment, rather than just being cautious only to avoid Vatican City itself. But Matthews was not worried about the San Lorenzo church: "anyone who has seen it must agree that, from an artistic viewpoint, there is no need to get too sentimental about the damage, which would doubtless be reparable." And, besides, he added, echoing the arguments of British envoy D'Arcy Osborne, the



Figure 2.4 Interior of the Basilica of San Lorenzo after the bombing of 19 July 1943.

De Agostino Picture Library, Getty Images.

Axis forces destroyed many beautiful churches in England. Moreover, Romans are “probably the least religious of all Catholics,” so unlikely to fret over damage to churches. In short, the Allied bombers “did a great military job and did it with an absolute minimum of civilian and religious damage.”¹²³ In another article, the *Times* reported Secretary Hull’s assurances that “strict instructions had been given to avoid non-military objectives and that men specially skilled in precision bombing had been chosen for the task.” The bombing was “confined to military objectives,” he insisted, “notably railway yards.”¹²⁴

Some of this immediate reaction of US officials and the press has made its way into American historical accounts. Conflating US intentions with results, even an otherwise sound history of the air campaign against Italy reports, for example, that “damage to nonmilitary targets and civilians in Rome was minimal as air crews were especially careful.”¹²⁵ The perspective from the ground contradicts such accounts. The attacks took place during the day, between 11 in the morning and three in the afternoon, as people went about their daily business. Although aiming mainly for the rail yards, the bombers thoroughly destroyed the working-class

neighborhood of San Lorenzo. In the words of two leading Italian historians, the attack constituted a massacre “more macabre” than against other Italian cities, because its epicenter was the cemetery of Verano in the Tiburtino-San Lorenzo district. “The neighborhood, caught in the middle of the day in its quotidian normality, was crossed by a scorching wind of death that left in its wake an unexpected and therefore all the more traumatic panorama of destruction.” Particularly disturbing were the many accounts of decapitated corpses, including bodies without heads walking several steps before falling.¹²⁶ There were thousands of civilian casualties, as many as two or three thousand dead, 10,000 houses destroyed, and 40,000 people rendered homeless.¹²⁷

Although carried out by US forces, the air raid fit well the British objective of attacking militarily relevant targets while terrorizing the civilian population. The Americans prided themselves on carrying out daylight raids and “precision bombing” of specific military targets, by contrast to the British approach of carpet-bombing entire cities by night. But the technology of the era was clearly not up to the task. Thus, as Andrew Brookes put it, for the US air forces, “precision bombing of Italy had meant the area bombing of precise targets.”¹²⁸

Worth noting is that the US bomber crews themselves evinced a more realistic understanding of what was possible than the political leaders or journalists. The informal history of the 488th Air Squadron, the unit of which Joseph Heller was



Figure 2.5 Ruins of the Campo Verano Cemetery.

FPG/Getty Images.

a member, conveys that reality, with much of the black humor that later found its way into *Catch-22*:

In addition to airfields which were often difficult to locate, the 488th had an almost perfect record when it came to dropping bulls-eyes on cemeteries... No matter what the target pinpoints, we always hit cemeteries on Saturdays and churches on Sundays.¹²⁹

The results inevitably harmed civilians, and it was difficult to avoid the impression that the harm was intentional. The initial coverage by the *New York Times* recognized this terrorizing aspect of the July bombing as a source of political support at home. Reporting from Washington, DC, one correspondent wrote: “The impression here was that the attack on Rome...was intended to be a blow at Italian morale as much as at railways and military installations.” As the article’s subtitle announced, “Republican and Democratic Senators Voice Approval—Smash at Morale Seen.”¹³⁰ This was the objective that Churchill and his advisers had so long ago articulated—to drive Italy from the war at a point when the Roman population was at its most vulnerable and wavering. Legality and morality aside, did the bombing of Rome serve that purpose?

Consequences of Bombing Rome

Benito Mussolini received news of the bombing of Rome while listening to a two-hour monologue from Adolf Hitler at a meeting in Feltre, in the northeast Veneto region of Italy. The meeting was intended to discuss German aid to Italy to repel the Allied attack that was launched earlier that month. Italy’s ill-considered participation in the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union had led to vast losses of soldiers and rendered its armed forces incapable of territorial defense without German assistance. Mussolini came away empty-handed, as Hitler offered neither the aircraft nor the armored divisions the Italians requested.¹³¹ As Chapter One describes, six days after the bombing, on 25 July 1943, following a contentious meeting of the Grand Council of Fascism, King Victor Emmanuel III demanded Mussolini’s resignation as prime minister, had him arrested, and installed Marshal Pietro Badoglio in his place. As the news spread, cheering Romans began burning photographs of Mussolini and destroying fascist symbols, as they celebrated the imminent end of the war. Yet, as Badoglio announced that night over the radio, “the war continues.”¹³² As he hesitated to accept the Allies’ demand of unconditional surrender, he sought instead, with the support of the Vatican, yet again to secure Rome’s status as an “open city.” The bombing nevertheless continued.

On 13 August 1943, the *New York Times* reported from Switzerland that a few days earlier a mass was held in the Basilica of San Lorenzo to celebrate the feast day of St. Lawrence. The article’s main point was clear from its subtitle: “Service in Rome is Held Proof Italians Exaggerated Damage.”¹³³ The day the article appeared Rome suffered its second major Allied bombing, as 278 aircraft again hit the freight yards at Littorio and San Lorenzo, damaging the neighborhoods of

Prenestino, Tuscolano, Appio, and Casilino, killing some 500 civilians, and igniting fires that burned for a week.¹³⁴ Rome would endure more than 50 further attacks before the war's end. Other Italian cities, from Turin and Milan in the north, to Messina and Taormina in Sicily came under bombardment the same day, and more later that month.¹³⁵ As Overy recounts,

Pisa was struck on 31 August by 144 aircraft, leaving 953 dead and wide destruction in the residential areas of the city. Foggia was struck again, leading to its almost complete evacuation. On 27 August Pescara was bombed, with 1,600 dead.¹³⁶

The Pope continued to express his dismay over the attacks, and his representatives adopted increasingly sharp tones in their correspondence with Myron Taylor. In August 1943, for example, in a message sent before but received after the second bombing of Rome, Secretary of State Maglione conveyed the Pope's "deep appreciation of the sentiments of regret and sympathy" that Taylor expressed in response to the July bombing. But Maglione insisted on stressing the "terroristic character" of the subsequent Allied bombings across Italy.¹³⁷ Indeed, Maglione's own apartment in the Monte Mario district was damaged by Allied bombs sometime later, and he made a point of letting Taylor know that its immunity from attack had been "respected by the Germans, but not by the Americans."¹³⁸



Figure 2.6 Pope Pius XII visits San Lorenzo neighborhood in the wake of an Allied bombing raid to comfort survivors and hand out money.

<https://roma.repubblica.it/images/2013/07/15/185856869-33e17afb-247a-4ff8-9ec1-17a95566f89d.jpg>

In response to the August bombing of Rome, Marshal Badoglio unilaterally declared the Italian capital an open city, and on 8 September finally signed an armistice with the Allies. His radio announcement that evening, in the words of a Roman diarist, was “so sudden and unexpected that it made people believe the war was finally over, and the euphoria of the moment distracted from the reality” of “the presence of German troops on the peninsula.”¹³⁹ The *Wehrmacht*, which for weeks had already been making its way through the Brenner Pass in the north, invaded Rome that same night—rendering irrelevant the notion of an open city immune to attack.

Nevertheless, throughout Italy, Badoglio’s radio broadcast led people to believe that the war was over and that the Allies would soon drive out the Germans. One town that enjoyed no such illusions was Frascati. At noon on 8 September, more than a hundred B-17 Flying Fortresses targeted Kesselring’s headquarters. The sound of four hundred tons of high explosives was audible to General Maxwell Taylor and Colonel William Gardiner back in Rome as they completed their mission to secure Italy’s surrender. Kesselring survived the attack, but hundreds of Italian civilians died. With the announcement of the Armistice eight hours later, the survivors had to choose between fleeing the German occupiers or burying their dead to forestall Kesselring’s threat to incinerate the ruins of the town with flame-throwers. The residents remained and carried on with the burials.¹⁴⁰

Did the Allied bombing of Rome drive Italy out of the war, as Churchill had long promised that it would do? Certainly, the Italian case is probably the closest we have to an “exception that proves the rule” that punishment of civilians is far less effective than bombing to influence military operations. We noted already in Chapter One Baldoli’s argument that bombing of the northern Italian cities contributed to the wave of strikes in spring 1943.¹⁴¹ Yet, despite what Churchill and his advisers originally hoped, air power alone was not responsible for Italy’s defeat. The invasion of Sicily and the failure of the Germans to promise more than a holding operation in the north of the country played a major role in convincing the king and the Fascist leadership to depose Mussolini.¹⁴²

Second, Mussolini had been in power for two decades already and was increasingly losing popular support—not least because of the strictures imposed by the regime after joining Hitler’s war: “Italy was more like a subject country in the German empire than an alliance member, as the allowance of food by the end of 1942 was less than half that allowed in Germany.”¹⁴³ As Iris Origo’s contemporaneous diary recorded, the war was causing resentment among Italians on this count already only a few months into it:

Each necessary war-restriction measure is preceded by articles in the daily press, showing that such measures are really conducive to the well-being and comfort of the public. Thus, just before the sale of coffee was forbidden, long medical articles appeared, describing the deleterious effects of coffee on the nerves and constitution: “wine is far less harmful.” The meat rationing was

preceded by similar articles in praise of vegetarianism; and now the abolition of private cars is accompanied by long articles in praise of bicycling!¹⁴⁴

Mancini, drawing on police informant reports, explained that “part of the population had the sense that fascism was ready to fall,” a victim of its own corruption and incompetence, and that the regime was using the war to distract attention from its failures.¹⁴⁵

Indeed, these two considerations—poor military performance and the discrediting of the Fascist regime—are directly connected. Labanca argued that already in the late 1930s “the regime faced a crisis in its relations with the country as a whole,” to the extent that Mussolini decided “not to proclaim a general mobilization in June 1940” when he joined Hitler’s war because “he did not want to alarm public opinion or to put its loyalty to the test.”¹⁴⁶ Even before the Sicilian invasion, it was

defeat on the North African front that sealed the fate of Italy’s war and of the Fascist regime, not only because of the huge losses in terms of personnel—by the end of the war more than 400,000 Italian prisoners were in British hands, a large part of them captured in the battles in East and North Africa—but also because defeat on this front marked the failure of the whole Fascist programme.¹⁴⁷

Conversations among interned Italian soldiers and officers, secretly recorded by the British authorities, provide ample evidence of dissatisfaction with Mussolini, well before the Allied invasion.¹⁴⁸ Even scholars who disagree on the goals and methods of Italian fascism share a conviction that the regime was doomed to failure long before the defeat in war sealed its fate.¹⁴⁹

Aside from the long-term influence of military defeat and the failure of the Fascist program, a careful study of the effect of the bombing on the decision to depose Mussolini identifies several contributing proximate factors in addition to the attack of 19 July. According to Smith,

four events, the disaster in Russia, the poor defense of Sicily, the failure at Feltre to obtain the requested German military aid, and the Rome raid, contributed to breaking the spirit of Mussolini. The bombing may have directly contributed to Mussolini’s failure at Feltre, which, besides the material effects of the destruction in the “Eternal City,” gave proof to all of Italy’s defenselessness.¹⁵⁰

The main point is that Mussolini’s fall from power was only temporary. In the wake of the second Allied bombing raid on 13 August, the king and Badoglio fled Rome for the protection of Allied-held areas to the south. In September a German commando squad rescued Mussolini from prison and installed him as head of the German puppet regime called the Republic of Salò.¹⁵¹ Whatever the benefits of Italian surrender, the Allies continued to fight in Italy for nearly a year and a half more, at a cost of some 60,000 troops and more than 120,000 Italian civilian

deaths.¹⁵² Moreover, to the extent that the quick defeat of Mussolini's regime convinced Allied airpower enthusiasts that bombing civilians was the route to victory, we can add to the tally the lives of hundreds of thousands more civilians in the other Axis powers.

Back in Rome, Taylor's colleagues Tittmann and D'Arcy Osborne had become increasingly outspoken in their opposition to their countries' bombing raids against Rome. Five days after the August 1943 attack, D'Arcy Osborne complained to the Foreign Office that this second bombing of Rome "is too much like kicking a man who is down and out." Revealing his underlying sympathy for the Italians, the diplomat stressed "the great difference between paying Germany back in her own coin and adopting those German methods which we have so often denounced against helpless Italy." By "destroying the Italian cities and killing citizens," he warned, we are "thereby lowering ourselves to the Nazi level."¹⁵³ As the bombing continued, D'Arcy Osborne issued additional warnings. A report to London in March 1944 described 30 fatalities from an Allied attack on a hospital in Rome, and a further 200 corpses mutilated and barely recognizable, the victims of two other raids. The British envoy insisted that the psychological consequences of such attacks were harming the Allied cause and helping the Germans, and he requested that his report be forwarded to Washington.¹⁵⁴

Tittmann also continued to work to prevent further killing of Italian civilians. In August 1943, he had sent Taylor detailed descriptions and a map of the papal domain at Castel Gandolfo for transmission to the War Department. The Vatican was sheltering some 15,000 refugees on the property, including many Jews. But the Allied commanders described the territory as "saturated with Germans" to justify four attacks carried out in the first half of 1944, with hundreds of civilian deaths and about 191 million lire in property damage, according to Vatican estimates. As Tittmann reported, the manager of the Vatican domains complained that he "was sickened at the sight of so many dead bodies, but he had yet to see one dead German."¹⁵⁵

Diplomacy had reached its limits. Although Myron Taylor, Harold Tittmann, and Francis D'Arcy Osborne would continue to represent their governments throughout the rest of the war, they would have no effect on the course of military operations or the fate of Italian civilians subjected to Allied bombing and artillery fire. Their fate was now in the hands of the strategists whose debates about the appropriate targets for Allied air raids determined who would live and who would die.

Notes

- 1 Myron C. Taylor, ed., *Wartime Correspondence between President Roosevelt and Pope Pius XII* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), from his introduction, 3. The next day, 23 December 1939, the President wrote to the Pope a letter of introduction for Taylor to bring with him to Rome. The letter and cover note to Taylor are found in the first folder of Box 1, Myron Taylor Papers, #3308. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, hereafter MTP. The materials related to the bombing of Rome are

- arranged into four additional folders, prepared by Taylor for the archive, but in somewhat disorganized fashion, with some overlap of materials between folders, three of them called “Bombing Rome,” and one—the thickest—called “Bombing of Rome.” In my notes I refer to the names Taylor gave the folders (with the time period covered indicated here in parentheses, but not in subsequent references): Bombing Rome (11 June–16 August 1943); Bombing Rome, Book #2 (17 September 1941–25 August 1943); Bombing Rome, Book #3 (27 May 1944–6 August 1943, in reverse chronological order); Bombing of Rome (17 September 1941–1 January 1943).
- 2 Marco Gioannini and Giulio Massobrio, *Bombardate l’Italia: storia della guerra di distruzione aerea, 1940–1945* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2007), 12.
 - 3 Umberto Gentiloni Silveri and Maddalena Carli, *Bombardare Roma: Gli Alleati e la “Città aperta” (1940–1944)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 18.
 - 4 Matthew Evangelista, “Blockbusters, Nukes, and Drones: Trajectories of Change over a Century,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, vol. 14, issue 23, no. 3 (1 December 2016), 1–29, available at <https://apjif.org/2016/23/Evangelista.html>
 - 5 Hague Rules of Air Warfare (1923), http://www.lawofwar.org/hague_rules_of_air_warfare.htm
 - 6 Laws and Customs of War on Land (1907), http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04.asp
 - 7 Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Penguin, 2014), Apple ebook version, 29.
 - 8 Franklin D. Roosevelt, “An Appeal to Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, and Poland to Refrain from Air Bombing of Civilians,” 1 September 1939, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/appeal-great-britain-france-italy-germany-and-poland-refrain-from-air-bombing-civilians>. For more detail, see Robert C. Batchelder, *The Irreversible Decision, 1939–1950* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 172–173, and Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).
 - 9 Giulio Douhet, *Il dominio dell’aria* (1921), revised version 1927, translated in 1942 by Dino Ferrari as *Command of the Air* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1998). For discussion of Douhet’s reception outside Italy, see Tami Davis Biddle, “Strategic Bombardment: Expectation, Theory, and Practice in the Early Twentieth Century,” in Matthew Evangelista and Henry Shue, eds., *The American Way of Bombing: Changing Ethical and Legal Norms, from Flying Fortresses to Drones* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014). See also Paul K. Saint-Amour, “Air War Prophecy and Interwar Modernism,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2005), 130–161; and Thomas Hippler, *Bombing the People: Giulio Douhet and the Foundations of Air-power Strategy, 1884–1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
 - 10 “Gavotti racconta del primo bombardamento aereo,” quoting a recently discovered letter of 1 November 1911 from the pilot to his father, on the website of *Corriere della Sera*, <https://www.cinquantamila.it/storyTellerArticolo.php?storyId=4de399d11a8fc>; Alan Johnston, “Libya 1911: How an Italian Pilot Began the Air War Era,” *BBC News*, 10 May 2011; Marco Patricelli, *L’Italia sotto le bombe: Guerra aerea e vita civile 1940–1945* (Rome: Editori Laterza, 2007), 3–5; Donald Cameron Watt, “Restraints on War in the Air before 1945,” ch. 4 in Michael Howard, ed., *Restraints on War: Studies in the Limitation of Armed Conflict* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1979), 61.
 - 11 With Churchill’s blessing, Trenchard sought to use the Iraqi campaign’s results to boost the standing of his branch of the armed services, submitting a report to the cabinet on “The Development of Air Control in Iraq.” The quotations in this paragraph come from Geoff Simons, *Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam*, 3rd edn. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 179. See also Yuki Tanaka, “British ‘Humane’ Bombing of Iraq during the Interwar Era,” ch. 1 in Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young, eds., *Bombing Civilians: A*

- Twentieth Century History* (New York: New Press, 2009). On the use of airpower in other colonies, see V.G. Kiernan, *Colonial Empires and Armies, 1815–1960* (Montreal: McGill/Queen's Press, 1998), 194–201. The Italian air forces used mustard gas in the war against Ethiopia in 1935. See Simone Belladonna, *Gas in Etiopia: I crimini rimossi dell'Italia coloniale* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2015).
- 12 Overy, *Bombing War*, Apple ebook version, 1380.
 - 13 Pierre Blet, Robert A. Graham, Angelo Martini, and Burkhardt Schneider, eds., *Actes et documents du Saint Siege relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, vol. 4, Le Saint Siège et la guerre en Europe (Juin 1940–Juin 1941)* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1967), 39–40, 63–64.
 - 14 Gioannini and Massobrio, *Bombardate l'Italia*, 96; Pier Luigi, Bassignana, *Torino sotto le bombe: Nei rapporti inediti dell'aviazione alleata* (Turin: Edizioni del Capricorno, 2008), 7–8; Rastelli, *Bombe sulla città*; Overy, *Bombing War*, 1635–1637.
 - 15 Robert S. Ehlers, Jr., *The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 29–30 (Kindle version).
 - 16 Overy, *Bombing War*, 257.
 - 17 Ministero della difesa, Aeronautica militare, “Un corpo aereo italiano sopra la manica,” http://www.aeronautica.difesa.it/storia/1940_1945/Pagine/CAI.aspx; “Il Duce’s Blitz—Italy’s Forgotten Role in the Battle of Britain,” *Military History Now*, 13 November 2013, <https://militaryhistorynow.com/2021/10/15/il-duces-blitz-italys-role-in-the-battle-of-britain-2/>; Peter Haining, *The Chianti Raiders: The Extraordinary Story of the Italian Air Force in the Battle of Britain* (London: Robson, 2005).
 - 18 Iris Origo, *A Chill in the Air: An Italian War Diary, 1939–1940* (New York: New York Review Books, 2017), Apple ebook version, 268.
 - 19 Overy, *Bombing War*, 1656–1657.
 - 20 “R.A.F. Ready to Bomb Rome, Airman Insists,” *New York Times*, 7 November 1940. Umberto Gentiloni Silveri and Maddalena Carli, *Bombardare Roma: Gli Alleati e la “Città aperta” (1940–1944)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 51.
 - 21 Robert P. Post, “Rome to Be Raided if Cairo or Athens Is Hit, British Warn, but Promise to Spare Vatican,” *New York Times*, 19 April 1941; the British had made similar threats in correspondence with the Vatican the month before: Blet et al., *Actes et documents*, vol. 4, 44.
 - 22 Overy, *Bombing War*, 1656–1657.
 - 23 Harold H. Tittmann, Jr., *Inside the Vatican of Pius XII: The Memoir of an American Diplomat during World War II*, ed. Harold H. Tittmann, III (New York: Image Books, 2004), 65; the BBC broadcast is quoted in a memorandum from Pope Pius XII to Myron Taylor, 17 September 1941, in the folder, Bombing Rome, Book #2, Box 1, MTP.
 - 24 Pierre Blet, Robert A. Graham, Angelo Martini, and Burkhardt Schneider, eds., *Actes et documents du Saint Siege relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, vol. 5, Le Saint Siège et la guerre en Europe (Juillet 1941–Octobre 1942)* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1969), 26.
 - 25 W. David Curtiss and C. Evan Stewart, “Myron C. Taylor: Cornell Benefactor, Industrial Czar, and FDR’s ‘Ambassador Extraordinary,’” Part 1, *Cornell Law Forum*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2006), 7–8.
 - 26 Myron Taylor, ed. *Wartime Correspondence between President Roosevelt and Pope Pius XII* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 103.
 - 27 Taylor, *Wartime Correspondence*, 4.
 - 28 “Vatican City: Pope to Get Jerusalem?” *Time Magazine*, 8 July 1940. For more detail on Protestant opposition to Taylor’s appointment, and re-appointment by President Truman, see Rosanne Francis Saeli, “A Biographical Sketch of Myron C. Taylor,” a research paper for Red Creek Central School, Red Creek, New York, April 1971, Cornell Law Library, 36–38.

- 29 Taylor, *Wartime Correspondence*, 4.
- 30 Harold H. Tittmann, Jr., *Inside the Vatican of Pius XII: The Memoir of an American Diplomat during World War II*, ed. Harold H. Tittmann, III (New York: Image Books, 2004), x.
- 31 Tittmann, *Inside the Vatican*, 130.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 34 W. David Curtiss and C. Evan Stewart, "Myron C. Taylor: Cornell Benefactor, Industrial Czar, and FDR's 'Ambassador Extraordinary,'" Part 2, *Cornell Law Forum*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Winter 2007), 5.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 7; the encyclical is available here: https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19370319_divini-redemptoris.html
- 36 Statement by Myron Taylor to Pope Pius XII, 19 September 1942, in first folder of Box 1, MTP.
- 37 Tittmann, *Inside the Vatican*, 12–17.
- 38 Origo, *Chill in the Air*, 149–151.
- 39 Ennio Di Nolfo and Maurizio Serra, *La gabbia infranta: Gli Alleati e l'Italia dal 1943 al 1945* (Rome: Laterza, 2010), ch. 1.
- 40 David I. Kertzer, *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Apple ebook version, 504–506, 508.
- 41 Blet et al., *Actes et documents*, vol. 5, 9–10.
- 42 Kertzer, *Pope and Mussolini*, 504–506, 508.
- 43 See Tittmann's discussion of the reaction of Eldridge Durbrow, a senior State Department specialist on the USSR, in *Inside the Vatican*, 62–63.
- 44 The two letters of 3 and 20 September 1941 are reprinted in Taylor, *Wartime Correspondence*, 61–64. For the Vatican's description of the exchange between Taylor and Pius XII on the USSR and religion, see Blet et al., *Actes et documents*, vol. 5, 17–18, 21–25.
- 45 Tittmann, *Inside the Vatican*, 64–65; Blet et al., *Actes et documents*, vol. 5, 20.
- 46 "Memorandum Re Bombing Rome Given Myron Taylor September 17 1941 by His Holiness Pope Pius XII," Bombing Rome, Book #2, Box 1, MTP; Blet et al., *Actes et documents*, vol. 5, 20–21.
- 47 "Text of Prime Minister Churchill's Review of War in House of Commons," *New York Times*, 1 October 1941.
- 48 Ugo Mancini, *Guerra nelle terre del papa: I bombardamenti alleati tra Roma e Montecassino attraversando i Castelli Romani* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011), 30–31.
- 49 Memorandum by Myron Taylor on indiscriminate bombing, given to the President, November 1941, drafted 5 October 1941, folder Bombing of Rome.
- 50 Tittmann, *Inside the Vatican*, 128.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 130–131.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 133.
- 53 Memorandum of His Holiness Pope Pius XII Re Bombing Civilian Populations, 26 September 1942, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 54 Blet et al., *Actes et documents*, vol. 5, 20–21.
- 55 Winant to the Secretary of State, paraphrase of telegram, 8 December 1942, sent in response to a request from Taylor to Winant, 2 December 1942, for a summary of the dinner conversation regarding the bombing of Rome, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 56 The most complete list of bombings of Italian cities and towns of which I am aware was compiled by Giovanni Lafirenze for his website: <http://biografiadiunabomba.anvcg.it/seconda-guerra-mondiale/> (hereafter, Lafirenze, Bombing list).
- 57 Letter, Cicognani to Taylor, 28 October 1942 and letter, Taylor to Roosevelt, 2 November 1942, both in Bombing of Rome, MTP. The folder also contains a clipping

- of an article by the Associated Press, “No Pact against Rome Raids,” from the *New York Herald Tribune*, 22 October 1942, with the quotation from Eden.
- 58 Tittmann telegram #187, 17 November 1942, quoted in American Legation, Bern to the Secretary of State, Paraphrase of Telegram, 20 November 1942, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP. Maglione’s interpretation of popular attitudes was actually at variance with what fascist informants were conveying to the local authorities in the northern cities. In Milan, for example, according to one report, the people “were not cursing the foreign aviators who were attacking, but fascism which is held to be uniquely responsible for this situation.” See Gioannini and Massobrio, *Bombardate l’Italia*, 202–203.
- 59 “Position of Italy,” memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Anthony Eden), 20 November 1942, W.P. (42) 545, National Archives, original emphasis.
- 60 Cable of 18 November 1942, quoted in “Air Phase of the Italian Campaign to 1 January 1944,” AAFRH-15, Army Air Force Historical Office, Headquarters Army Air Forces, June 1946, 2–3, in Philip A. Smith, *Bombing to Surrender: The Contribution of Airpower to the Collapse of Italy, 1943* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1998), 7, emphasis added.
- 61 American Legation, Bern to the Secretary of State, 27 November 1942, Paraphrase of Telegram.
- 62 Two days after the signing of the Lateran Accords, as they were also known, Pope Pius XI told a university audience that divine providence was responsible for sending a man who would make such a deal, unlike the anti-clerical liberals who had united and promoted a secular Italy at the expense of the Vatican. “The pope’s reference to Mussolini as the man sent by Providence would be repeated by bishops, priests, and lay Catholics thousands of times in the years to follow,” as Kertzer observed. See Kertzer, *Pope and Mussolini*, 403–407, 434.
- 63 Kertzer, *Pope and Mussolini*, 548.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 785–793.
- 65 “Vatican City: Pope to Get Jerusalem?” *Time Magazine*, 8 July 1940.
- 66 On Brindisi, see “I bombardamenti del novembre 1941,” http://www.brindisiweb.it/storia/bombardamenti_nov1941.asp; on Naples, Gabriella Gribaudo, *Guerra totale: tra bombe alleate e violenze naziste. Napoli e il fronte meridionale 1940–1944* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2005), 56–58.
- 67 Kertzer, *Pope and Mussolini*, 147.
- 68 Farinacci’s article (15 November 1942) is translated and quoted in Harrison to Hull, 23 November 1942, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 69 Article of 22 November 1942 translated and quoted in letter from Michael J. Read to A.G. Cicognani, 23 November 1942, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 70 American Legation, Bern to the Secretary of State, 21 November 1942, paraphrasing Tittmann’s telegrams, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 71 Ciano’s diary is quoted in Ugo Mancini, *Guerra nelle terre del papa: I bombardamenti alleati tra Roma e Montecassino attraversando i Castelli Romani* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011), 49, note 121.
- 72 Mancini, *La guerra nelle terre del papa*, 49, n. 121. See also “Guerra e Pace – La missione Myron Charles Taylor – 1940/41/42,” <https://digilander.libero.it/lacorsainfinita/guerra2/41/lamissionetaylor.htm>; W. David Curtiss and C. Evan Stewart, “Myron C. Taylor: Cornell Benefactor, Industrial Czar, and FDR’s ‘Ambassador Extraordinary,’” Part 2, *Cornell Law Forum*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Winter 2007), 9.
- 73 Viscount Halifax to Myron Taylor, 6 November 1942, with attached document, “Air Raid Damage to Churches,” folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 74 A letter, Cicognani to Taylor, dated 8 December 1942, conveys greetings from a few days before from Cardinal Maglione in Rome, but does not mention Taylor’s letter of the day before or the document. Folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 75 “Letter, Taylor to FDR, by telephone to Miss Tully, White House,” 30 November 1942, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.

- 76 Letter, FDR to Taylor, December 1942 (no specific date), Bombing of Rome, MTP. Taylor's telephone message is also included as Document 680 in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1942, Europe*, vol. III, where a memorandum from FDR of 1 December instructs the Secretary of State to prepare a response to Taylor, and Hull sends FDR his draft reply on 3 December (Document 681).
- 77 Document 51, Le délégué apostolique A. Washington Cicognani au cardinal Maglione, in Pierre Blet, Robert A. Graham, Angelo Martini, and Burkhart Schneider, eds., *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, vol. 7, Le Saint Siège et la guerre en Europe (Novembre 1942–Décembre 1943)* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1973), 135.
- 78 Ehlers, *Mediterranean Air War*.
- 79 Claudia Baldoli, "I bombardamenti sull'Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale: Strategia anglo-americana e propaganda rivolta alla popolazione civile," *Deportati, esuli, profughe*, n. 13–14 (2010), 36.
- 80 Mancini, *La guerra nelle terre del papa*, 42–43, quoting Ciano's diary.
- 81 Memorandum, 4 December 1942, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 82 Harrison to the Secretary of State, 5 December 1942, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 83 United Press report of 4 December 1942, reprinted in *New York Journal*, 12 December 1942.
- 84 Taylor to the Secretary of State, 12 December 1942, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 85 Cicognani to Taylor, 15 December 1942, with attached memorandum, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP; for the report on the Italian ambassador's assurances, see Document 52, Notes du cardinal Maglione, 13 December 1942, in Blet et al., *Actes et documents, vol. 7*, 136.
- 86 Cicognani to Taylor, 15 December 1942.
- 87 Taylor memorandum, 22 December 1942, folder Bombing of Rome, MTP.
- 88 Maddalena Carli, "Da 'Bombing of Rome' a 'Open City Question.' Alleati, incursioni aeree e status speciale (1940–1944)," Istituto romano per la storia d'Italia dal fascismo alla Resistenza, *Roma durante l'occupazione nazifascista, Percorsi di ricerca* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009).
- 89 Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State (Washington), 21 December 1942, 740.0011 European War 1939/26908, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1942, Europe*, vol. III, 1.
- 90 The British Ambassador (Halifax) to the Secretary of State (Washington), 22 December 1942, 740.0011 European War 1939/26648, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1942, Europe*, vol. III, 1.
- 91 Taylor, Memorandum for the Record, 11 June 1943, folder Bombing Rome.
- 92 Letter, Cicognani to Taylor, 25 June 1943, folder Bombing Rome.
- 93 Letter, Cicognani to Taylor, 28 June 1943, folder Bombing Rome. Indeed the Axis powers did later bomb the Vatican—on 5 November 1943—and tried to blame the British for the attack. The target was the Vatican radio station, which was suspected (correctly) of providing military information to the Allies, and the organizer of the attack was Roberto Farinacci, the "extreme anticlerical fascist" who had also suspected Myron Taylor of receiving intelligence information from the Vatican. See Patricia M. McGoldrick, "Who Bombed the Vatican? The Argentinean Connection," *Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 4 (Autumn 2016), 796; and Alessandrini, Raffaele. "Bombe in Vaticano," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10–11 January 2011.
- 94 Letter, Cicognani to Taylor, 28 June 1943, folder Bombing Rome.
- 95 Letter, Taylor to FDR, 28 June 1943, folder Bombing Rome (emphasis added).
- 96 Taylor, Memorandum for the Secretary (dictated over the telephone), 9 July 1943, folder Bombing Rome.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 Carli, "Da 'Bombing of Rome,'" 72.
- 99 Ibid., 73.

- 100 Transcript, Myron Charles Taylor, second year (1894), Registrar's records, #36-1-667, Kroch Library, Division of Rare & Manuscript Collections, Cornell University; Howard Jeruchimowitz, "Who Was Myron Taylor? And Who Was Charles Evans Hughes?" *The Tower* (Cornell Law School), 5 December 1996, 3.
- 101 David J. Danelski and Joseph S. Tulchin, "Charles Evans Hughes at Cornell: Excerpts from Hughes's Autobiographical Notes," *Cornell Law Review*, vol. 58, no. 1 (November 1972); the course was taught in the School of History and Political Science (now the separate departments of History and Government), but open to law students, 18, n. 26.
- 102 "Dedication of Myron Taylor Hall," *Cornell Law Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 1 (December 1932), 1. *Cornell Law Forum*, centennial issue, 1988, entry for Charles Evans Hughes.
- 103 Umberto Barbisan, *Il crollo della diga di Pian del Gleno: errore tecnico?* (Cavriana: Tecnologos Editore, 2007).
- 104 Giovanni Ruggeri and Sergio Adami, "Lo sviluppo dell'energia dell'energia idroelettrica in Italia," *L'Acqua*, no. 6 (2011), 69-78.
- 105 Henry Shue, "Force Protection, Military Advantage, and 'Constant Care' for Civilians: The 1991 Bombing of Iraq," ch. 7 in Matthew Evangelista and Henry Shue, eds., *The American Way of Bombing: Changing Ethical and Legal Norms, from Flying Fortresses to Drones* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).
- 106 Ruggeri and Adami, "Lo sviluppo dell'energia," 72.
- 107 Luigi Ceffà, *Dalla Bayard alla Frecciarossa: breve storia delle ferrovie in Italia, 1839-2011*, 10, https://www.3rotaie.it/3r_Documenti/Ferrovie_Italia.htm
- 108 Emilio Maraini, "L'elettrificazione delle ferrovie italiane. Una storia di coraggiosa intraprendenza e di incapacità a seguire una coerente politica industriale," in Stefano Maggi, *Le Ferrovie* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2003), 223-235, at 229.
- 109 Direzione generale delle ferrovie dello Stato, *La trazione elettrica nelle ferrovie italiane* (Naples: Richter & c., 1928).
- 110 Mario Pietrangeli, *Le ferrovie militarizzate i treni armati i treni ospedale nella prima e seconda guerra mondiale 1915-1945*, Edizione 2012, 35-36, 44.
- 111 Thomas McKelvey Cleaver, *The Bridgebusters: The True Story of the Catch-22 Bomb Wing* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2016); Andrew J. Brookes, *Air War over Italy* (Sittingbourne, UK: Ian Allan Publishing, 2000), 125.
- 112 "Roosevelt's Note to the Pope," special to the *New York Times*, 10 July 1943.
- 113 Richard Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary* (New York: Random House, 1944), 11.
- 114 Town Plan of Roma (Rome), 2nd edn., published by War Office, 1943 (1st edn. was 1942).
- 115 Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary*, 12-13.
- 116 Smith, *Bombing to Surrender*, 38.
- 117 "321 Bombs Italy First," 321 in *the News*, 19 July 1943, 5; Lt. William T. Williams' Flight Log, Part 1, entry for 19 July 1943.
- 118 For a discussion of why San Lorenzo was left out of the briefings and maps, see Ron E. Hassner, *Religion on the Battlefield* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 281-297 (Apple book version).
- 119 Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary*, 17-19.
- 120 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 121 Drew Middleton, "Rail Centers Hit," *New York Times*, 20 July 1943.
- 122 Herbert L. Matthews, "Damage to Shrines Is Kept to a Minimum," *New York Times*, 21 July 1943.
- 123 *Ibid.*
- 124 Harold Callender, "Hull Emphasizes Care in Rome Raid," *New York Times*, 20 July 1943.
- 125 Smith, *Bombing to Surrender*, 40.
- 126 Gioannini and Massobrio, *Bombardate l'Italia*, 261, with details from Cesare De Simone, *Venti angeli sopra Roma: I bombardamenti aerei sulla Città Eterna, 19 luglio e 13 agosto 1943* (Milano: Mursia, 1993).

- 127 Paola De Castro and Daniela Marsili, “Un convegno per ricordare il bombardamento di San Lorenzo del 19 luglio 1943,” *Notiziario dell’Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, vol. 26, nos. 7–8 (July–August 2013), 11–12.
- 128 Brookes, *Air War*, 142. For a discussion of the accuracy of US bombing in support of this judgment, see Claudia Baldoli, “La memoria dei bombardamenti nelle regioni del Nord Italia,” *L’Italia e le sue Regioni* (2015), 10, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/la-memoria-dei-bombardamenti-nelle-regioni-del-nord-italia_%28L%27Italia-e-le-sue-Regioni%29/
- 129 Everett B. Thomas, *Round the World with the 488th: A more or less factual narrative supported by on-the-spot pictorial evidence* (1946), in *Sidney Schneider Papers*, #6319. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, 61.
- 130 Harold Callender, “Hull Emphasizes Care in Rome Raid,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1943. For a general argument about the conflation of intentions and outcomes, and the limits of technology, in US postwar bombing practices, see Sahr Conway-Lanz, *Collateral Damage: Americans, Noncombatant Immunity, and Atrocity after World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 131 Smith, *Bombing to Surrender*, 30–32.
- 132 Mancini, *La guerra nelle terre del papa*, 122–124.
- 133 “San Lorenzo Holds Mass,” *New York Times*, 13 August 1943.
- 134 Smith, *Bombing to Surrender*, 61.
- 135 Tittmann, *Inside the Vatican*, 179–180; Gentiloni Silveri and Carli, *Bombardare Roma*, 104; Lafirenze, Bombing list.
- 136 Overy, *The Bombing War*, 1915.
- 137 Cicognani to Taylor, 16 August 1943, folder Bombing Rome.
- 138 *Memorie di Samuele Schaeff*, hand-written in 1946, transcribed in 2006 by his son Carlo (to whom I am grateful for my copy), 32.
- 139 Angelino Petraglia, “Riflessioni sulla seconda guerra mondiale e ricordi di prigionia,” (unpublished memoir, Salerno, December 1985), https://archiviodistatosalerno.benculturali.it/fileadmin/risorse/memoriagm2/pdf/diario_di_angelino_petraglia.pdf
- 140 Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 695–696.
- 141 Claudia Baldoli, “Spring 1943: The Fiat Strikes and the Collapse of the Italian Home Front,” *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 72, no. 1 (October 2011), 181–189.
- 142 This argument resembles one made by Tsuyoshi Hasegawa regarding the bombing of Japan, that it was not the atomic bombs but the entry of the USSR into the war that led to surrender. See his *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- 143 Smith, *Bombing to Surrender*, 29.
- 144 Origo, *Chill in the Air*, entry for 8 September 1940, 149.
- 145 Mancini, *La guerra nelle terre del papa*, 20.
- 146 Nicola Labanca, “The Italian Wars,” in R.J. Overy, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 82.
- 147 *Ibid.*, 87.
- 148 Alexander Henry, *War Through Italian Eyes: Fighting for Mussolini, 1940–1943* (London: Routledge, 2021), esp. ch. 6 and 7.
- 149 Emilio Gentile, Paul Corner, and Christopher Duggan, “Two New Books on Fascism. A Review, the Authors’ Responses and the Reviewer’s Comments,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 5 (2014), 665–683.
- 150 Smith, *Bombing to Surrender*, 56.
- 151 Gentiloni Silveri and Carli, *Bombardare Roma*, 104–105, Tittmann, *Inside the Vatican*, 180–185.
- 152 Atkinson, *Day of Battle*; John Grigg, *1943: The Victory That Never Was* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980); Istituto centrale di statistica, *Morti e dispersi per cause belliche negli anni 1940–45* (Rome, 1957), 5.

- 153 Telegraph of 18 August 1943, Public Record Office, F.O. 371/37265, quoted in Pierre Blet, Robert A. Graham, Angelo Martini, and Burkhart Schneider, eds., *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, vol. 9, Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre (Janvier–Décembre 1943)* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), 435.
- 154 The report is reprinted in Gentiloni Silveri and Carli, *Bombardare Roma*, 175–177.
- 155 Tittman, *Inside the Vatican*, 199–200.

3 Strategy

Following the bombing of Rome in July and August 1943 and the Allied invasions of Sicily and the Italian mainland, Italy's status changed. From co-belligerent of Nazi Germany, Italy became its defeated ally, then a puppet regime occupied by the Germans and a major battlefield for nearly two more years of war between the Axis and the Allies. One might expect bombing strategies and attitudes toward civilian harm to have shifted with the changes in the status of the country and of ordinary Italians. Did the rhetorical shift from enemies to friends entail an effort on the part of the Allies to take greater precautions to protect civilian life? Unfortunately not. As Chapter One reports, more civilians died under Allied bombardment *after* Italy ceased to be an enemy than while it was allied to Nazi Germany. An important part of the explanation is the outsized influence of Solomon ("Solly") Zuckerman, a South African-born zoologist and self-taught adviser to the British government on bombing.

Two months before the first bombing of Rome, the small Italian fortress island of Pantelleria came under Allied attack. For more than three weeks the Allies carried out hundreds of sorties, dropping thousands of tons of bombs in a relentless effort to compel the garrison's surrender by bombing alone. Pantelleria served as a stepping stone for Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, and the strategy for the "reduction of Pantelleria" was Zuckerman's brainchild. On 13 May 1943, five days into the bombing, Zuckerman received an honorary commission as wing commander in the Royal Air Forces, and later a promotion to group captain.¹ Having declared the Pantelleria "experiment" a smashing success, Zuckerman went on to devise the British air campaign for the invasion of Sicily. The lessons he drew from the bombing of Sicily influenced both the subsequent campaign in Italy and the Normandy invasion.

Zuckerman's strategy for taking Pantelleria entailed steady and concentrated bombing of its defenses, along with its airfield, port, and the town itself. His strategy for the rest of Italy emphasized bombing railroad junctions and "marshaling yards" within cities—depots where locomotives and other rolling stock were stored and repaired—with the objective of hindering rail traffic to reduce supplies of fuel, ammunition, food, and reinforcements to the *Wehrmacht*, thereby aiding the Allied ground offensive. Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder, head of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF), became so enamored of Zuckerman's strategy that US

critics of the approach began calling him “Air Chief Marshalling Yards” Tedder.² General George S. Patton, who met him in the early days of the Pantelleria bombing, confided to his diary that Tedder “is a great promiser, but I don’t wholly trust him. He seems to me more interested in producing an independent airforce in the army than in winning the war.”³

This chapter puts Zuckerman’s strategy first in the context of British thinking about how to bomb Italy during the period between Mussolini’s entry into the war in June 1940 and the Armistice of September 1943; and then in the context of debates with US economists working for the London-based Enemy Objectives Unit over the appropriate air strategy for German-occupied Italy and France. The defeat of Pantelleria in June 1943 in the face of bombardment alone inspired the Allies to exaggerate the possibilities of air power. The bombing of Rome in July and August 1943 served as a seeming tribute to the role of strategies of civilian punishment to induce surrender. In the subsequent war to liberate Italy from German occupation, one might expect German forces to constitute the main military targets for aerial bombardment. For the Allied air forces, however, elements of the Italian infrastructure that supported the Nazi advance were higher priorities for attack than the German army itself. To the extent that such elements were located in population centers, attacking them would subject civilians to grave, if unintentional, harm.

The second half of the chapter considers the role of air power in defeating German ground forces, leading to their capitulation in May 1945. Why were more civilians killed by bombing during this period, when Italians were no longer the enemy, but effectively hostages hoping for liberation, than in the previous one when they were formally belligerents? Why did air strategies, supposedly oriented to aiding in the *Wehrmacht’s* defeat in occupied Italy, produce such punishing effects on civilians? The discussion focuses on Operation Strangle, probably the first major example of a campaign of air *interdiction*—a common term now, but one that came into use initially in the Allied air war over Italy. It highlights the impact of Zuckerman and the legacy of Pantelleria and the campaign in Sicily. His conflict with the US specialists yielded a compromise strategy of bombing urban railroad junctures and marshaling yards as well as the bridges, tunnels, and viaducts that were the preferred targets of Zuckerman’s critics. A near-constant factor influencing decisions on strategy was the effort by leaders of both the British and US air forces to assert the autonomy of their service by favoring independent long-range missions over what we would now call combined-arms approaches in cooperation with other branches. Although little evidence suggests that proponents of either approach considered the impact on civilians, their decisions made a difference.

“How many tons of bombs does it take to break a town?”

Solly Zuckerman was a civilian who had studied medicine in his native South Africa and had no military experience. He got his start in the bombing business when the British molecular physicist J.D. Bernal, working for the Research and Experiments Department of the Ministry of Home Security, recommended him to help evaluate the impact of air attacks on Britain. Zuckerman specialized in

anatomy and had worked mainly with monkeys and apes at the London Zoological Society, before joining the University of Oxford. Interested in whether people in bomb shelters would suffer concussions from shockwaves during aerial bombardment, Bernal recruited Zuckerman and his monkeys for an experiment on Salisbury Plain in October 1939. A year later, as the Battle of Britain witnessed actual *Luftwaffe* attacks on British towns, Bernal and Zuckerman visited the site of a bombing attack to make further calculations.⁴

Soon Zuckerman, along with the Royal Air Force, turned his attention from defensive to offensive air operations. He was recruited to perform estimates of how to conduct bombing raids most efficiently—with a particular focus on killing people and damaging their homes, a practice that became known as “dehousing.” As he recalled in his memoir, “it turned out that in terms of the weight of bombs an aircraft could carry, the 50 kg bomb was the most potent casualty producer.” More small bombs rather than a single large bomb meant more targets attacked. Most damage came not directly from the bombs, but “secondary consequences,” such as flying debris if people were in their houses or near buildings, rather than protected in shelters. “Between us, Bernal and I had learnt as much about the effects of bombs as could be known at the time, short of having become victims ourselves... We became directly involved in the formulation of our own bombing policy.” Their own policy coincided with the official one well enough, as Zuckerman acknowledged when he quoted in his memoir the 14 February 1942 Cabinet directive to Bomber Command “to attack Germany ‘without restriction,’ the objective being to destroy ‘the morale of the enemy civilian population and in particular, of the industrial workers.’”⁵

That killing civilians was at the heart of British bombing policy for some key figures is clear from Zuckerman and others’ descriptions of the views of F.A. Lindemann (later Lord Cherwell). The physicist served as Churchill’s science adviser and was so fixated on bombing that he “even suggested that the building up of strong land forces for the projected invasion of France was wrong,” as Patrick Blackett, a physicist who worked on radar during the war, remembered Lindemann. “Never have I encountered such fanatical belief in the efficacy of bombing.”⁶ In Zuckerman’s words, Lindemann was “a powerful supporter of an area-bombing policy,” mainly directed at killing civilians; he generated many suggestions for how to do so, including deliberately destroying their living quarters.⁷ “The Prof,” as he was called,

got the idea that our aircraft should hail what I can only describe as sharp needles onto cities...Sometime later, he had an idea, which was dismissed by the Air Staff, that the German harvest could be disrupted by dropping small bombs, or steel spikes, among growing crops so as to interfere with the work of harvesting machines.

The Prof engaged Zuckerman in questions such as “how many tons of bombs does it take to break a town?”⁸

Zuckerman became a self-educated expert at answering such questions. His first assignment was to design a plan for an assault, slated for May 1942, on Alderney, a

German-held island off the coast of Normandy—a mission with little military purpose:

Since the island was within range of the big guns of [German-held] Cherbourg, it had never been intended to hold Alderney for more than some twenty-four hours and, as I understood it, the purpose of the operation was to boost British morale

and “show the Germans that we had no intention of leaving them unmolested.” The operation was cancelled. His next assignment was the key one: “Little more than six months later,” he writes, “I was called upon to apply the same variety of planning analysis, but in a more sophisticated way, to the Italian island of Pantelleria in the Mediterranean,” with the objective (note the unusual wording) “to capture the island of Pantelleria by bombing.”⁹

Many of Zuckerman’s ostensibly military-technical analyses incorporated factors related to the morale of soldiers or civilians. Because, in his view, “heavy bombers could not at that time be relied upon to aim accurately” enough to “neutralize pin-point targets such as gun-positions,” he advocated “plastering an area target with a sufficient number of bombs” to “destroy fixed defenses” and “seriously disturb enemy formations (a) directly, by causing casualties and damage to structures, and (b) indirectly, by its effect on morale.”¹⁰ In his proposal for Pantelleria, Zuckerman “referred to the possibility that the morale of the garrison might be broken by bombing.” He urged that the main batteries “should be attacked only with five-hundred-pound or thousand-pound bombs fused to go off a split second after impact.”¹¹ As Edith Rodgers writes in her definitive history, the attack on Pantelleria, dubbed Operation Corkscrew, would emphasize such bombing: The expectation was that “offensive air action and bombardment from the sea” would “break the resistance both of the garrison and of the civilian population to such an extent that a surrender would be attained before the launching of an assault by ground and naval forces.” Pantelleria came to be seen as “a test of the effectiveness of concentrated heavy bombardment.”¹²

“We do not bomb to scare people”

As we saw in Chapter One, during the first years of World War II, US political and military leaders did not favor giving priority to fighting in North Africa. Along with the USSR, they had pressed for opening a second front in Europe instead. The British Allies did not feel ready, however, and were reluctant to mount an operation in northwest France—still shaken, as they were, by memories of the previous war’s trench stalemate and the more recent narrow escape at Dunkirk in May/June 1940. So, the Americans had agreed to fight in North Africa (Operation Torch), then to invade Sicily (Operation Husky), and, finally, mainland Italy itself. The small island of Pantelleria became the focus of their planning, even before the campaign in Tunisia had ended.

Churchill had originally hoped that Germany could be defeated by massive bombing alone, after having been further weakened by revolts in the occupied

countries, such as Italy and the Balkans, provoked by Allied air attacks against their civilians.¹³ Even though his enthusiasm for strategic bombing found a welcome reception among like-minded officials in the US Army Air Forces (USAAF), they were unhappy about Operation Torch. General Henry (“Hap”) Arnold, commanding general of the USAAF, for example, “continued to consider it a diversion from the main business of bombing the sources of German war power.”¹⁴ Once that campaign had succeeded in defeating Axis forces in North Africa—and with the British still not ready to endorse redeployment to England to prepare for the invasion of France—a proposal emerged to conduct further operations in the Mediterranean, starting with a campaign against Sicily. “To that proposal,” according to the official history records, the USAAF representatives “registered vigorous objection,” maintaining that “the heart of Germany’s capacity to wage war is in Germany,” and “that a strategic bomber offensive alone could at the moment strike effectively at that objective, and that any unnecessary diversion which would reduce the effectiveness of the bomber offensive should not be undertaken.”¹⁵

The issue was resolved only at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, when President Franklin Roosevelt reluctantly accepted Churchill’s argument for delaying the second front.¹⁶

If there was general disappointment among the Americans over the decision in favor of the Mediterranean strategy, there was for the AAF cause for gratification in the simultaneous decision to mount the ‘heaviest possible bomber offensive against the German war effort.’¹⁷

Along with the Allies’ demand for “unconditional surrender” of the Axis belligerents—Roosevelt’s initiative—this decision ensured that the war would bring untold harm to civilians from aerial bombardment, despite FDR’s disclaimer: “we mean no harm to the common people of the Axis nations. But we do mean to impose punishment and retribution upon their guilty, barbaric leaders.”¹⁸ Punishing guilty leaders by bombardment without harming the civilian population was then, as now, an elusive task.

The first mission of the Mediterranean strategy was to drive the Axis forces from Sicily. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Allied commander-in-chief, “became increasingly impressed with the desirability of occupying Pantelleria and Lampedusa as a preliminary to such an undertaking,” according to a comprehensive USAAF history, as the two islands “virtually command the passage connecting the eastern and western basins of the Mediterranean, and serve as stepping stones to the Italian mainland.”¹⁹ The Axis powers used the islands as observation posts—one Italian account called them “two large eyes in the Mediterranean”—to detect Allied aircraft and “practically every ship that passed between them and the shores of North Africa.”²⁰ Allied “signal intercepts indicated that the Axis commanders were concentrating their air assets on Sardinia, Sicily and Pantelleria, and that as many as 795 aircraft (545 of which were German) might attack the invasion fleet.”²¹ A successful air attack and subsequent occupation of Sicily would require that the islands come under Allied control.

Pantelleria, thus, was “given first place in operations preliminary to the invasion of Sicily.”²² An island of volcanic rock, about 9 km wide and 14 long, Pantelleria boasted strong natural defenses, only one developed harbor, and few places suitable for amphibious landing. Starting in the mid-1920s, Mussolini initiated the building of fortifications, but Pantelleria never matched its description as an Italian Gibraltar or Malta, despite *il Duce*’s claims that it was impregnable.²³ Allied photographic reconnaissance revealed more than a hundred gun emplacements, “supplemented by pillboxes, machine-gun nests, and strongpoints scattered among the mountains and embedded in the faces of cliffs.”²⁴ Intelligence estimates put its defense force at about 10,000, including infantry battalions, machine-gun companies, and artillery units. The Allies judged the morale of the forces to be low, especially given that they would have recently learned of the defeat of Axis forces in North Africa.

As later observers put it, Operation Corkscrew was an experiment carried out under ideal conditions. Preliminary bombing raids conducted during the second week of May 1943 as the Tunisia campaign was finishing provoked little resistance. The main bombing campaign that began on 18 May encountered scarce opposition from Axis interceptor aircraft, but there were occasional reports of “severe

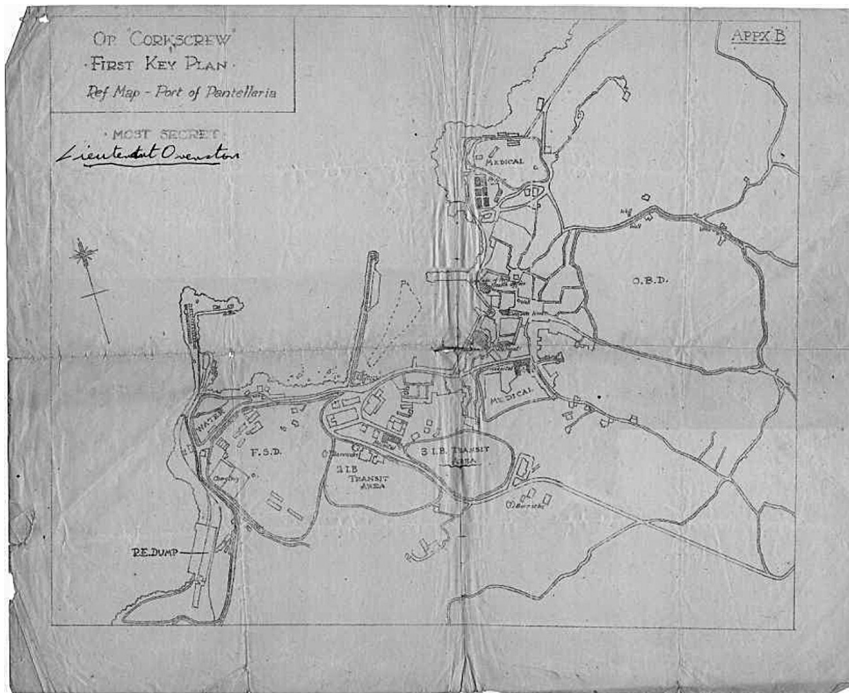


Figure 3.1 British map for Operation Corkscrew, the “reduction” of Pantelleria http://www.militarystory.org/declassified-the-reduction-of-pantelleria_8-may-4-june-1943/

antiaircraft fire from well-concealed gun positions on the island.”²⁵ The bombing itself consisted of two phases of increasing intensity. By the second phase, beginning on 7 June, “the island would be attacked around the clock, with an intensity growing from 200 sorties on the first day to 1,500 or 2,000 on the last.”²⁶

Even in descriptions devoted to details of military targets one can find allusion to civilian destruction, as in Rodgers’ report on Pantelleria: “pillboxes, trenches, breastworks, and other fortifications in the vicinity of the harbor would be affected by spill from attacks upon adjacent batteries, and from the night bombardment of the port and the town.”²⁷ On 29 May 1943, “84 tons of bombs were dropped on the island by medium and fighter-bombers, scoring hits in the area of the dock and the town, where fires and explosions were noted.”²⁸ Intense bombing continued with up to 200 tons dropped in a day. Between the beginning of the offensive on 18 May and the first days of June, Allied forces “were now reported to have plastered Pantelleria with approximately 1,339 tons of bombs—a tonnage that represented a pulverizing attack upon an island slightly less than half the size of Malta.”²⁹ On 8 June 1943, “a full-scale naval bombardment” was carried out “in conjunction with an attack on the western batteries by B-17’s—an onslaught of such weight that the little island appeared to observers to be lifted from the sea, and even the ships off shore were shaken violently.”³⁰ At that point planes were sent to drop leaflets over the airport, the public square, and the residence of the military governor to demand surrender within six hours. Other planes followed up by releasing “thousands of leaflets, informing both the garrison and the civilian population of the futility of further resistance and stating that, in the hope of sparing islanders the ordeal of continued bombings, a call to surrender had been made.”³¹ When no response was forthcoming, the attacks resumed, with 700 tons of bombs dropped on 8 June and 822 tons the next day.³² As an official British history described, “the island was battered day and night in a pitiless, unrelenting crescendo of violence.”³³

Vice Admiral Gino Pavesi, having obtained Mussolini’s permission to surrender the night before, did so on 11 June, just as the amphibious landing was underway.³⁴ The island had endured some 6,313 tons of bombs, about half a ton per inhabitant, most devoted to trying to destroy gun emplacements, although 743 tons were dropped on the town and harbor and 180 tons on airdromes.³⁵ Yet Pavesi was too late to ward off a massive attack of the B-17 Flying Fortresses, intended “to deliver a final air blow to the harbor area before the landing was made.” Rodgers described what happened next:

Turning in over their targets, the B-17’s showered tons of bombs upon the island. These struck, causing almost simultaneous flashes and a great roar. Suddenly the whole harbor area appeared to rise and hang in mid-air, while smoke and dust billowed high, dwarfing Montagna Grande, Pantelleria’s tallest peak.³⁶

What significance did Operation Corkscrew hold for subsequent harm to Italian civilians from bombing? The mission was exclusively military in the sense that the control of the island was required for further prosecution of the Allied campaign in the Mediterranean and the eventual invasion of Sicily and the Italian mainland.

Within the military operations themselves, psychological factors played an important role. Consistent with Clausewitz's notions of breaking the will of the enemy, demoralization of the troops figured prominently. As Zuckerman reported:

A hundred bombs falling within a hundred yards of a six-gun battery might fail to secure a single direct hit; yet their secondary effects might be completely to neutralize its guns. Bombs not only damaged the ground and the material and units which make up a battery; they also demoralized, and demoralization may play as big a part in silencing a battery as any other single factor.³⁷

Rodgers concurs: "Although the material damage to the guns was slight, it was thought that the bombing attacks had produced a profound effect psychologically...In fact, none of the batteries which had sustained heavy bombing opened fire on shipping during the landing."³⁸

Although the psychological effects of combat and the attempt to demoralize enemy forces fall well within conventional Clausewitzian notions of war, it is hard to mistake the impression that the impact on civilians also mattered—and this was a lesson that the proponents of strategic air power embraced. As Rodgers summarizes, in a close paraphrase of Zuckerman's report on the operation,

the demoralizing effects of the bombing both on military and civilian population gave rise to a fairly widespread view that the capitulation of Pantelleria was due almost entirely to the collapse of a poor-spirited garrison, and very little to the destruction of fixed defenses.³⁹

As Zuckerman himself wrote, "apart from the batteries, the most striking damage was to the town behind the port. For all practical purposes it had been wiped out, and all roads and communications leading from it and to it had been seriously affected."⁴⁰

It later became known that the military governor had requested Mussolini's permission to surrender long before he knew that an Allied invasion was impending, on grounds that the island was running out of water.⁴¹ Once Allied officers landed, they were unable to get in touch with Italian authorities for some time because "the intensity of the recent bombing had led Admiral Pavesi and his headquarters to seek refuge in the hills." The consequences of the bombing for civilian life in Pantelleria were devastating. "In the harbor area there appeared to be scarcely a square yard that did not show signs either of bombing or of shelling... The town was a shambles; the roads were obstructed by debris and, at some points, almost obliterated." The electric power plant and the water mains were destroyed. The "two principal wells of the town had been rendered useless in the early days of the offensive." The main stores of food had been "lost in the general destruction of Porto di Pantelleria," and the town "had been without food and water for three days."⁴² Zuckerman could now calculate the answer to how many tons of bombs it takes to break a town.

Unlike the strategic bombing of population centers elsewhere in Italy, not to mention in Germany and Japan, where casualties numbered in the thousands or

tens of thousands of civilians, the estimates for Pantelleria ranged between a hundred and two hundred killed and a further 200 wounded—probably mostly military. Allied observers interpreted the low figures “to mean that the battery crews had failed to remain at their posts, and that the civilian population had taken to cover or had fled to safer inland territory,” as interrogations of prisoners of war later confirmed.⁴³

Based on his own interviews with Italian soldiers after Pantelleria’s surrender, and analysis of the damage, Zuckerman found what he had expected: that the demoralization caused by the round-the-clock bombing of gun placements, the airfield, the port, and the town over a period of three weeks was the main cause of the island’s surrender. He reported accordingly to General Carl (“Tooey”) Spaatz, commander of the US Strategic Air Forces in Europe: “By common consent, the capture of the island was essentially due to the bombing.”⁴⁴ “Tooey was delighted,” wrote Zuckerman in his memoir, but “Tedder’s assessment of the whole experience was much more sober.” A number of factors—including air superiority, careful planning, and adequate resources—rendered Pantelleria a possibly atypical case, to put it generously. As Rodgers summarizes, Operation Corkscrew was “extremely costly in supplies such as gasoline, bombs, air crews, planes, and the vast organization needed to keep them in operation.”⁴⁵ Tedder, Zuckerman reports, was concerned “that false conclusions might be drawn from the Pantelleria operation.” Writing to Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, chief of the British air staff, Tedder called Pantelleria “a valuable laboratory experiment,” whose conditions were unlikely to be repeated: “no enemy air worthy of the name, an extremely limited objective and consequent ability to concentrate a terrific scale of effort on a very small area.” He complained that Eisenhower was eager to apply its lessons to Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, to the point that Tedder could “see Pantelleria becoming a perfect curse to us in this manner.”⁴⁶

But what were the lessons? Brookes writes that “Pantelleria became famous as the first instance of a substantial ground force surrendering to massive air power alone,” followed by the surrender of Lampedusa after a shorter bombing effort. “Such apparently clear examples of the successful effect of sustained air attack on morale were to be a source of great comfort to the Allies in the coming months.”⁴⁷ A more critical, if understated, view was offered by Marie Louise Berneri, a young British anarchist, from the perspective of her native Italy: “The methods of intensive bombing used at Pantelleria and in many important cities,” she wrote, “do not offer prospects for a very bright future for the Italian people.”⁴⁸

A week after Pantelleria’s surrender, 34-year old General Lauris Norstad, second-in-command to Carl Spaatz, downplayed the morale factor. In a meeting with journalists covering the Mediterranean campaign, Norstad emphasized the importance of precision bombing for military purposes. After distributing aerial photographs to the reporters, he said,

I think we have demonstrated that we bomb for military effect. We do not bomb to scare people. We’ve now reached the point where it is necessary to cut the enemy’s supply lines. We must achieve the destruction of enemy aircraft and bases.

He insisted that “bombardment from the air is a precise instrument” and “we are using it with precision methods. That is done in all cases. Precision bombing reached a peak at Pantelleria. We checked it every day. We checked it coldly and scientifically.”⁴⁹ As Chapter Two described, the next day, 19 July 1943, witnessed “the largest single bombing raid in history to date,” with more than 540 US aircraft dropping a thousand tons of bombs on airfields and rail marshaling yards in and around Rome.⁵⁰ Was it for military effect or to scare people?

“Confined to military objectives”

We know from Chapter Two that the civilian toll of the bombing of Rome was substantial: thousands of civilian casualties, as many as two or three thousand dead.⁵¹ We also know that the US press coverage of the attack was of two minds. It simultaneously played down the civilian harm—claiming that the bombing was “confined to military objectives, notably railway yards”—yet celebrated the psychological damage inflicted on ordinary Italians. The attack “was intended to be a blow at Italian morale as much as at railways and military installations.”⁵² The official US history of the Army Air Forces, published in 1949, acknowledges both the military (disrupting lines of communication) and political (creating an adverse effect on civilian morale) purposes of the attack, but incorrectly reports that, aside from the basilica, “nonmilitary objectives suffered only slight damage,” and it makes no mention of the thousands of civilian casualties.⁵³

Compounding the tragedy of the victims of the Rome bombing was the fact that many of them were refugees from previous Allied air raids. They were drawn to Rome by the expectation that the Vatican would be able to secure the city from destruction or, “to use the phraseology of the time,” that the “Pope’s umbrella” might “shelter Rome from the rain of bombs.”⁵⁴ “Everybody thinks Rome is safe,” explains Adele, in Alfred Hayes’ 1949 novel, *The Girl on the Via Flaminia*. “Yes,” the girl said. “The Pope protects us, doesn’t he?” “Well,” Adele said, “one must be grateful to the priests for something.”⁵⁵ Another young woman in the novel explains to an American soldier why she fled to Rome.

“You bombed Genoa,” she said, “and my father thought I would be safer in Rome.”

“Me?” he said. “I didn’t bomb Genoa.”

“Your countrymen.”

“Oh.”⁵⁶

According to the testimony of the survivors of the Rome raids, the attacks included not only the bombs themselves but also strafing by machine-gun fire directed at “people, animals, and things,” a practice familiar from previous attacks on Naples and elsewhere. The flyers themselves acknowledged these attacks, which they called “buzzing” or “buzz jobs.”⁵⁷ Harold Tittmann, the US diplomat based in Rome, described a report he received of how “an American pilot flying low over the outskirts of Naples, had deliberately machine-gunned civilians, particularly a bus filled with laborers.”⁵⁸ Novels of the war recount the same phenomenon, as in

John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano* (1944), when a character describes the state of his recently liberated town: "For three days we have not had bread...Some people are sick because the drivers of the water carts have not had the courage to get water for several days, because of the planes along the roads."⁵⁹ The practice of strafing Italian civilians continued throughout the war against the Germans in Italy, even after the Italians had surrendered.⁶⁰ In many respects the practices of bombing Italy to defeat carried over to the period of bombing Italy to liberation.

Thanks to the impressive research of scholars such as Gabrielle Gribaudi, we know of interest in the US air forces at the time for pursuing a British-style bombing campaign aimed at Italian civilians. The headquarters US Northwest African Strategic Air Force produced a report on 1 August 1943 for its commander, Major General J.H. (Jimmy) Doolittle, on "Psychological Bombardment Operation Designed to Drive Italy to Surrender." It bears quoting at length, given subsequent raids that Doolittle led:

It is firmly believed that now is the time for decisive blows to be dealt against the ragged nerves and crumbling morale of the Italian people, especially during this period of readjustment and reorganization caused by the collapse of Mussolini's regime. This can be done by properly displaying the devastating power of the Strategic Air Force. To make it even more impressive and terrifying, they should be given a list of specially selected Italian cities which are to be systematically isolated and totally destroyed. Operations against these cities should be periodic and spaced between other operations...These cities should be carefully selected so that all of Italy will feel the tremendous effect of such a war. This list should contain cities such as Rome, Naples, Florence, Genoa and Venice as these cities are nearest to the heart of the Italian people.⁶¹

Following the Armistice of September 1943, the Allies continued attacking Italian cities. The goal was to expel German forces from the peninsula and occupy Rome along the way. For the air forces, however, the methods seemed indistinguishable from those pursued when the goal was to destroy civilian morale and drive Italy out of the war.

Originally the Allies had expected to seize Naples quickly and then advance on Rome, just over 200 km to the north. Instead, the poorly planned landing at Salerno on 9 September was nearly turned back by fierce German resistance, as General Mark Clark, commander of the US Fifth Army, struggled to maintain a foothold. Naples was captured only on 1 October, at a cost of nearly 12,000 Allied casualties—killed, wounded, or missing.⁶²

Italian civilians suffered as well. Norman Lewis, a British army intelligence officer, observed the destruction firsthand. He was particularly critical of Clark's indiscriminate use of air power, although clearly General Doolittle shares responsibility. Lewis' diary entry for 4 October 1943 described

an opportunity for a close-quarters study of the effects of the carpet bombing ordered by General Clark. The General has become the destroying angel of

Southern Italy, prone to panic...and then to violent and vengeful reaction, which occasioned the sacrifice of the village of Altavilla, shelled out of existence because it might have contained Germans.

He described Battipaglia as “an Italian Guernica, a town transformed in a matter of seconds to a heap of rubble.”⁶³ The main attacks had taken place on 14 September, as the official US Air Force history explained, when medium and heavy bombers “divided their attention between roads leading into the Salerno area and German concentrations of troops and supplies in the Battipaglia–Eboli sector immediately behind the battle front.” The history concurs with Lewis’ assessment: “The towns of Battipaglia and Eboli were all but obliterated.”⁶⁴ That Doolittle deserves responsibility, and that his preference for such thorough destruction was well known, is revealed by the message General Spaatz conveyed to him after the bombing of Battipaglia: “You’re slipping Jimmy. There’s one crabapple tree and one stable still standing.”⁶⁵

Lewis provides an account of the human consequences that is usually missing from conventional military histories. In Battipaglia, for example,

an old man who came to beg said that practically nobody had been left alive, and that the bodies were still under the ruins. From the stench and from the sight of the flies streaming like black smoke into, and out of, the holes in the ground, this was entirely believable.⁶⁶

“Happily,” recorded Lewis,

no town had been large enough to warrant the General’s calling in his Flying Fortresses. The only visible damage to most villages had been the inevitable sack of the post office by the vanguard of the advancing troops, who seem to have been philatelists to a man.

Yet, all along the route to Naples, he encountered “grimy, war-husked towns.”

We made slow progress through shattered streets, past landslides of rubble from bombed buildings. People stood in their doorways, faces the colour of pumice, to wave mechanically to the victors, the apathetic Fascist salute of last week having been converted to the apathetic V-sign of today, but on the whole the civilian mood seemed one of stunned indifference.⁶⁷

In Naples, the destruction of civilians and their property—combined with the Germans’ scorched earth retreat—shocked the Allied troops liberating the city.

There are many reliable accounts of the damage, but Lewis’ diary entry for 6 October 1943 is particularly affecting:

The city of Naples smells of charred wood, with ruins everywhere, sometimes completely blocking the streets, bomb craters and abandoned trams. The main problem is water. Two tremendous air-raids on August 4 and September 6 smashed up all the services, and there has been no proper water supply since

the first of these. To complete the Allies' work of destruction, German demolition squads have gone round blowing up anything of value to the city that still worked. Such has been the great public thirst of the past few days that we are told that people have experimented with sea-water in their cooking, and families have been seen squatting along the seashore round weird contraptions with which they hope to distil sea-water for drinking purposes.⁶⁸

Famine was widespread. "Inexplicably," Lewis wrote on 9 October, "no boats were allowed out yet to fish," presumably for some security-related reason. By this point, "all the tropical fish in Naples's celebrated aquarium" had been consumed

in the days preceding the liberation, no fish being spared however strange and specialised in its appearance and habits. All Neapolitans believe that at the banquet offered to welcome General Mark Clark—who had expressed a preference for fish—the principal course was a baby manatee, the most prized item of the aquarium's collection, which was boiled and served with a garlic sauce.⁶⁹

Following the liberation of Naples on 1 October 1943 the Allies would need another eight months and four major offensives from the West to break through the Gustav Line and reach Rome. Air attacks in support of the Allied offensive, while immensely destructive to Italian civilian property and lives, sometimes proved counterproductive even for military purposes. The controversial bombing of the 14th century Benedictine abbey at Monte Cassino (founded in 529) and the flattening of the town of Cassino by artillery and air strikes constitute prime examples. For some observers, these practices gave rise to the suspicion, which we have already encountered in the views of General Patton and the British physicist Blackett, that air power advocates were more interested in promoting the autonomy and prestige of their service than achieving meaningful military results.

Historians have established that, contrary to widespread assumptions at the time, the Germans were not using the abbey as a reconnaissance position. Instead, having acceded to the request of the abbot, they had largely evacuated the premises. In their place, the monastery became crowded with refugees. Allied soldiers, however, continued to assume their enemy was using it as a command post (CP). Because the Germans held the high ground, the Allies were suffering tremendous losses—and they blamed the monastery. As Daniel Petruzzi, a US soldier from Pennsylvania who fought in the campaign alongside members of the 36th Infantry Division from Texas, recorded in his diary on 31 January 1944, "tonight's discussion centered mostly on the order from 5th Army not to shell the monastery at Monte Cassino." Referring to army intelligence, the entry continues: "G-1 told us [that] Chief of Staff had announced Germans were using it for CP. And yet it can't be bombed or shelled. All of our boys have [lost] or will lose their lives therefore."⁷⁰ A later entry revised that information, based on the report of a German prisoner who claimed "monastery was being used periodically for CP but orders were against using it." He reported that military police "were guarding it to prevent soldiers from using it."⁷¹

Despite such reports, the Allied commander, New Zealand General Bernard Freyberg, insisted that, for reasons of morale alone, the air forces should destroy

the abbey.⁷² As Herman Chanowitz, former captain in the 2nd Tactical Air Communications Squadron, put it in an interview in 2005, “he was convinced there were guys up there who could see everything.” But, Chanowitz sensibly pointed out, “hell, you didn’t have to sit in the abbey to see what was going on. There were mountains all around that would show you the whole valley.”⁷³ Nevertheless, overcoming the initial reluctance of General Clark, Freyberg succeeded in having the abbey destroyed by mid-February 1944. Chanowitz, a witness to the bombing, recalls some unexpected consequences:

There was 50% cloud cover. We made mistakes, we mistook targets. We had a hospital not too far away in a town called Venafrò. We bombed the hell out of that, and we bombed the hell out of a lot of other places, not knowing from the air that they were Americans, visibility being what it was. Of course, we bombed the hell out of the Abbey.⁷⁴

Once the Allies violated the sanctuary of the monastery, the Germans were ready to put it to use for their defense. As General Clark had predicted, “the ruins of a demolished building would be more defensible” than an intact one, because the rubble provided a protected place from which to fire.⁷⁵ In fact, Freyberg did not immediately attack the monastery, but delayed for eight days while focusing his attention on Cassino, thereby giving the Germans more than a week to dig in. As Chanowitz recalled,

the English had the Gurkhas with them and the Gurkhas started to go up, but the Germans had booby-trapped everything. They had trip-wires everywhere. All [the bombing] did was make it more difficult for the Gurkhas to try to get up, and they didn’t succeed at all.⁷⁶

The same situation resulted from the Allied destruction of the town of Cassino. Atkinson suggests that some of the impetus came from the air force leadership. “The use of airpower to bludgeon a hole through the Gustav Line found favor with Hap Arnold, the Army Air Forces chief, whose cables from Washington had become increasingly shrill.” Was it not possible, Arnold asked, to “break up every stone in the town behind which a German soldier might be hiding?” Such an attack “could really make air history,” he wrote. “The whole future of the air forces is closely knit into this whole problem.” Atkinson writes that “behind Arnold’s military advice lay a larger political calculus: Air Force success in breaking the impasse at Cassino would strengthen his campaign to make the service independent of the U.S. Army.”⁷⁷

The Air Force strategy, consistent with the attack on Battipaglia, was to pulverize the town.

“The object of the attack,” each flight crew had been told, “is to accomplish [the] complete reduction of Cassino town.” To terrorize German defenders, the lead squadrons were advised to “attach whistling devices”—known as screamers—“to as many bombs as practicable.” The planes carried only thousand-pound blockbusters, with fuses set to detonate at basement depth.⁷⁸

Despite the bombing—actually, because of the rubble created by the bombing—the head of the German paratroopers deployed in the city was “convinced that he held an impregnable redoubt” and that Cassino was now “ideally situated from a defensive standpoint.” As Atkinson describes, dust-caked paratroopers dug out of the rubble, stood to arms, then dug back in to prepare for the inevitable Allied assault. Sappers shored up the sagging ceilings in cellars...The conversion of Cassino from crossroads market town to stand-or-die citadel was complete.⁷⁹

The planned pace of one hundred yards’ advance every ten minutes slowed to one hundred yards an hour. A squadron of Sherman tanks also trundled into Cassino, pitching up and down across the rubble “like a flotilla headed into a stormy sea,” as the New Zealand official history described it. Crews dismounted with picks and shovels to clear the road for a few yards’ advance only to find bomb craters so deep, so wide, and so plentiful that sappers would have to build bridges across them—some as long as seventy feet. After surveying the pocked landscape, now lashed with plunging fire from Monte Cassino’s east face, Kiwi engineers calculated that they would need two days to bulldoze a path to the town center, even in peacetime.⁸⁰

Thus, even though its leaders “continued to talk as if the Air Force had unlocked the gates of Rome,” the destruction of Cassino had made the advance of the ground forces more difficult.⁸¹ “The Allies eventually occupied the town,” writes Robert Ehlers, “but the price was too high, and they could not achieve a breakthrough.” He puts the “decision to bomb Cassino and the abbey at Monte Cassino” in the context of a choice General Eisenhower had made between preserving the monastery and “reducing Allied casualties. Nonetheless,” Ehlers contends, “it was a sad and ultimately ineffective operation not worthy of the brave men who fought and died in it... Air assets had engaged in one of the largest bombing raids of the campaign, and it did no good.”⁸²

In undertaking the assault on Cassino, “bombardiers had no aim points other than a quarter-mile radius around Cassino’s heart.” Moreover, “flight leaders had flown no previous reconnaissance of the area.” These two factors combined to produce serious mistakes, including the bombing of French military headquarters, the US 8th Army command post, “the 4th Indian Division, the 3rd Algerian Division, a Moroccan military hospital, and a Polish bivouac.”

In a dozen incidents of imprecision during a two-hour period, nearly 100 Allied soldiers died and another 250 were wounded; in Venafro alone as many as 75 civilians were killed...Through inexperience and “careless navigation,” aircrews mistook Venafro, Isernia, Pozzilli, Montaquila, and Cervaro for Cassino.⁸³

The civilian toll of the attack on the abbey was around 250, mainly refugees who had fled there for shelter from the ongoing catastrophe.⁸⁴ In Cassino itself, about one in ten residents died from the Allied attacks, more than two thousand out of a prewar population of some 20,000.⁸⁵



Figure 3.2 The destruction of Cassino gave the entrenched Germans an advantage and made it difficult for the Allies to get through.

Pen and Sword Books, Getty Images.

Numbers of casualties only begin to tell the story of the toll on civilians, because they fail to include the thousands who contracted typhoid fever when the sanitation systems of cities such as Naples were destroyed, or the tens of thousands who became homeless refugees, or those whose destroyed homes were looted by the Germans, the Allies, or their own neighbors.⁸⁶ Eric Linklater, the official historian of the British War Office, was stationed in Italy in 1944. He later described the swath of destruction in his novel, *Private Angelo*:

The pleasant little towns along the Appian Way had suffered, quite suddenly, such a change in their appearance as could only have been effected—without the help of science—by long eras of disaster. Our age of steel and explosives had shown itself very like the Ice Age in its ability to alter the face of a landscape, create lacunae, and remove excrescences. Wedding-chamber and warm kitchen, the smithy and the grocer's shop and the notary's office had been reduced to rags and dusty rubble by a stick of bombs that caught the sunlight as they fell. With a huff and a puff the metallurgist and the chemist had blown away the long toil of many simple masons, and whole families who had spent their arduous and patient years in the growing of corn and wine had vanished in a little acrid smoke. A bridge that had served a thousand needs, and many thousand brisk and busy people, and filled its valley with arcs of beauty and

proud columns, had been demolished with boisterous success by a cartload of guncotton ... Of all the triumphs that had marched the Appian Way none had so spaciouly shown the enormity of human power as this great spectacle of destruction; and the pity was that the refugees could not appreciate it as it deserved. The refugees were unimpressed by the march and the majesty of science. They were thinking only about their homes. Tired as they were, and stumbling under their burdens, they hurried on towards their abandoned villages with hope in their straining muscles, hope in their bright eyes. And when they came to their villages they sat down and wept.

“All these people,” observed his hero, Angelo, “have been liberated and now they have nowhere to live.”⁸⁷

Eight months of fighting, from the Allies’ arrival in Naples in October 1943 to the liberation of Rome on 4 June 1944 had cost the lives of some 43,000 Allied soldiers (German losses were estimated at 38,000).⁸⁸ Why was capturing the Eternal City considered so crucial? President Roosevelt, in his speech announcing the fall of Rome to the US public on 5 June, acknowledged the fact that taking the Italian capital was hardly a military necessity: “From a strictly military standpoint,” he pointed out,

we had long ago accomplished certain of the main objectives of our Italian campaign—the control of the islands—the major islands—the control of the sea lanes of the Mediterranean to shorten our combat and supply lines, and the capture of the airports, such as the great airports of Foggia, south of Rome, from which we have struck telling blows on the continent.

Rome was important for its symbolic value. “The first of the Axis capitals is now in our hands,” declared the president. “One up and two to go!”⁸⁹

Paradoxically, the decision to bomb Rome may well have contributed to the difficulty and cost of conquering it. According to some accounts, diversion of bombers from the still-incomplete Sicilian campaign to attack Rome on 19 June and especially on 13 August 1943 allowed Axis forces to evacuate the island from Messina. General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, commander of the German 10th Army, wrote that “it would not have been possible to offer effective resistance on the Italian mainland south of Rome” if the Axis forces fleeing Sicily had been captured.⁹⁰ The Allies did not anticipate the evacuation. Atkinson claims there was little sense of urgency about Messina as an escape route:

Of ten thousand sorties flown by bombers and fighter-bombers in the Mediterranean from late July to mid-August, only a quarter hit targets around Messina... as the Axis evacuation intensified on August 13, the entire Flying Fortress fleet was again bombing Rome’s rail yards.⁹¹

The Axis powers evacuated 40,000 German and 70,000 Italian soldiers, along with “ten thousand vehicles—more than they had brought to Sicily, thanks to unbridled pilferage—and forty-seven tanks,” a good basis for repelling the Allied landing and advance up the peninsula.⁹² Within a couple of months, with the announcement

of the Armistice on 8 September, the evacuated Italian soldiers—those who failed to escape—would be rounded up and disarmed by the Germans and forced into work brigades or shipped in freight cars to Germany. Yet the Germans still managed to hold Rome for nearly a year after they retreated from Sicily.

The Anatomist versus the Economists

As we have seen, much of the Allied air campaign following the Italian surrender was focused on defeating German forces blocking the route to Rome. In addition to the attacks against urban centers, such as Eboli, Battipaglia, and Cassino, Allied air forces targeted militarily relevant objects elsewhere in missions of close air support and what British air planners called “general air support.” The first referred to “the immediate availability of aircraft to attack and destroy, in response to army requests, targets engaging or being engaged by the forward troops, thereby improving the tactical situation of the moment.” The second

was defined as the attacking of targets not in close proximity to friendly troops but immediately behind the battlefield, in order to hamper the fighting capabilities of the enemy’s front-line troops. Such attacks included the blocking of road and rail links, the demolition of bridges and tunnels, and transport supplying the front line.⁹³

Normally air officials preferred to leave tactical support to the army’s own artillery forces and to pursue targets further to the rear. During the early days of the invasion of Sicily, General George Patton complained in his diary that “our air force is the poorest set of people we have, and is wholly uninterested in ground support.”⁹⁴ If they could not get their first choice of massive bombing of German cities, and they avoided ground support of the army, the air forces would have to settle for other targets in Italy. Much of the debate among British and US advisers concerned which targets those should be.

Planners put primary emphasis on disrupting lines of communication, mainly the rail system. Operation Strangle, for example, carried out during the period 19 March to 11 May 1944, was intended to reduce supplies to German forces defending the Gustav Line south of Rome by cutting rail traffic north of Rome in anticipation of a resumption of ground combat during the subsequent Operation Diadem. Or, even better, as air commanders initially hoped, Strangle might cause the collapse of German forces through air power alone, following the Pantelleria precedent. Yet operations such as Strangle were highly destructive of civilian life and property, even if the goal was denial of supplies to ground forces. Why? The figure of Solly Zuckerman again looms large in any explanation.⁹⁵

During the war, many in the Allied political and military command believed that disrupting railroad traffic could speed the defeat of Axis forces by hindering reinforcements. Yet fierce disagreements erupted between advisers to the US and British commands about how to do so. On one side was Zuckerman, who favored attacking marshaling yards and transportation nodes within cities, at the cost of extensive harm to civilian lives and property (but less, he argued, than

indiscriminate area bombing would cause). On the other side were US advisers, members of the Enemy Objectives Unit (EOU), based at the US Embassy in London.⁹⁶ Its analysts, including such later prominent economists as Carl Kaysen, Charles Kindleberger, and Walt W. Rostow, claimed that destroying rail bridges, tunnels, and viaducts *outside* cities would be more effective than attacking marshaling yards *within* cities, as it would take longer to rebuild bridges than to re-route tracks or reconfigure damaged junctions.⁹⁷

Within a couple of years of the end of World War II, as soon as military historians managed to analyze the data, it became known that Zuckerman's strategy of attacking cities had failed. Yet in his 1978 memoir Zuckerman termed his strategy "an outstanding success" and described its origins:

My quick survey of the Sicilian railway records already pointed to the clear conclusion that the more we concentrated our bombing attacks on those nodal points in the system which regulated major traffic, and which were responsible for the maintenance of rolling-stock, the greater the return in terms of dislocation of the movement of troops and military supplies.⁹⁸

Thanks to his bombing strategy, "the Sicilian and Southern Italian rail systems had become practically paralysed by the end of July 1943—and as a result of attacks on only six railway centres [i.e., cities], Naples, Foggia, San Giovanni, Reggio, Messina, Palermo." In a report of December 1943 prepared for Air Marshal Tedder, Zuckerman persuaded his boss that "the most economic way to disrupt communications was not to cut [rail] lines, but to attack large railway centres which contain important repair facilities and large concentrations of locomotives and rolling-stock."⁹⁹ In a directive of 24 December 1943, as one of Zuckerman's critics reports, Tedder accordingly "banned the bombing (by either American or British air forces) of *all* targets within either of these two categories"—the marshaling yards favored by the British anatomist or the bridges favored by the US economists—"throughout Italy, except for seven rail-center" yards in cities "in the central and far northern reaches of the country. These were mostly far behind the front, which then was slowly approaching Cassino."¹⁰⁰

In retrospect, evidence supports the views of Zuckerman's critics that city bombing was less effective than destroying bridges in both the battle for Rome and the operations in France in advance of the Normandy invasion. "The essential point," according to a careful analysis of the competing positions, is

that only one railroad track is needed to bring up troops, tanks, and supplies. Such a track can be reopened in a few hours through a bombed-out marshaling yard, whereas weeks normally are required to reconstruct a collapsed heavy railway bridge, 11 weeks in the case of the Recco Viaduct in Italy.¹⁰¹

Even the bombing of the rail yards of Rome on 19 July 1943 demonstrated the weaknesses of Zuckerman's strategy. The official history described how "almost the entire strategic air force in the Mediterranean was sent against Rome in one of the most significant operations of the war." It reported that "at both Lorenzo and

Littorio the yards were out of action,” but it cautioned that “the effect of the damage should be viewed in conjunction with the raid of 17 July on the Naples yards.” The combined result of these devastating and costly attacks on two major rail centers? They “prevented for *at least several days* the movement of Axis troops and supplies by rail from central to southern Italy”—after which the tracks were repaired and reopened.¹⁰²

For most operations, the repairs were completed within hours. Precisely this argument was made against Zuckerman’s strategy in the planning for Operation Strangle by none other than the commanding general of the MAAF, General Ira C. Eaker. He wrote:

All our experience in attacks on communications in this theater has shown that even the most successful bombardment of a marshaling yard does not cut traffic for more than a few hours. Attacks on marshaling yards are valuable more because they destroy concentrations of goods, rolling stock and repair facilities. We have found that a more permanent way to cut lines is by attacks on bridges and viaducts which are more difficult to repair.¹⁰³

Zuckerman claimed such targets were “uneconomic and difficult” and “in general do not appear to be worth attacking.”¹⁰⁴ He based his claim on the assumption that heavy and medium bombers would be targeting the bridges, but the MAAF used fighter-bombers, which carried a lighter payload, yet yielded a much higher success rate.¹⁰⁵

Zuckerman was simply wrong on the effectiveness of his preferred strategy. As F.M. Sallagar’s valuable analysis of Operation Strangle reports,

we have it on the authority of the German officer in charge of the Italian Transport System that traffic from and to Germany was slowed but never stopped because of the bombing of marshaling yards in northern Italy. Damage to the yards was repaired quickly since the location of the attacks could be anticipated and the Germans had assembled repair crews and material near the threatened spots.¹⁰⁶

Zuckerman had emphasized more the effects of damaging rolling stock and locomotives than tracks and rail yards per se. Yet here his strategy also fell short. According to Brookes, at the end of February 1944, the Intelligence Section of the MAAF

was reporting that the Germans were building locomotives in such numbers throughout occupied Europe that they could ‘afford to send into Italy each day the numbers of locomotives required to haul the 15 trains of military supplies to the front, and discard each locomotive at the end of the haul.’¹⁰⁷

Intelligence analysts noted that “in the 19 weeks since the capture of Naples, Allied bombers (all types) have dropped a total of 8,258 tons of bombs on 47 marshaling yards without critically weakening the enemy supply position.”¹⁰⁸

A basic problem with Zuckerman's strategy, according to Brookes, is that "there were not many marshalling yards in Italy which satisfied both" of Zuckerman's conditions—that the centers "contain important repair facilities and large concentrations of locomotives and rolling stock."¹⁰⁹ Atkinson calculated a higher number of significant marshaling yards, but claimed that any damage done to them was "easy to either fix or circumvent."¹¹⁰

The shortcomings of Zuckerman's approach received criticism at the time and were described in historical accounts immediately after the war. Ironically, a broader public became aware of them in the late 1970s, when Zuckerman sought to defend his strategy and attack his critics in his memoirs, and the critics mounted a devastating counterattack. Kindleberger and Rostow highlighted the fact that Zuckerman's advocacy of attacks on urban marshaling yards was based on rather flimsy and limited analysis, especially for someone who touted the merits of his scientific approach. Zuckerman had interviewed Italian railroad personnel and consulted their records after the invasion of Sicily; he drew the conclusion that the destruction of engines and other rolling stock concentrated in marshaling yards and repair centers had hindered the Axis armies' transport. "But science rests on controlled experiments," wrote Kindleberger, "not observation of separate events in isolation. The Italian railroad service was less than enthusiastic in its repair efforts on behalf of the Germans." Regarding Zuckerman's rejection of the proposal to attack bridges, Kindleberger argued that "it was a serious mistake of Zuckerman to insist that railroad bridges could not be destroyed, as shown by Italian experience, when it was not tried."¹¹¹ Kindleberger also took Zuckerman to task for a style of interviewing that depended on leading questions to elicit the answers he favored. At a meeting in February 1944, which Kindleberger attended,

Zuckerman asked the British railroad 'practical men' how they would like it if the German Air Force dropped a thousand tons of bombs on their yards; and they had said they would not like it at all. When I asked how long would it take before they could get a train through, the reply was 'a few hours.'¹¹²

Zuckerman the anatomist had "likened the railway network to a nervous system, damage to any part of which would affect the whole."¹¹³ In fact, the Germans were so adept at repairing, replacing, or working around so many of the damaged parts, that the analogy was inapt—unless to the nervous system of a starfish or a salamander.

The Germans had the most trouble restoring destroyed bridges, a target Zuckerman considered not worth attacking. Rostow recalled that he and his colleagues read Zuckerman's

'Sicily Report' with great care in early 1944 and decided—on the basis of its text as opposed to its summary and conclusions—that the bombing of bridges had been quite efficient. They buttressed their view with later evidence flowing from the Mediterranean where bridge bombing was systematically undertaken in the early months of 1944, after the departure of Tedder and Zuckerman for London.

The EOU economists recalculated Zuckerman's assessment of the requirements for disabling bridges and found he had overestimated them: he had made a "more than five-fold error in interpreting the empirical evidence of the Italy and Sicily campaigns."¹¹⁴ Zuckerman had studied attacks on only 35 bridges, and found only a 20 percent probability of success at blocking them given a certain bomb load per plane.¹¹⁵ Harry Lytton, an intelligence analyst with MAAF during the war and an opponent of the Zuckerman/Tedder approach, observed that

it is perilous to stick with *statistical probabilities*, based on fleeting, early data, for bridge attacks originally carried out by heavy bombers and expect them to be a better policy guide for the future than *actual results* obtained in that future (five to seven months later) by fighter bombers, making lower flying, more sophisticated, more accurate strikes.¹¹⁶

Lytton refers to the period October–November 1943, when a temporary decision was made to attack rail bridges. According to the official history,

damage was widespread, almost all rail traffic north of the Rome area being interdicted pending extensive repairs. The enemy was forced to resort to an increased use of motor transport and coastal shipping—which in turn were attacked by light and fighter-bombers.¹¹⁷

The campaign had been so effective that an Italian general, the main liaison to the German military command, told the Allies that the "Germans were 'mentally preparing themselves' for a withdrawal to above Rome—and might well have done so had not the Allies abandoned the program before the end of November because of other commitments and bad weather."¹¹⁸ The "other commitments" were mainly Zuckerman's preferred urban marshaling yards.

Operation Strangle offered the clearest evidence of the benefits of attacking bridges rather than railroad yards in cities. Zuckerman lost out in his bid to focus entirely on the latter category. By the time the operation "was no more than two weeks old," described the official history, General "Eaker reported that experience had shown the best way to cut lines of communication was by attacks on bridges and viaducts...The bridge-busting campaign justified the expectations of its proponents."¹¹⁹

Rostow pointed out that Tedder himself, in his memoir, acknowledged his mistake regarding rail and road bridges, not based on the temporary experiment in Italy, but only later in France once the Allies began bombing such targets during the Normandy campaign. Tedder wrote: "Though expert opinion, with which I had concurred, had earlier held these targets to be relatively unprofitable for attack, our bomber crews now surpassed even their own high standards."¹²⁰

Unfortunately Tedder's rejection of Zuckerman's "expert opinion" came too late to spare the thousands of French and Italian civilians who perished in the bombing of urban rail yards.¹²¹ And despite the opposition of such leading figures as General Eaker, the competition between the proponents of attacking urban marshaling yards and those who advocated bombing bridges "ended in a

compromise when it was decided to treat the Italian rail network as a target *system* and to attack all elements of the system, including marshaling yards, bridges, tunnels, defiles, and even open stretches of track.”¹²² That compromise cost many thousands of civilian lives, a fact that some of Zuckerman’s critics recognized at the time, but has become even clearer in retrospect.¹²³

Air Force autonomy and civilian harm in light of the Italian campaign

In planning Operation Strangle, the Allied air forces were in a strong position to carry out an “experiment,” not unlike at Pantelleria, to demonstrate just what air power could do. “In the Italian theater the MAAF had achieved not just air superiority but air supremacy.” Bolstered by such an advantageous position, the MAAF declared as its objective on 19 March 1944 “to reduce the enemy’s flow of supplies to a level which will make it impractical for him to maintain and operate his forces in Central Italy.” As Sallagar pointed out, “if this directive is to be interpreted literally, it meant that the German withdrawal from the GUSTAV Line was to be achieved *through air action alone*, without the need for ground fighting”—every airman’s dream.¹²⁴ Two months later, after the punishing German defenses had cost the Allies tens of thousands of casualties on the road to take Rome, MAAF faced the reality that it could not beat such a foe on its own, and acted as if it had never made such a claim.¹²⁵

Even the more limited version of the experiment—to reduce German supplies to hinder the *Wehrmacht*’s ground operations—failed to produce the desired results. According to Sallagar’s careful analysis of German-language materials, “the outstanding fact to emerge from the German records is that *there were no critical supply shortages, either during STRANGLE or even during DIADEM*,” the subsequent operation.¹²⁶ In fact, General Clark, chief of the US Fifth Army in Italy, drew the same conclusion:

Our Air Force blasted the mountain tunnels in northern Italy, bombed railways through narrow passes, and performed other modern miracles of destruction. It hurt the enemy without question, but it never kept him from reinforcing or supplying his Italian armies up to the very end of the war.¹²⁷

Sallagar did not argue, however, that the Allied air strategy was completely ineffective. On the contrary, it contributed to victory for unexpected reasons, by disrupting German tactical mobility on the battlefield. Not surprisingly, Sallagar concluded that “now that the results of the campaign are available to us, it is clear that mobility denial and not supply denial should have been the objective from the beginning.” In that case,

the interdiction campaign would have been designed from the start with the needs of the ground offensive in mind, while the ground operations would have been planned so as to provide lucrative targets for air attack and to take advantage of the fleeting effects of interdiction upon the enemy’s tactical mobility.¹²⁸

Sallagar's 1972 report, prepared for what was still known then as United States Air Force Project Rand, was bad news for proponents of independent strategic air operations of the sort that Solly Zuckerman and the top leadership of the US and British air forces favored: concentrated bombing of fixed targets in cities, without need for coordination with other armed services. Even the competing strategy advocated by the US economists to interdict lines of communication by destroying distant bridges in an attempt to "isolate the battlefield" Sallagar found useless against an enemy who could adapt, improvise, and make do with less. Sallagar's findings were inconvenient to Air Force officials who prize autonomy and independence of their service above all else and who act as if wars can be won by air power alone. Instead, he argued that aerial bombardment must be integrated with and serve the needs of a ground offensive if it is to contribute to military victory.¹²⁹

As the previous chapters described, the Allied bombing campaign against Italy pursued a number of objectives over time and a combination of strategies, as Italy's status changed. Attacks against urban industrial centers such as Turin, Milan, and Genoa were intended to destroy armament plants while demoralizing workers. The bombing of Rome combined the military goal of disrupting rail transport with the political goal of terrorizing civilians to push them to overthrow Mussolini and then force his successor to surrender. Moreover, even missions that seemed strictly military—such as defeating the garrison at Pantelleria, interdicting urban rail traffic, or breaking through the Gustav Line by demolishing Cassino and the nearby monastery—reflected a focus on psychological factors and an objective of demoralization through the terrorizing effects of concentrated bombardment that inevitably harmed civilians, even if they were not the main target.

This chapter has focused on the peculiar case of Solly Zuckerman. An anatomist, whose work with chimpanzees first led to his involvement in military affairs, he seemed oblivious to the damage his strategies inflicted on thousands of civilians, and he stubbornly opposed more effective options that might have spared them. Zuckerman's seeming indifference to civilian suffering perhaps owes to the fact that his original recruitment as a military adviser coincided with the first phase of the war, when such figures as Winston Churchill and F.A. Lindemann were promoting strategies, such as "dehousing," that deliberately harmed ordinary working-class families while claiming to pursue military objectives (e.g., destroying factories near the workers' houses). In the first phase, Italians were treated as enemies to be terrorized into surrender. In the second phase, they were ostensibly friends to be liberated. Yet for British and US air forces, the preferred instrument during both phases was strategic bombing, so it is not surprising that the outcome—high civilian casualties—remained the same.

Notes

- 1 *London Gazette*, supplement, 8 October 1943, 4508 and 12 October 1943, 4570.
- 2 Henry D. Lytton, "Bombing Policy in the Rome and Pre-Normandy Campaigns: Bridge-Bombing Strategy Vindicated – And Railyard-Bombing Strategy Invalidated," *Military Affairs*, vol. 47, no. 2 (1983), 57, n. 19. Lytton writes "vice" rather than "chief," but this seems to misremember Tedder's rank.

- 3 US Library of Congress, George S. Patton Papers: Diaries, 1910–1945; Annotated transcripts; 1943–1945; 9 May 1943.
- 4 Solly Zuckerman, *From Apes to Warlords* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 113, 132.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 137–140.
- 6 P.M.S. Blackett, *Studies of War, Nuclear and Conventional* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1962), 124. For a thorough discussion of Lindemann's promotion of his strategy despite extensive criticism of its technical assumptions from Blackett, Bernal, and others, see Andrew Brown, *J.D. Bernal: The Sage of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapter Ten, "Bombing Strategy."
- 7 Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Penguin, 2014), Apple ebook version, 1988.
- 8 Zuckerman, *Apes to Warlords*, 140–141.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 156, 182–183.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 179.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 186.
- 12 Edith C. Rodgers, *The Reduction of Pantelleria and Adjacent Islands, 8 May–14 Jun 1943*, Army Air Forces Historical Studies, No. 52, Air Historical Office Headquarters, Army Air Forces, May 1947, 8–11.
- 13 See especially, the chapters on Bulgaria and Italy in Overy, *Bombing War*.
- 14 Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (hereafter, *AAFWWII*), vol. 2, *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 276.
- 15 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 284–285.
- 16 Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007); John Grigg, *1943: The Victory That Never Was* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980).
- 17 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 301.
- 18 Radio address, 12 February 1943, *The Public Papers of F.D. Roosevelt*, vol. 12, 71.
- 19 Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 1–2.
- 20 Marco Gioannini and Giulio Massobrio, *Bombardate l'Italia: storia della guerra di distruzione aerea, 1940–1945* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2007), 299; Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 1–2.
- 21 Andrew J. Brookes, *Air War over Italy* (Sittingbourne, UK: Ian Allan Publishing, 2000), 10.
- 22 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 419.
- 23 *Ibid.*; Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 4–6; Gioannini and Massobrio, *Bombardate*, 298.
- 24 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 421.
- 25 Toward the end of the bombing campaign some Axis fighters had been deployed, but the resistance "seemed only half-hearted." Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 20, 38 (for the quotation in the text); Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 426–427.
- 26 Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 18.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 30.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 33–34.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 35–36.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Eric Linklater, *The Campaign in Italy* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1951), 20.
- 34 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 429.
- 35 Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 99, n. 15.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 37 Quoted in John Peyton, *Solly Zuckerman: A Scientist out of the Ordinary* (London: John Murray, 2001), 43.
- 38 Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 64.

- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Zuckerman, *Apes to Warlords*, 194.
- 41 Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 45. Gioannini and Massobrio, *Bombardate*, 303, claim that Pavesi's information was false, but do not provide a citation.
- 42 Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 46–47, 61; Linklater, *Campaign*, 21.
- 43 Ibid., 59. Gioannini and Massobrio, *Bombardate*, 303, suggest an even lower number of deaths, 40, but provide no source.
- 44 Zuckerman, *Apes to Warlords*, 195.
- 45 Rodgers, *Pantelleria*, 69.
- 46 Zuckerman, *Apes to Warlords*, 195–196. For more on Pantelleria as a “curse,” see F.M. Sallagar, *Operation “Strangle” (Italy, Spring 1944): A Case Study of Tactical Air Interdiction*, US Air Force Project Rand Report R-851-PR, February 1972, 20–23.
- 47 Brookes, *Air War*, 13.
- 48 Marie Louise Berneri, “Liberating’ Italy with Bombs,” *War Commentary* (June 1943), reprinted in her *Neither East Nor West: Selected Writings 1939–1948* (London: Freedom Press, 1988), 94. For Berneri's background and translation of her work, and that of Vera Brittain into Italian, see Marie Louise Berneri and Vera Brittain, *Il seme del caos: Scritti sui bombardamenti di massa (1939–1945)*, edited with an introduction by Claudia Baldoli (Santa Maria Capua Vetere: Edizioni Spartaco, 2004).
- 49 Richard Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary* (New York: Random House, 1944), entry for 18 July 1943.
- 50 Smith, *Bombing to Surrender*, 38.
- 51 “San Lorenzo: I bombardamenti del 19 luglio 1943,” https://www.vivisanlorenzo.it/bombardamenti_del_19_luglio_1943_a_san_lorenzo.htm: Cesare De Simone, *Venti angeli sopra Roma: I bombardamenti aerei sulla Città Eterna, 19 luglio e 13 agosto 1943* (Milano: Mursia, 1993).
- 52 Harold Callender, “Hull Emphasizes Care in Rome Raid,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1943. The first quotation is from Secretary of State Cordell Hull, the second are the journalist's words. See also Drew Middleton, “Rail Centers Hit,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1943; and Herbert L. Matthews, “Damage to Shrines is Kept to a Minimum,” *New York Times*, 21 July 1943.
- 53 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 463–465.
- 54 Curzio Malaparte, *The Skin* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2013), trans. David Moore (originally published as *La Pelle* in 1949), 201.
- 55 Alfred Hayes, *The Girl on the Via Flaminia* (1949), Apple ebook, 40.
- 56 Ibid., 74.
- 57 Ugo Mancini, *Guerra nelle terre del papa: I bombardamenti alleati tra Roma e Montecassino attraversando i Castelli Romani* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011), 112–115; Everett B. Thomas, *Round the World with the 488th: A More or Less Factual Narrative Supported by On-the-spot Pictorial Evidence* (1946), in Sidney Schneider Papers, #6319. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, 116.
- 58 Harold H. Tittmann, Jr., *Inside the Vatican of Pius XII: The Memoir of an American Diplomat during World War II*, ed. Harold H. Tittmann, III (New York: Image Books, 2004), 140.
- 59 John Hersey, *A Bell for Adano* (New York: Knopf, 1944), Apple ebook, 20–21.
- 60 See, for example, Iris Origo, *War in Val d'Orcia: An Italian War Diary, 1943–1944* (Boston, MA: Godine, 1984), 167.
- 61 Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama, microfilm A 6013–1621. Headquarters Northwest African Strategic Air Force, APO 520: “Psychological Bombardment Operation designed to drive Italy to surrender,” Colonel Reuben Kyke Jr. to Major General J. H. Doolittle, 1 August 1943, quoted in Gabriella Gribaudi, “‘Moral Collapse’: People, Fascists and Authorities under the Bombs. Naples and the Countryside, 1940–1944,” in Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp and Richard Overly, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe 1940–1945* (London: Continuum, 2011), 220–221.

- 62 *Rome-Arno 1944*, US Army Center for Military History Publication #72-20, 23.
- 63 Norman Lewis, *Naples '44: A World War II Diary of Occupied Italy* (New York: Open Road Media ebook, originally published in 1978), 44–45.
- 64 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 534.
- 65 Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 2012), 503.
- 66 Lewis, *Naples '44*, 45.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 49–50.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 58, 120–121.
- 70 Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War: Against the Land of My Ancestors* (Irving, TX: Fusion Press, 2000), 196.
- 71 Petruzzi, *My War*, 201. According to a recent assessment of the evidence, “although German soldiers entered the exclusion zone on occasion, they never entered the Abbey itself.” See Ron E. Hassner, *Religion on the Battlefield* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 55 (Apple ebook version).
- 72 David Hapgood and David Richardson, *Monte Cassino: The Story of the Most Controversial Battle of World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002).
- 73 Interview with Herman Chanowitz by Jeff Matthews, January 2005, archived with author from <http://www.naplesldm.com/herman1.php>
- 74 Chanowitz interview.
- 75 Uwe Steinhoff, “Moral Ambiguities in the Bombing of Monte Cassino,” *Journal of Military Ethics*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2005), 142–143.
- 76 Chanowitz interview.
- 77 Atkinson, *Day of Battle*, 454–455.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 460.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 464.
- 80 *Ibid.*
- 81 *Ibid.*
- 82 Robert S Ehlers Jr., *The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 328.
- 83 Atkinson, *Day of Battle*, 461–462.
- 84 Baldoli and Knapp, *Forgotten Blitzes*, 39.
- 85 Antonio Grazio Ferraro, *Cassino: dalla distruzione della guerra alla rinascita nella pace* (Cassino: Francesco Ciolfi editore, 2007).
- 86 Gribaudi, “Moral Collapse.”
- 87 Eric Linklater, *Private Angelo* (1946), Apple ebook, 307–309.
- 88 *Rome-Arno 1944*, US Army Center for Military History Publication #72-20, 23.
- 89 “Address of the President on the Fall of Rome,” 5 June 1944, available at <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/060544.html>
- 90 Brookes, *Air War*, 18.
- 91 Atkinson, *Day of Battle*, 462–464; Messina was not bombed between 15 and 21 July, but there were some attacks around 13 August, even as the B-17 force was bombing Rome again, according to Giovanni Lafrenze’s list on the website, <http://biografiadiunabomba.anvcg.it/seconda-guerra-mondiale/>
- 92 Atkinson, *Day of Battle*, 466. The official USAAF history describes extensive bombing of Messina focused on the German evacuation, but it does not mention the diversion of bombers on 13 August or its adverse consequences: Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 472–473.
- 93 Brookes, *Air War*, 80.
- 94 US Library of Congress, George S. Patton Papers: Diaries, 1910–1945; Annotated transcripts; 1943–1945; 7 June 1943, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss35634.00301/?sp=42>
- 95 Atkinson, *Day of Battle*, 1325.
- 96 Alan Bollard, *Economists at War: How a Handful of Economists Helped Win and Lose the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 191–197.

- 97 The debate became public with the response to Zuckerman's autobiography. See Charles P. Kindleberger, "World War II Strategy," *Encounter*, vol. 51, no. 5 (1978), 39–42; Lord Zuckerman, "Bombs & Illusions in World War II," and C.P. Kindleberger, "A Rejoinder," *Encounter*, vol. 52, no. 6 (1979), 86–89; Walt W. Rostow, "The Controversy over World War II Bombing: A Reply to Lord Zuckerman," *Encounter*, vol. 55, nos. 2–3 (1980), 100–102.
- 98 Zuckerman, *Apes to Warlords*, 203.
- 99 *Ibid.*, 210.
- 100 Lytton, "Bombing Policy," 53.
- 101 *Ibid.*
- 102 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 463–464, emphasis added.
- 103 Quoted in Sallagar, *Operation "Strangle"*, 33.
- 104 *Ibid.*
- 105 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 106 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 107 Memo, MAAF A-2 Section to MAAF A-3 Section, Current Intelligence Considerations in Interdiction of Rail Traffic to Italian Peninsula, 29 February 1944, quoted in Brookes, *Air War*, 84.
- 108 MAAF, Operations in Support of Diadem (n.d.), quoted in Brookes, *Air War*, 84.
- 109 Brookes, *Air War*, 8.
- 110 Atkinson, *Day of Battle*, 1326.
- 111 Kindleberger, "World War II," 40.
- 112 *Ibid.* Zuckerman denied that this exchange had taken place. Lord Zuckerman, "Bombs & Illusions," 87.
- 113 Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, *Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944 to May 1945* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 73.
- 114 Rostow, "Controversy," 100.
- 115 *Ibid.*, 101.
- 116 Lytton, "Bombing Policy," 56, original emphasis.
- 117 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 2, 557.
- 118 Craven and Cate, *AAFWWII*, vol. 3, 372.
- 119 *Ibid.*, 376, 378.
- 120 Arthur W. Tedder, *With Prejudice: The War Memoirs of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Tedder* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1967), 537, quoted in Rostow, "Controversy," 100.
- 121 Baldoli et al., *Bombing, States and Peoples*; Baldoli and Knapp, *Forgotten Blitzes*.
- 122 Sallagar, *Operation "Strangle"*, 33, original emphasis.
- 123 Lytton, "Bombing Policy," 54–55.
- 124 Sallagar, *Operation "Strangle"*, 18–19, original emphasis.
- 125 *Ibid.*
- 126 *Ibid.*, 45, original emphasis.
- 127 Quoted in Brookes, *Air War*, 143.
- 128 *Ibid.*, vii, xi.
- 129 A similar claim was made by Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); see also Michael Horowitz and Dan Reiter, "When Does Aerial Bombing Work? Quantitative Empirical Tests, 1917–1999," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2001), 147–173.

4 Resistance

June 1940 saw Italy's entry into World War II, with its attack against France on the tenth, and British retaliatory air raids against Italian cities the next night. A defeated France signed an armistice with the Germans on the 22nd and with the Italians on the 24th. Aldo "Aldone" Quaranta, a 31-year-old captain in the Alpini, the mountain troops of the Italian Army, was ordered to serve on the commission that implemented the Armistice, an assignment that probably saved his life. Quaranta had been born in the northwestern region of Piedmont, in the city of Cuneo. The province of the same name borders France from the Maritime Alps in the south to the Po River in the north and includes the low rolling hills of the wine-producing territory known as the Langhe. When Aldone joined the Resistance in the wake of the September 1943 Armistice, he sought not only to rid his native territory of the German and fascist occupiers but also to prevent the Allies from harming its inhabitants with inaccurate air attacks.

As a law student at the University of Turin, Aldone Quaranta admired liberal professors such as the economist Luigi Einaudi and he engaged in antifascist activities—including the physical defense from an attack by fascist *squadristi* on Francesco Ruffini, the jurist, senator, and staunch opponent of Mussolini. Upon graduation, Quaranta became director of the public library in Cuneo and married Lina Pernigotti in 1939, the year before the war broke out. Recalled to the army, he and his unit entered France the day before its surrender. The combination of Quaranta's legal training and knowledge of the Alpine passes between Italy and France led to his assignment surveilling the line of French fortifications "from the Maddalena Pass to the sea."¹ Based at the Hotel Miramar in the Mont Boron district of Nice, he was spared the fate of the rest of the 4th Alpine Division of Cuneo. Dispatched to the Eastern Front, it was entirely destroyed by the Red Army and thousands of its troops perished.²

When he first learned of Marshal Badoglio's decision to capitulate to the Allies on 8 September 1943, Quaranta was serving at the headquarters of the Italian 4th Army in Provence.³ Its soldiers were spread out along the Riviera from La Spezia in Italy to Marseilles in France, with hardly a functioning combat unit. According to Quaranta, they had effectively disbanded even before the

Armistice was announced. His superior contacted Rome for instructions and was astonished to hear from the army chief of staff, "I too just this moment learned the news from the radio. Do what you can."⁴ The officers crossed back into Italy on 9 September and headed for Cuneo and the landmark Tre Citroni hotel. There Quaranta personally drafted the order, dictated by its commanding officer, to dissolve the Italian 4th Army, most of whose soldiers had already fled their posts. The Germans entered Nice that same day and arrested any stragglers.⁵

The Partisans of Piedmont

By 12 September many of the soldiers and officers of the disbanded army had reformed into partisan resistance groups, taking their weapons and military skills with them.⁶ Because their unit was formally dissolved, they could claim they were not traitors and deserters, as the Germans asserted, but rather remained obedient to the king and his new government under Badoglio. Piedmont deployed more partisan fighters than any other region of Italy, some 25,000 out of a total of 82,000 in June 1944, with more than 43,000 participating in the partisan movement by the end of the war.⁷ The region "lay at the heart of the northern Resistance," in Caroline Moorehead's words, and "more Piedmontese proportionately fought and died than in any other part of the country."⁸ In the autumn of 1944 the partisans managed to free several areas from German and fascist control, including the short-lived Republic of Alba, depicted in Beppe Fenoglio's short story, "The 23 Days of the City of Alba," and they liberated Turin, Cuneo, and many smaller towns in April 1945 before the arrival of the Allied armies.⁹

What makes Piedmont and Cuneo particularly interesting from the standpoint of the Allied air campaign is the degree of collaboration between the partisans and representatives of the British and US armed forces. Unlike the British area bombing of cities to demoralize the civilian population before the Armistice, the air war in Piedmont reflected more explicit military goals. Widespread bombing of the region began in March 1944 with Operation Strangle, the effort described in Chapter Three to disrupt supplies to the German forces defending the Gustav Line south of Rome. The main focus was rail transport and the targets included stations and marshaling yards within cities. As we have seen, given the degree of inaccuracy of bombing techniques, the raids typically produced considerable damage to civilian property and lives.

Partisan leaders sought to convince the Allies to bomb targets directly relevant to the guerrilla combat against the German and Italian fascist troops in Piedmont itself. In preparation for Operation Anvil (later called Dragoon), a planned Allied landing in the south of France to coincide with the Normandy invasion of June 1944, the air forces hit numerous targets in Piedmont intended to prevent German reinforcements. The following month, Operation Mallory Major was launched to knock out all 22 bridges over the Po River, several of which were in Piedmont.¹⁰ At the same time, on orders from Field Marshal Harold Alexander, British commander of the 15th Army Group and head of Allied forces in the Mediterranean

theater, the Allied special forces dropped agents into Piedmont, along with supplies and weapons.

From this the Piedmontese inferred that the Allies were poised for a drive into the Po Valley and that liberation was imminent. In fact, Alexander's directive was motivated by the needs of Dragoon, the landings on the French Riviera that took place in August.

Unbeknown to the partisans, "Alexander had been told in early July that the campaign in Italy was to be subordinated to the needs of the French landings."¹¹

This was not the first time that the Allies had disappointed the partisans of Piedmont. As with most Italian opponents of fascism, the *Piemontesi* imagined that the Armistice of September 1943 would lead to a quick liberation by the Allied forces. One memoir recounts how the partisans followed the "communications of Radio London and the Allied advance" during the autumn of 1943, waiting for the good news:

Around a map of Italy we are all becoming strategists. We wanted to give advice to the English, to the Americans, to Anders' Poles. Above all we wanted to advise them to break through the German front and arrive quickly in Piedmont. Everything would go well: from the landing in Liguria or the Côte d'Azur to the drop of the parachutists into the Val Padana, the Veneto, whatever. Sometimes we laughed at what we were saying. Unfortunately, at the front, nothing was moving.¹²

Nevertheless, during the summer of 1944 the interests of the Piedmont Resistance and the Allies seemed to overlap for a time, as hindering the mobility of the German forces made them less threatening to the partisans. In collaboration with Allied special forces infiltrated into the territory, partisan leaders became involved in selecting targets that would impede the operations of the German troops and sometimes the Allies carried out bombing raids specifically to assist partisan units. A case can be made that the use of air power in collaboration with the partisans proved more valuable in defeating the German occupation—in Piedmont, anyway—than indiscriminate bombing of cities or even more selective, but inaccurate, attacks against urban communications facilities and rail yards. The distinction echoes that made by Robert Pape between strategies of "denial" and "punishment"—the first intended to influence the course of military operations directly, the second to achieve a political outcome of victory by undermining civilian morale.¹³

One might argue, however, that we are comparing apples and oranges—that the air campaign in Piedmont does not count as "strategic bombing," so its effectiveness should not be compared to the raids carried out by the B-17 Flying Fortress and other heavy bombers against "strategic" targets. Indeed, the planes that carried out the attacks in Piedmont were not the heavy bombers associated with the raids against cities, but rather fighter bombers (Republic P-47 Thunderbolt), light bombers (Douglas A-20), and medium bombers (Martin B-26 Marauder).

Such planes had also been deployed against major strategic objectives, as in the destruction of Pantelleria described in the previous chapter, as well against targets in major industrial cities such as Turin.¹⁴ The question, then, is not the type of airplane used, but rather the mission, whether it is oriented toward a direct military goal or a broader political one.¹⁵ The comparison of the two types of missions goes to the heart of the critique that Pape and others have made of air force leaders' preference for strategic bombing—that it might be the best way for the service to assert its autonomy and enhance its resources, but it is not necessarily the most effective use of air power to achieve military objectives. Much of the story told here bears out that generalization.

As we saw in the previous chapter, a debate was raging between Allied military planners and their civilian advisers about whether or not to concentrate on urban targets and centers of transport and communication. When applied to occupied Italy or France, the debate no longer focused on undermining civilian morale by bombing cities. The civilians after all were unwilling victims of German occupation, awaiting liberation by the Allies; they were no longer considered belligerents. One Italian authority has suggested that with the Armistice “the infernal cycle of strategic bombing ended,” with Allied air power used only for tactical purposes thereafter.¹⁶ Yet this characterization is slightly misleading, as prominent figures in the Allied air forces continued to favor attacking cities, with the objective of destroying lines of communication, particularly railroad marshaling yards. This is the approach, as we saw in the last chapter, advocated by Solly Zuckerman and championed by his boss, Air Marshal Tedder.

Critics of their approach argued not that attacking cities was too costly in human casualties, but that it was relatively ineffective in hindering the German war machine. Rail lines could easily be replaced and destroying rail cars and engines made a trivial impact on the Germans given that production facilities for replacing them were operating throughout occupied Europe.¹⁷ As Zuckerman's American critics argued, more effective targets for disrupting German communications and resupply would be those that took much longer to replace or rebuild: bridges, tunnels, viaducts. Proponents of attacking these targets found likeminded supporters among the partisans—and indeed a source of valuable intelligence to identify the targets themselves.

Ultimately the debate was resolved through compromise: both types of targets were included as part of the overall rail and transport system. In fact, the range of targets became so extensive that one Italian historian described them as *tutto fa brodo*—“anything goes” (into the broth): “road junctions and lines of communication, bridges and railways, airports and population centers, [fuel and weapons] deposits and viaducts, military posts and troop concentrations, stations and public transport, troops columns and tanks, factories and radar sites”—all evidence of a “continual hammering” of the Italian population.¹⁸ The metaphor was the same that a British diplomat used in his diary entry the week Italy signed the Armistice: “The only way to get anything out of the Italians is to go on hammering them.”¹⁹ A key goal of the partisans was to limit the hammering that continued after the Armistice—by identifying more precise targets, by

discouraging attacks on civilian areas, and by sabotaging or destroying facilities to render the bombing unnecessary.

Piedmont had experienced the war early through the British area bombing of Turin and the flight of many of its residents to the relative safety of the countryside. The region was, however, spared the direct onslaught of the war that engulfed the country as the Allies fought their way to Rome and then up through Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna. Most of the fighting in Piedmont took place after the Armistice of September 1943 in a conflict that pitted German troops and their fascist puppets of the Italian Social Republic (RSI) against the partisans, including soldiers and officers such as Aldone Quaranta who had abandoned the Italian Army and risked execution or transport to German concentration camps if caught. They were joined by young men who sought to avoid conscription into the RSI forces or labor brigades and local antifascists. Women played key roles in urging soldiers to desert the army and in hiding escapees. Later, as *staffette*, or couriers, they constituted the communication network that undergirded the partisan resistance, at high personal risk. Aldone's wife Lina Pernigotti played such a role in Cuneo.²⁰

At first the Allies and their air forces were involved with the partisans only to the extent that they launched parachute drops of supplies to some of them and infiltrated agents to work with the partisan units. Even here, the expectations of support during the first half of 1944 were low. A British report predicted that "our operations will always be limited by the transport available and there are small prospects of being able to drop arms and supplies to support armies."²¹ The early drops attempted were often unsuccessful—say, if the partisans had not managed to light flares to indicate the location—and sometimes the supplies fell into enemy hands. In April 1944, Lina Pernigotti learned of such a case when she was arrested on her way to the mountain village of Entracque, having learned that the fascists had broken into her husband's family's ancestral home and carted away two trucks' worth of their furniture, linen, books, and other possessions. The RSI captain taunted her, waving a British Sten submachine gun in her direction. "Last week, tricking the English aviators with our flares we snatched one of the drops destined for the Partisans. This is one of the Stens that parachuted down. The Germans took the rest of them away." Lina retorted with a quick bluff:

The Partisans have so many of those Stens. I've seen so many myself, I can show you one, if you want. What great allies you have! The German comrades take the entire stash and leave you a single Sten. Our Allies send us arms, while the Germans, if they could, would take your whole supply. The German comrades despise you, you have no dignity! Even to go the bathroom you have to raise two fingers and ask their permission!²²

In fact, the partisans were struggling. They had been carrying out acts of sabotage in Cuneo during the winter of 1944, disrupting telephone and telegraph lines and targeting the Cuneo-Nice rail line, "the most important and fastest route for

maintaining connection between the German troops in Provence and the ones in Piedmont.²³ But they were running out of weapons, especially after the Germans insisted that the local authorities track down and seize any arms and ammunition that had been left behind when the 4th Army disintegrated. In May, thanks to Turin-based members of the Resistance who passed on a request to the Allies, the partisans near Borgo San Dalmazzo, a small town 8 km southwest of the city of Cuneo, finally received a parachute drop of weapons and supplies.²⁴ Borgo was also the site of a Nazi-fascist transit camp from which several hundred Italian and foreign Jews were deported to their deaths in Auschwitz, but the camp was never a target for aerial destruction.²⁵

“Moses of the Maritimes”

Aldone Quaranta left the Tre Citroni hotel in Cuneo after drafting the order disbanding the 4th Army on 9 September 1943 and headed for Entracque, near the border with France, to visit his parents. On the 12th—the same day German troops rescued Mussolini from captivity on the Gran Sasso massif—Aldone recruited soldiers from his disbanded unit and others to form a partisan brigade. Under the banner of *Giustizia e Libertà*, the antifascist organization founded in Paris in 1929, they would fight against both the Nazi occupiers and their Italian fascist collaborators.

The partisans' early actions were oriented toward preventing the Germans from transiting into France. Even before the Allies sought to do so through bombing, the partisans were destroying the relevant bridges. On 8 March 1944 they disabled two road bridges over the River Vermenagna. They carried out guerrilla attacks against German units in the region and executed spies suspected of revealing their positions.²⁶

One consequence of the Allied landing in southern France in mid-August 1944 was to bring the partisans, who were based mainly in the Alpine valleys along the border, into more direct contact with the German forces. As Chiara Colombini writes, following the landing, the Alpine valleys

became the rear of the front, which is why the Nazi-Fascists concentrated on it, asserting a firm control over the valleys of Vermenagna, Roja, Stura and Varaita, and establishing garrisons in the main centers of the Valle Gesso and Maira.²⁷

That same month the Germans carried out a vicious *rastrellamento*, a search and roundup—literally “raking”—to break the partisan resistance in Piedmont, as the Allies bombed the region to hinder German reinforcements into France. To coerce the partisans into surrendering, German troops took civilians hostage, including children whom they would use as human shields to ward off partisan attacks. Having decimated the partisan bands, the Germans sacked the homes of the locals and stole their meager supplies of food. Providing a “moment of relief and hope,” Commander Quaranta dispatched a *staffeta* with an order to the remaining

partisans to abandon their insecure position in the mountains and move closer to the French border.²⁸

No match for the German divisions, the partisans carried out an evacuation that has become known as *pianurizzazione* (from the word *pianura*—plain or flat land). They descended from the mountains across the plain into the Langhe region—an area of low rolling hills and deep wooded valleys that provided plenty of places to hide. For his expert guidance through the mountain passes of the Maritime Alps, Aldone was dubbed “Moses of the Maritimes.”²⁹

With the dispersal of the partisans, the German presence receded, although German troops reacted with brutality when they did encounter a member of the Resistance. In early November 1944, for example, they killed a young partisan, first torturing him beyond recognition, and dumped his body at the cemetery of Borgo San Dalmazzo. Three weeks later the Allies bombed the town, damaging the train station and cutting the Cuneo–Nice line. Several bombs fell on the cemetery, striking tombs and disinterring several bodies.³⁰



Figure 4.1 Aldo “Aldone” Quaranta, during the parade celebrating the liberation in Cuneo, 6 May 1945, used by kind permission of the Istituto Storico della Resistenza e della Società Contemporanea “Dante Livio Bianco,” in the province of Cuneo.

By this time, Aldone was aware of the toll that Operation Strangle was imposing on civilians in Cuneo province. In the summer and fall of 1944 the Allies' bridge-busting plans were intended mainly to influence combat far from Piedmont, along the Gothic Line, and during Operation Anvil/Dragoon, in southern France, yet the local consequences were severe.³¹ During the air attacks around Borgo in July and August, "the targets were almost always the same: the train station, the railway tracks on the Cuneo-Nice and Borgo-Boves lines, the barracks, the road and rail bridges, and industries." Many of the bombs went astray, landing on houses, "reaping victims among the civilian population and causing incalculable damage," according to a local historian.³² Attempts on two separate days succeeded in disabling the bridge over the Gesso River on the road from Borgo to Roccavione, along with the telephone and electric lines, at the cost of several casualties among the workers. A third attempt to destroy the bridge on 8 August hit a shelter in Roccavione and killed 17 people, including entire families. The Pepino and Belloni families were hit particularly hard, with the age of the victims ranging from the toddlers, Alberto and Giuseppina Belloni, at one and three years old, to Margherita Pepino, who was 83 years.³³

The Roccavione attack occurred while the area was under the control of Quaranta's partisans. Having expelled the local fascists, on 18 July they declared the Partisan Republic of the Gesso Valley. Although it lasted only 37 days before the Germans reconquered the territory, Aldone described it "a model of a democratic republic, where every nonmilitary question followed the will of the population."³⁴ Thus, it came as a shock to the partisans for the Allied air force to bomb one of their liberated towns. As Aldone later explained, the "Anglo-American bombing" was "logical in military terms in that it was designed to hit the enemy's line of communication. Unfortunately it hit the partisan population of Roccavione, a town that gave its name to a partisan band," and, along with Entracque, Valdieri, and Roaschia, constituted the liberated republic. In his 1947 memoir Aldone listed the names of the civilians killed by the Allied air attacks against Roccavione and Entracque just below the list of wartime victims of Nazi atrocities, such as torture, rape, murder, and the burning of villages.³⁵ Mauro Fantino, Aldone's younger friend and a publisher from Borgo San Dalmazzo, described a similar situation there: "While in the mountains the Germans sowed terror, on the streets of Borgo, the Anglo-American bombs continued to rain down."³⁶ The residents of Roccavione later installed a stone plaque on a building of the street named in honor of their victims: *via 8 agosto*. The inscription commemorates those who "suffered tremendously in spirit and flesh" as a "holocaust to the barbarity of an unwanted war."³⁷ The juxtaposition of commemoration of bombing victims alongside victims of Nazi-fascist atrocities is something Claudia Baldoli, in her extensive research, has found common throughout northern Italy.³⁸

Following the attack on Roccavione, the partisans organized a funeral for the victims. The partisan authorities refused to allow any fascist officials to attend,



Figure 4.2 Remembering the victims of the Allied bombing of Roccavione.

Author's photo.

putting up signs along the routes to town warning in German, *Achtung, Banditen!* Two hundred partisan fighters came to the funeral, along with a *staffetta* named Ada who rode her bicycle 10 km from Cuneo to Roccavione, crossing German lines to deliver a wreath of flowers.³⁹

Cooperation and Conflict with the Allies

The Allies had first learned of the partisan effort in the regions of Biella and Cuneo in Piedmont and Val d'Ossola and Lake Garda in autumn 1943 through contacts with Italian representatives in Bern, Switzerland. The British Special Operations Executive (SOE) office branch there was headed by John ("Jock") McCaffery and the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) by Allen Dulles.⁴⁰ Dulles had met on 17 September with Alberto Damiani of *Giustizia e Libertà*. Damiani became a regular source of information for both intelligence services.⁴¹ By this time, some British prisoners of war who had been held in Italian military custody

had escaped and joined up with partisan groups in Piedmont and in the Apennines, after it became clear that the Armistice did not portend a speedy end to the war and a rescue of the POWs.⁴² Eventually the Allies parachuted some 500 agents behind the lines in northern Italy.⁴³

At first the Allies were skeptical of the partisans' ability to fight. Headquarters promised support only on a case-by-case basis, depending, for example, on how close the units were to main roads used by the Germans. The Allied leadership preferred that the partisans gather intelligence and engage in acts of sabotage rather than fight directly.⁴⁴ The Allies were suspicious of the evident political motives—and political posturing—of the various groups and thought they should give priority to defeating the Germans by fully supporting the Allies' chosen representatives of Italy: the king and Badoglio. What the Allies failed to understand is that some of the key components of the Resistance—the communists and members of the *Partito d'Azione* (the political arm of *Giustizia e Libertà*), in particular—blamed fascism for the war and the king for having enabled Mussolini. Their political goal to create a revolutionary democratic republic was inseparable from the military goal of driving out the Germans. The Allies, and the British in particular, blamed not fascism, but Italy for having joined Hitler's war, and they were suspicious of the intentions of the antifascists.⁴⁵

The partisans were equally suspicious of the Allies. On 13 November 1944, Field Marshal Alexander issued an order via a radio broadcast that has become infamous among historians of the Italian Resistance, although overlooked in many English-language sources.⁴⁶ Alexander instructed the partisans to return home for the winter, avoid attacking Germans, and concentrate on gathering military intelligence useful for Allied operations, including bombing and the anticipated spring offensive. As Colombini describes, “for the combatants who had been living for months in the bush, this advice seemed like a mockery. ‘Go home where, Marshal?’” they wondered, and in any case “it was largely impractical: how many would have the possibility to return to a normal life without becoming suspect and running the risk of a predictable arrest?”⁴⁷ The reaction of Fenoglio's partisan Johnny, in a novel based on the author's wartime experience, was typical: “Sure, go home. Who still has a home that's not under surveillance by spies or surrounded by fascists?”⁴⁸

A typical postwar recollection of Alexander's announcement comes in the memoirs of the partisan, Lidia Menapace, published in 2014:

In 1945 I was sent a solemn piece of paper signed by General Alexander which said, “Lidia resisted”—an object of jokes and laughs on the part of my entire family and me too, because General Alexander, who on behalf of the Allies had overseen the Italian Resistance, was cordially hated by us for always undervaluing us, to the point where in Winter 1944 he advised us to return home and stopped sending us any help, despite the fact that '44 was an impossible winter: “Resisted,” they say, “despite General Alexander.”⁴⁹

Many Italian historians have similarly tended to understand Alexander's announcement as a signal of Britain's distrust of the partisans, especially those on the Left,

and an unwillingness to support their efforts to develop a strong military capability to drive out the Germans. The episode carries “a stigma of suspicion and rancour.”⁵⁰ The most extensive research into the question by the historian Tommaso Piffer, however, finds the conventional wisdom unconvincing: behind the proclamation there was no “attempt to damage nor to liquidate politically and militarily the partisan movement.” Piffer has argued that Alexander “had always been one of the most decisive supporters of the need to do everything to reinforce the [partisan] formations in northern Italy.”⁵¹ As for Alexander’s motive in making the proclamation, Elena Aga Rossi argues that it reflected “a total lack of understanding of the situation in which the partisan struggle was developing and what the consequences of such an initiative”—giving up the fight for the winter—would be, but she also does not impute any malign intention.⁵² The official British history of the SOE argues that

a close examination of Alexander’s motives reveals that far from containing some sinister political component—a suggestion frequently leveled by those antagonistic to the Allies—they were exclusively military in character and aimed at *preserving* the partisan movement as far as possible for future operations.⁵³

Later that same month, November 1944, some partisan leaders were invited to meet in Siena to coordinate efforts with British officials. Alfredo Pizzoni, head of the Committee of National Liberation for Upper Italy, attended a dinner with Alexander, seated next to him as a guest of honor. Over the soup course, he explained to the general “how disastrous the proclamation of 13 November had been” for the partisan cause. “Only after the ribs alla milanese had been consumed, however, did Alexander reply. ‘You have to realise,’ he gently told Pizzoni, ‘that I am a soldier and not a politician.’” Pizzoni interpreted the remark as an admission that Alexander had made a mistake in broadcasting the announcement.⁵⁴

Alexander certainly supported the partisans’ efforts, and in retrospect he gave them substantial credit. Overall, he argued, partisan military activity had prompted the Germans to divert six of their nearly 20 divisions to cope with it—thereby enhancing the Allies’ relative strength.⁵⁵

For partisans concerned about the civilian casualties of Allied bombing, Alexander was on their side. On the very day he broadcast his radio announcement, he wrote to General Henry Maitland Wilson, supreme commander of Mediterranean forces, arguing that it was “important to do everything possible to increase the dropping of supplies to partisans in Italy forthwith to enable them to make a major effort in conjunction with my offensive operation in December” and the airlift “should be given priority over certain bombing missions.”⁵⁶

Despite his good intentions, Alexander’s proclamation clearly had a demoralizing effect on the partisans who heard it or later learned about it. It also came as a shock to the Allied intelligence officers who had been collaborating with the partisans. Alexander had not consulted the leadership of the British SOE in advance, for example.⁵⁷ The OSS office in Bern, headed by Dulles, was likewise blindsided by the announcement. The Swiss press had published articles suggesting

that Alexander and the US General Mark Clark had decided to abandon the partisans. Dulles wrote to a fellow OSS officer to try to figure out what was going on. He clearly understood that Alexander's instructions for the partisans to go home for the winter made no sense: "these poor devils, for the most part, have nowhere to go," they would just end up freezing in the mountains. Moreover, the instructions contradicted developments on the ground. In November supply drops to the partisan groups had continued and actually increased.⁵⁸

One possible consequence of the widespread news of Alexander's proclamation was to embolden the Germans to go on the offensive against the partisans, believing the Allies had abandoned them. That is the argument Colombini makes regarding the *rastrellamento* "of colossal proportions" carried out in the Langhe, Liguria, and the Asti area. The partisans had taken the Germans by surprise by displacing the fascist units in Alba and declaring a free republic on 10 October 1944. Although the Germans retook the city already on 2 November and began the sweep of the area on the 12th, Colombini argues they intensified and broadened their efforts in the wake of Alexander's proclamation, under the impression that the partisans were at a "critical phase," owing to the onset of winter and the supposed lack of provisions from the Allies.⁵⁹

Eventually, despite Alexander's recommendation to increase parachute drops, the Allied leadership would reconsider the military benefits of diverting aircraft to supply the partisans, given the other demands on air power on other fronts. In January 1945, the headquarters of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces prepared a report suggesting that the support to the partisans had not substantially aided the Allied campaign against the Germans, a view that was apparently shared by officials at Special Operations Mediterranean (SOM), who handled relations with the partisan bands. In Piffer's summary,

according to the SOM, while initially the Allies had collaborated with the partisans on specific operations against the Germans, in the second part of 1944 the tendency was established to resupply them according to the needs they expressed, but letting them select the targets and impose the strategy. The general result was a diminution in the military contribution that the Resistance could give to the Allied advance.⁶⁰

This was certainly true in Piedmont, where only the partisans were in direct combat with Germans and they were intent on liberating their own territory as much as contributing to the general Allied war effort.

"The Partisan Air Force has Arrived"

On 12 February 1945 Aldone Quaranta undertook an extraordinary expedition. He and a small group of comrades traveled on skis more than 100 km from Roaschia, then covered in 2 m of snow, through the Maritime Alps to reach the headquarters of US Army General Ralph C. Tobin in Nice. They presented Tobin with a letter proposing that the Allies drop propaganda leaflets by air over Cuneo province to try to convince the unhappy conscripts in the RSI Littorio Division

to desert and flee to France, thereby enhancing the partisans' prospects for defeating the fascists. Weakening Littorio was a high priority for the partisans. One of its units of military police, based in Borgo, was specifically tasked with hunting down suspected partisan sympathizers, and their methods were notoriously brutal.⁶¹

Tobin was sold on the idea and had the leaflets, along with "safe conduct" passes, prepared and distributed by air. Tobin also provided Quaranta's group with a radio and a British soldier from Scotland to operate it. The partisans would use radio transmissions to convey intelligence information to the Allies and direct them where to drop supplies.

Throughout the ten days Aldone spent in Nice, the Allies engaged in bombing attacks from the air and sea and strafing of nearby Italian towns on the Riviera, including San Remo, just 20 km away.⁶² Armistice notwithstanding, they had been bombing the coastal cities since the autumn of 1943, attacking the bridges at Ventimiglia, for example, and had increased the raids in anticipation of Operation Dragoon, the landing in Provence in summer 1944.⁶³ The Free French forces joined that operation and occupied some of the Italian towns in Liguria, part of a longer-term plan to try to annex them after the war.⁶⁴ Their occupation was welcome to the extent it allowed a respite from the bombing.

For a few weeks the French were popular in Ventimiglia, which had been so heavily bombed that only 2,000 inhabitants were left in a state of great misery; they were especially delighted when the French immediately undertook a vigorous rehousing and building programme.⁶⁵

The fear of Allied bombing that pervaded the region during this period accounts for Aldone's reaction when, in the course of the meeting with Tobin, he heard one of the general's assistants describe plans to bomb his native province of Cuneo. Aldone was particularly sentimental about the province and its capital city of Cuneo, his birthplace. In fact, the Quaranta family claimed descent from a Roman soldier who founded the city at the end of the twelfth century.⁶⁶

Meeting with General Tobin, Aldone was undoubtedly also influenced by the fact that the Allies had bombed Cuneo on 11 February, the day before he and his party set out on their skis for Nice, causing the deaths of 20 civilians.⁶⁷ As he recalled in 1999,

I couldn't restrain myself from intervening, exclaiming, 'General, it's a serious error: in Cuneo there aren't any objects of military or industrial relevance, you risk hitting the civilian population. We have reached an agreement, a pretty delicate one, to obtain the support of civilians on the propaganda that we conduct among the fascist troops. We can't allow ourselves to see these new propaganda activities cancelled out, especially since they could be effective in other regions of Northern Italy. General, suspend the bombing!

According to Quaranta, Tobin agreed with him and promised not to continue bombing in the Cuneo region.⁶⁸



Figure 4.3 Destruction by Allied bombing of buildings along Corso Gesso, Cuneo, 11 February 1945. Used by kind permission of the Istituto Storico della Resistenza e della Società Contemporanea “Dante Livio Bianco” in the province of Cuneo.

Quaranta’s party, including the Scottish radio operator, left Nice on 20 February and returned to the mountains. Five days later the Allies bombed Entracque, killing five members of the Begarelli family: Angelo, Chiara, Giovanna, Giovanni, and Maria.⁶⁹

In mid-March 1945 Quaranta’s band came into conflict with the fascist *Brigate Nere* and units of the *Littorio* anti-partisan division. This time Aldone had reason to be glad that Tobin failed to keep his promise not to bomb. The fascist troops had blocked the Gesso and Roaschia valleys to carry out another *rastrellamento* of partisans and army deserters. Without letting anyone know, the Scottish radio operator had contacted headquarters in Nice. After about an hour,

we heard a loud noise coming: it was three fighter aircraft descending into the valley and machine-gunning the fascist columns. That’s where the expression ‘the partisan air force has arrived’ came from, and it spread rapidly among the partisan bands,

boosting their morale and prestige and demoralizing the enemy.⁷⁰

In subsequent months Aldone’s fellow partisans cooperated with the Allies to designate targets for bombing and sometimes requested particular attacks. Servizio X, the partisan intelligence branch, sent radio transmissions with recommendations of important targets, including in and around the city of Cuneo: the offices of the Gestapo and the gendarmerie along Viale degli Angeli; an anti-air battery in the Mellea zone; a former explosives factory in nearby Fossano which now housed a thousand German troops and their equipment.⁷¹

The Allies and the partisans did not always agree on targets. The partisans typically wanted bridges destroyed to influence their own immediate military operations. On 27 July 1944, Enrico Martini, the commander known as Mauri, asked the Allies to bomb the bridge over the River Stura between Cherasco and Bra in Cuneo Province and let them know that 5,000 Germans were camped out near the town of Pollenzo. A month later Dino Giacosa and Aldo Sacchetti, two

partisan leaders who went by the combined code name Dinaldo, repeated the same request to bomb the bridge to “Major Temple,” the British SOE agent Neville Lawrence Darewski, along with a map of Cherasco indicating the locations of German munitions depots.⁷² On 3 March 1945, Dinaldo sent a request by radio “insisting again on the necessity of bombing the Cuneo–San Dalmazzo di Tenda rail line,” to cut off supplies of troops operating in the Val Roya. It was the second time they had asked unsuccessfully that the Vernante Bridge be destroyed.⁷³

At other points, the Allies destroyed bridges that hindered the partisans. On 26 July 1944, the night before Mauri had made his futile request for the bridge over the Stura to be bombed, “a long column of vehicles of the 6th Alpine Division of *Giustizia e Libertà* left Pont Canavese headed for Chivasso,” less than 80 km from Mauri’s band. Some 200 partisans planned to attack the military district headquarters to seize arms and take prisoners for future exchanges. On the verge of entering Chivasso they were unable to proceed further because, without informing them, the Allies had destroyed the bridge over the River Orco. They were forced to turn around.⁷⁴

The main motivation for telling the Allies which targets *not* to bomb, following the precedent set by Aldone Quaranta, was concern about civilian casualties. The partisans complained that the bombing of Cuneo, which they had earlier requested, had produced little effect, since “not a single military objective was hit.” In mid-March Dinaldo reported that the city of Mondovì should no longer be considered a military objective because all enemy personnel and materiel had been removed.⁷⁵

The most direct way the partisans sought to prevent civilian casualties from Allied bombing was to destroy the designated targets themselves. During the summer of 1944, for example, partisans got word of a planned Allied raid on a Fiat plant in the lower Susa valley, where the Germans had organized production of fighter aircraft. Late one night 170 partisans descended from camps in the mountains, attacked the factory, “destroyed the planes in production, sabotaged the machinery and made off with an exceptional haul of desperately needed weapons.” There were no casualties on either side.⁷⁶ In July 1944, partisans from *Giustizia e Libertà* destroyed the Lolla Bridge over the Stura River, to hinder German troops heading into France. Otherwise the Allies would have bombed it.⁷⁷ In December 1944, partisans from the 7th GL Division sabotaged the railroad bridge at Ivrea, north of Turin to spare the town from the anticipated Allied attack. Major Alastair MacDonald, their SOE liaison, called it “the most heroic act of sabotage carried out in Italy during the War of Liberation”—a quote that the *Eporediesi* (inhabitants of Ivrea, who refer to themselves by the ancient Roman name of their city, Eporedia) proudly display on a commemorative sign near the river.⁷⁸ In two daring operations in Levaldigi and Mondovì in December 1945, partisans stole aviation fuel from depots located at some distance from the air fields (to protect them from Allied bombing)—in the latter case by ambushing a German truck convoy and using the stolen trucks to transport the fuel.



Figure 4.4 Commemorating the partisans' sabotage of the Ivrea bridge that prevented an Allied air attack.

Author's photo.

The Germans carried out a scorched-earth policy as they retreated, and in response the partisans added a new mission to their activities. The Allies, having learned from the Nazis' sadistic destruction of Naples, adopted an "anti-scorch" or counter-sabotage approach. Anticipating the German defeat—often with unrealistically hopeful expectations—the Allied command began instructing the partisans to carry out:

the protection of vital installations, personnel and factories from destruction and pillaging by the Germans. Priority targets were listed as electric power plants, ports and shipping, public utilities, stocks of food, petrol and tyres, railways and especially rolling stock, and industrial works.⁷⁹

In other words, many of the targets to save were the same ones that had been slated for destruction earlier, by bombardment or sabotage.

Anything but Innocent

Although munitions factories were noticeably excluded from the Allies' list of sites to spare from bombing, some Italian industrialists took advantage of the new Allied policy to save their businesses—and, consequently, their employees—from destruction. The case of Fernando Innocenti is a particularly intriguing one. Innocenti was an industrial entrepreneur who made his fortune during Mussolini's regime, initially by producing steel tubing for scaffolding for the various fascist construction projects, particularly in Rome. With the onset of Italy's war against Ethiopia in 1935, Innocenti began producing steel casing for bombs and artillery shells and soon earned a fortune as a war profiteer. Nowadays his company is better known for the postwar production of the Lambretta motor scooter. In 1939, Innocenti's company was declared "a model fascist establishment," as the current Lambretta

website explains, and benefited from Mussolini's suppression of independent trade union activity. The firm was mainly producing artillery shells, with 90 percent of its work force engaged in war production. With only 5.5 percent of the country's munitions workers, the Innocenti factories produced 17 percent of Italy's output of ammunition.⁸⁰

Innocenti avoided taxes by reinvesting his profits in new factories, with suitable names. *Guerra I*, built in Rome in the Tor Sapienza district, was designed to produce 40,000 shells a day. *Guerra II* he built in Milan, along Via Pitteri, having diverted the Lambro River to make room for it. *Guerra III*, also built in Milan, relied on machinery transported from *Guerra I* in Rome, following the Allied landing in Sicily. It produced rings for grenades, based on a German design. According to the version of the firm's history presented on the Lambretta website, Innocenti continued operating his factories and supplying the German and RSI armed forces, for which "he won trust and admiration." Meanwhile the Allies were fighting their way up the peninsula and Albert Speer, the Nazi minister of armaments and war production, ordered the dismantling of some of the factory machines for shipment to Germany and the destruction of others so they would not fall into Allied hands. Yet the firm's official history insists: "The war production never stopped" (*La produzione bellica non è mai venuta a mancare*).⁸¹ Indeed, aerial reconnaissance in February 1944 led US intelligence analysts to claim that the Innocenti complex in Milan was "active 24 hours a day producing parts" for the German V-1 and V-2 rockets and in March 1945 that it was producing "the chassis for V-weapons."⁸²

Curiously, while producing weapons for the Nazis, Innocenti also served as an informant for the Allies. Contrary to what the postwar website's history describes ("production never stopped"), Innocenti convinced the OSS that, even while under German supervision, "the Innocenti management" was able "to create all kinds of difficulties and succeeded in bringing about a gradual slowing down of production." Innocenti told the Allies that when the Germans ordered 320 train wagons of dismantled machinery from the *Guerra I* factory in Rome to be transported through the Brenner Pass to Germany, he sent them to his Milan site instead.⁸³ The OSS analyst credulously reported that

after the Armistice, the Rome factory did not produce anything other than minor civilian work, just to keep a few employees going. Nothing was done for the Germans, nor was there any sign that they were likely to place any order.

Four months after aerial reconnaissance had claimed the Milan factories were operating around the clock to produce parts for the V-rockets, the OSS report opined that "the value to the overall Axis munitions position is dubious. It is highly improbable that the Axis could be dealt a telling blow by attacks on a comparatively small munitions plant, in Northern Italy, using Italian labor."⁸⁴

Innocenti's secret contacts with the Allies had achieved the desired result, sparing his factories. The Lambretta website does not mention those contacts, but it does suggest that Innocenti "closely followed the events involving the factory and

maintained constructive and balanced political relations” with the Germans, the RSI, the Committee of National Liberation representing the partisans, and “democratic forces.” It explains how Innocenti transferred large amounts of cash to the partisans and managed to win over Charles Poletti, the Italian-American US Army colonel in charge of purging Italian society of fascist sympathizers: Poletti “was enthusiastic about the brilliant collaboration of Fernando Innocenti.” Moreover, “it was not by chance that the Allied bombing, on precise information from him, hit only isolated war-production units of little value, saving the most important industrial complexes.”⁸⁵ Other fascist collaborators and war profiteers, such as the Falck family of steel magnates and Giovanni Caproni, the aeronautical engineer and manufacturer, managed to pull off similar maneuvers and escape postwar retribution for their support of Mussolini’s dictatorship.⁸⁶ At least in the case of Innocenti, by saving his factories from aerial destruction, he also helped protect the civilian workforce—half of whom were women—from death by bombing. Not as heroic as the exploits of the partisans who tried to save civilians from Allied destruction, Innocenti’s story is still worth telling.

Why Civilians Died

Despite the efforts of Aldone Quaranta and the other partisan leaders, many civilians nevertheless suffered from the Allied air campaign. Most of the attention to the human consequences of the bombing in Piedmont has focused on the capital, Turin.⁸⁷ That the city was bombed 56 times during the war conveys only part of the terror experienced by its residents, since the 285 *alarmi bianchi*, or false alarms, were terrifying in themselves.⁸⁸ Even the best-researched accounts of the harm to civilians from the Allied bombing campaigns contain scarce mention of the bombing of other Piedmont cities, such as Alba or Cuneo, for example.⁸⁹ Nor are they discussed in the more conventional military histories of the role of air power during the Italian campaign, including the three-volume official study edited by Craven and Cate and published from 1948 to 1951 and the follow-up *Combat Chronology, 1941–1945*, prepared by the Center for Air Force History.⁹⁰ The most complete list of bombings of Italian cities and towns of which I am aware was compiled by Giovanni Lafrenze for his website, but it is also missing many of the towns attacked in Piedmont.⁹¹

Fascist propaganda and newspaper reports portrayed most of the Allied bombing as pure terrorism, conducted at sites absent of any militarily relevant targets. Internal RSI government reports, however, acknowledged the true targets and often contradicted the public accounts. On 1 August 1944, for example, the fascist newspaper *Piemonte repubblicano* reported that the “assassins of the air” had conducted “indiscriminate incursions” and had “not hesitated to machine-gun the streets,” attacking “unarmed and defenseless” civilians and killing one “poor woman.”⁹² A confidential report to the Prefect from the provincial committee in Cuneo, by contrast, acknowledged the attack’s military objective as the rail bridge over the Gesso River to interrupt the Cuneo-Mondovì line, and described attacks against a gasoline storage facility, some industrial buildings, and railroad and electrical lines. Among the victims it listed only one wounded.⁹³

Allied agents from the SOE and OSS, working with the partisans, were aware of the harm to civilians from inaccurate bombing and the extent to which the fascist press took advantage of it:

Major [Oliver] Churchill thought the population of northern Italy was strongly pro-Ally, but said that popularity was being eroded fast by senseless RAF and USAAF raids on town centres and civilian factories, described by the Fascists, “not without truth,” as “terror raids”; suburban tram passengers and solitary motorists had been killed. The most effective Fascist poster was circulated after an RAF raid which killed 250 children, and consisted of the photograph of four dead children with the slogan “Long Live our Liberators.”⁹⁴

A British commando behind enemy lines,

stated that twice a stick of Allied bombs fell within 200 yards of where he was sleeping, and both times there was no military target for miles, or a main road. Christmas Day [1944] he passed with a man whose wife and child had been killed by an Allied bomb. He called the Allied bombing ‘wanton jettisoning,’ and stated that the civilian population was ‘terribly frightened of the Allied air force.’⁹⁵

In recent years amateur historians and journalists from Cuneo province have commemorated the civilian losses from Allied bombardment of hospitals, rest homes, and orphanages. Their accounts sometimes provide details to complement the incomplete reports of the time. On 28 August 1944, for example, Allied bombers attacked Cuneo, damaging an old folks’ home, the Ospizio dei Cronici “Mater Amabilis,” killing 26 people, including five nurses, and seriously wounding another 13. In this case the confidential report to the Prefect could not identify the intended target.⁹⁶ In another attack in December 1944 the orphanage Monsignor Carlo Perrucchetti in Centallo was hit, resulting in the deaths of 16 people, mainly children.⁹⁷

We now have reason to believe that the August attack on the Mater Amabilis was a mistake. At least that was the opinion of Mario Parola, a witness to the destruction who was ten years old at the time. “Who would bomb an old folks’ home?” he wondered in an oral history interview in Cuneo in September 2006. Ten meters away were the barracks of an armed fascist unit, known as the Legione Autonoma Mobile Ettore Muti. “Certainly it was an error, probably the pilot’s intention was to bomb the Muti barracks,” Parola surmised, but “he was disturbed by the anti-aircraft” guns mounted on trucks driving around the area.⁹⁸

The December attack on the orphanage, however, was intentional, if also a mistake. The building apparently found its way onto Allied target lists in August 1943, when a British aerial reconnaissance mission identified the airfield at Levaldigi and the train station in nearby Centallo (less than 7 km away), through which military supplies presumably arrived.⁹⁹ The actual attack was carried out by a single P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bomber, based at Salon-de-Provence in France, part of the Chasse Roussillon squadron. It had not been aiming for the train

station, but for the orphanage itself. We now know—and the locals knew it at the time—that the *Luftwaffe* had requisitioned one of the dormitories of the orphanage in June 1943 and had built an air raid shelter there. In October, an Allied plane had machine-gunned the facility, but no one was killed. The Germans transferred their unit away from Centallo sometime thereafter, but the Allies were apparently unaware of that when they carried out the December raid.¹⁰⁰ The fascist press reported on the bombing, conducted “with perfect visibility” and at “very low altitude,” and the subsequent funeral, without mentioning the previous presence of the *Luftwaffe*.¹⁰¹

Misjudgments and mistaken confidence on the part of the Allied target planners could also account for bombing of civilian targets. Sergio Costagli, editor of a collection of diverse materials on the bombing of Cuneo, contacted Carlton M. Smith, a US veteran intelligence officer who worked in the Mediterranean Allied Photo Reconnaissance, to gain some understanding of how the targeting process worked. Smith’s job entailed interviewing pilots returning from bombing runs and determining targets for future attacks. Costagli sent Smith some photos of Cuneo that he had obtained from US archives and asked him about them. Costagli did not publish his own letter to Smith, only Smith’s response, so we need to infer what he asked. Smith discussed a site circled in white and marked “hospital” on one of the reconnaissance photos. He described its form as “extremely regular” and surrounded by trees. “The structure is not a hospital,” he insisted. “Why? In Italian cities hospitals are located in the center of the city, they are rarely in the immediate periphery.” He claimed that US intelligence officers made an estimate on the basis of where people lived in Cuneo that the city would not put a hospital there on the outskirts, where the map indicated a hospital. Moreover, the building was too similar to ones identified by the intelligence service as military barracks “not to be a third armory or barracks...It looked more like military quarters than a hospital.”¹⁰² We infer that Costagli was trying to understand why the Allies bombed Mater Amabilis. Mario Parola’s explanation is not far from what Smith suggested: rather than have dropped a bomb off target, the air crew may have thought the hospital/rest home was part of the Muti barracks. Even though Smith described to Costagli how the partisans helped the Allies identify targets to bomb *and to avoid bombing*—in this case by designating the Mater Amabilis facility as a hospital—overconfident Allies did not always heed their advice.

Costagli apparently wondered whether officers such as Smith suffered pangs of conscience when such tragic mistakes occurred. His question triggered this response from Smith:

We were at war, of course we talked among ourselves about the ethical aspects of our work, especially when we were providing the Fighter Squadrons with directions of which cities to hit, how and with what bomb loads or phosphorous munitions. It wasn’t possible to ignore the fact that civilians would die too, that’s war. Today it’s easy to criticize the decisions and the operations from back then. Personally, I never had any moral issues. The same in August 1945 with the two *big bombs* on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they were no problem for me.¹⁰³

Understandably, the partisans were reluctant to rely on the Allies to avoid harming Italian civilians. They would have been even more reluctant had they suspected that officials responsible for identifying targets and crews that carried out the bombing suffered no remorse when they mistakenly killed elderly people and orphans.

This chapter has reviewed the conflicting goals pursued by the Resistance forces of Piedmont and the Allied forces in charge of bombing the region. Certainly, they shared common enemies in the Nazi occupiers and their Italian fascist puppets. Yet the partisans' main objective was to defeat those enemies as soon as possible and liberate their cities, towns, and mountain villages. The Allies took a longer-term perspective. Their goal was the defeat of Nazi Germany, with the priority given, after a long year of slow, costly combat in Italy, to achieving success with the Normandy invasion. The partisans were grateful for the help in achieving their goal, represented by drops of supplies and direct attacks to undermine the Germans, but they resented the cost to civilian life and property, especially when the purpose was unrelated to the immediate liberation of Piedmont.

Aldone Quaranta's postwar reflections convey precisely this ambivalence:

We were fighting a war of liberation, a violent, horrendous guerrilla war against Nazis and fascists...against an invader (the Germans) and against an oppressor (the fascists): What war were the Allies fighting? A war like all the others, a war for power and primacy; they were afraid that the Germans would become the boss of Europe and Africa.

He conceded that liberation from German domination would not have succeeded without the Allies' help ("our cities would have flags with swastikas and probably we would be a little more Aryan, if it weren't for the intervention of the Anglo-Americans"), but he insisted that "we fought two different wars: our goal was to fight Nazi-fascism, for the Americans it was to prevent Germany from becoming a military power (it was already) and above all an economic one."¹⁰⁴ One might expect partisans seeking to liberate their homeland from foreign occupation to give priority to the welfare of their fellow citizens—as we have seen in their efforts to prevent harmful aerial attacks by the Allies. Political and military officials of the major powers fighting "a war for power and primacy," by contrast, might not be so concerned about the innocents caught in the crossfire, recognize their common humanity, and try to protect them. The reality was somewhat more complicated, as the next chapter describes.

Notes

- 1 Aldo Quaranta, *Oh sole! Oh sole! Oh sole! Le confessioni di un uomo libero* (Borgo San Dalmazzo: Mauro Fantino Editore, 2003), 28, 33; Aldo Quaranta, *Vivere e morire a testa alta: La Resistenza e l'Italia del dopo 25 Aprile* (Borgo San Dalmazzo: Mauro Fantino Editore, 2000), 7–8.
- 2 Riccardo Baldi, *Alpini Cuneense, 4a Divisione Alpina Cuneense, Campagna di Russia, 26 luglio 1942 / 28 gennaio 1943*, n.d., <http://www.alpini-cuneense.it>
- 3 Pino Ponzio, "L'addio ad Aldone" comandante della 1a divisione Giustizia-Libertà," *Patria indipendente*, 19 January 2003, 50–51.

- 4 Mauro Fantino, *Borgo nella Resistenza* (Borgo San Dalmazzo: Il Mensile di Borgo, 1994), 31. On the Italian occupation forces in France and elsewhere, see Davide Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation During the Second World War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 5 Fantino, *Borgo*, 31–32; Quaranta, *Oh sole!*, 6.
- 6 Aldo Quaranta, *Gente e partigiani della Valle Gesso* (Borgo San Dalmazzo: Mauro Fantino Editore, 1998), a reprint of his 1947 pamphlet, *Brigata Valle Gesso Ildo Vivanti* (Cuneo: Casa editrice I.C.A., 1947), 12.
- 7 Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943–1988* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 54; Michael Kelly, *The Italian Resistance in Piedmont: The Myth of Unity* (Melbourne: Contemporary Europe Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2006), 1–2. According to one source, postwar commissions certified 43,685 *Piemontesi* as having participated in the partisan movement: Valentine Braconcini, “La memorialistica della Resistenza attraverso gli scritti di Giovanni Pesce,” University of Turin, thesis, Corso di Laurea in Lingue e Letterature Straniere, 2007–2008, 30.
- 8 Caroline Moorehead, *A House in the Mountains: The Women Who Liberated Italy from Fascism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2020), xxvi.
- 9 Mauro Fantino, *...e i Partigiani scesero a Borgo: Aprile 1945, storia dei giorni della Liberazione* (Borgo San Dalmazzo: Mauro Fantino Editore, 2015).
- 10 Sergio Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo, 1943–1945: Attacchi dal cielo, Le missioni segrete della Special Force Number One* (Boves: Araba Fenice, 2016), 67–68.
- 11 Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*, 178–179.
- 12 Adriano Balbo, *Quando inglesi arrivare noi tutti morti. Cronache di lotta partigiana: Langhe 1943–1945* (Boves: Araba Fenice, 2017), 53.
- 13 Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); see also Michael Horowitz and Dan Reiter, “When Does Aerial Bombing Work? Quantitative Empirical Tests, 1917–1999,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2001), 147–173.
- 14 Edith C. Rodgers, *The Reduction of Pantelleria and Adjacent Islands, 8 May–14 June 1943*, Army Air Forces Historical Studies, no. 52, Air Historical Office Headquarters, Army Air Forces, May 1947, 29.
- 15 Janina Dill, *Legitimate Targets? Social Construction, International Law and US Bombing* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- 16 Marco Patricelli, *L'Italia sotto le bombe: Guerra aerea e vita civile, 1940–1945* (Rome: Laterza, 2007), 282.
- 17 Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 498–499.
- 18 Patricelli, *L'Italia sotto le bombe*, 287.
- 19 Oliver Harvey, *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1941–1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978), John Harvey, ed., 289.
- 20 Moorehead, *House in the Mountains*, esp. 39–40; Jane Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance, 1943–1945* (Denver, CO: Arden Press, 1997); Marisa Ombra, *Libere sempre: Una ragazza della Resistenza a una ragazza di oggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012); Quaranta, *Oh sole!*, 30.
- 21 Quoted in David Stafford, *Mission Accomplished: SOE and Italy 1943–1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2011), 113.
- 22 Quaranta, *Vivere e morire*, 10–11.
- 23 Fantino, *Borgo*, 57.
- 24 Fantino, *Borgo*, 67.
- 25 https://deportati.it/lager/borgosandalmazzo/borgo_san_dalmazzo/
- 26 Quaranta, *Gente e partigiani*, 14–15.
- 27 Chiara Colombini, *Giustizia e Libertà in Langa: La Resistenza della III e della X Divisione GL* (Borgara Torinese: Eataly, 2015), 44–49.
- 28 Fantino, *Borgo*, 83; see also Balbo, *Quando inglesi arrivare*, ch. 20.

- 29 Aldo Alessandro Mola, “Aldone: il ‘Mosè’ delle Marittime,” preface to Aldo Quaranta, *Oh sole! Oh sole! Oh sole! Le confessioni di un uomo libero* (Borgo San Dalmazzo: Mauro Fantino Editore, 2003), 5–7.
- 30 Fantino, *Borgo*, 87–89.
- 31 Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 3, *Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944 to May 1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 445.
- 32 Fantino, *Borgo*, 73. The archives of the *municipio* contain detailed records of all of the attacks on Borgo through to the end of the war.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Quaranta, *Gente e partigiani*, 18.
- 35 Aldo Quaranta, *Brigata Valle Gesso Ildo Vivanti* (Cuneo: Casa editrice I.C.A., 1947), 7–8; Quaranta, *Gente e partigiani*, 10.
- 36 Fantino, *Borgo*, 84–85.
- 37 <http://www.chieracostui.com/costui/docs/search/schedaoltre.asp?ID=12433>
- 38 Claudia Baldoli, “La memoria dei bombardamenti nelle regioni del Nord Italia,” *L’Italia e le sue Regioni* (2015), https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/la-memoria-dei-bombardamenti-nelle-regioni-del-nord-italia_%28L%27Italia-e-le-sue-Regioni%29/
- 39 Fantino, *Borgo*, 75.
- 40 Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*, ch. 4.
- 41 Tommaso Piffer, *Gli Alleati e la Resistenza italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2010), 65, 71.
- 42 Balbo, *Quando inglesi arrivare*; Eric Newby, *Love and War in the Apennines* (London: Lonely Planet Publications, 1999), 58–60; George Evans, “A British PoW becomes a Partisan, 1943–1945,” *BBC WWII People’s War*, 9 November 2003, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/41/a2001141.shtml>
- 43 Piffer, *Gli Alleati*, 12; Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*.
- 44 Piffer, *Gli Alleati*, 72; Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*.
- 45 Piffer, *Gli Alleati*, 73. See Moorehead, *House in the Mountains*, for discussion of the political goals of the Partito d’Azione, in particular.
- 46 For example, it is missing from this otherwise detailed timeline of World War II in 1944, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_World_War_II_\(1944\)#November](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_World_War_II_(1944)#November); from Atkinson’s excellent study, *Day of Battle*; and from online biographies. Moorehead, *House in the Mountains*, 228–229, describes the impact of Alexander’s broadcast on the partisans. I found the complete transcript here: Giacomo Casadio, *Sono stanco di vivere: un padre a un figlio nel baratro della guerra* (Faenza: Edit Faenza, 2013), 220–221.
- 47 Colombini, *Giustizia e Libertà*, 40; see also Balbo, *Quando inglesi arrivare*, 273.
- 48 Beppe Fenoglio, *Il partigiano Johnny* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 398.
- 49 Lidia Menapace, *Io, partigiana: La mia Resistenza* (San Cesario di Lecce: Piero Manni, 2014), 15.
- 50 David W. Ellwood, *Italy 1943–1945* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 165.
- 51 Piffer, *Gli Alleati*, 182–183.
- 52 Elena Aga Rossi, “Alleati e resistenza in Italia,” in *Problemi di storia della Resistenza in Friuli*, vol. I (1984), 214, quoted in *ibid.*, 183.
- 53 Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*, 233.
- 54 Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*, 257–258.
- 55 John Whiteclay Chambers, II, “OSS in Action: The Mediterranean and European Theaters,” ch. 8 in his *OSS Training in the National Parks and Service Abroad in World War II* (Washington, DC: US National Park Service, 2008), 318, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/oss/chap8.pdf; Peter Tompkins, “The OSS and Italian Partisans in World War II: Intelligence and Operational Support for the Anti-Nazi Resistance,” 14 April 2007, <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/archives/vol-41-no-5/the-oss-and-italian-partisans-in-world-war-ii/>; Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*, 122–123.
- 56 Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*, 233.

- 57 Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*, 232–233.
- 58 Piffer, *Gli Alleati*, 183–184.
- 59 Colombini, *Giustizia e Libertà*, 40–41. Moorehead, *House in the Mountains*, 229, shares the assessment that Alexander’s proclamation prompted major *rastrellamenti*. On the partisan occupation of Alba, see Balbo, *Quando inglesi arrivare*, ch. 26. The first *rastrellamento* in the region took place the previous April; see Adriano Balbo, Renato Grimaldi, and Antonella Saracco, *Vento di Guerra sulle Langhe: Lotta partigiana 1943–1945* (Boves: Araba Fenice, 2012), 86–89.
- 60 Piffer draws on the report, “The Italian Resistance Movement in Relation to Allied Air Aid,” 23 January 1944, in *Gli Alleati*, 206–207; the quotation is from 325, n. 46.
- 61 Mauro Fantino, *...e i Partigiani scesero a Borgo: Aprile 1945, storia dei giorni della Liberazione* (Borgo San Dalmazzo: Mauro Fantino Editore, 2015), 6.
- 62 “Bombardamenti alleati su Sanremo a febbraio 1945,” 25 March 2020, <https://primazonaoperativalliguria.blogspot.com/2020/03/bombardamenti-alleati-susanremo.html>, includes details from contemporaneous reports of Resistance units as well as the diary of Giuseppe Biancheri, originally published in *La voce intermelia*, vol. 39, no. 11 (November 1984).
- 63 Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 2, *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 593; Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces*, vol. 3, 339, 397.
- 64 Antonio Martino, “L’annessione di Tenda e Briga nei rapporti dell’intelligence alleata (1945–1946),” *Storia e Memoria* (l’Istituto Ligure per la Storia della Resistenza e dell’età contemporanea di Genova), n. 2, 2013.
- 65 Richard Lamb, *War in Italy, 1943–1945: A Brutal Story* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1993), 269.
- 66 Quaranta, *Oh sole!*, 18.
- 67 Sergio Costagli, “A Cuneo 97 vittime nei bombardamenti tra il 1944 e il 1945: per loro nemmeno una croce,” *Cuneodice.it*, 14 March 2022, https://www.cuneodice.it/varie/cuneo-e-valli/a-cuneo-97-vittime-nei-bombardamenti-tra-il-1944-e-il-1945-per-loro-nemmeno-una-croce_60350.html
- 68 Quaranta, *Vivere e morire*, 41; Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 402–404, 528.
- 69 Quaranta, *Gente e partigiani*, 10.
- 70 Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 402–404, 528; Quaranta, *Vivere e morire*, 42. For an earlier example of Allied planes coming to the rescue, see Balbo, *Quando inglesi arrivare*, 201.
- 71 Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 273.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 274, 279. On the partisans’ collaboration with Temple, see also Balbo, *Quando inglesi arrivare*, ch. 24.
- 73 Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 273.
- 74 Massimiliano Aloe, “In viaggio con le bombe. La guerra aerea degli equipaggi angloamericani,” *Storiadelmondo*, no. 57, 15 February 2009.
- 75 Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 283, 286–287.
- 76 Moorehead, *House in the Mountains*, 211–212.
- 77 Fantino, *Borgo nella Resistenza*, 79.
- 78 Author’s photo; for an account by a British soldier who prepared the explosive charges for the Italian partisans, see George Evans, “A British PoW becomes a Partisan, 1943–1945,” *BBC WWII People’s War*, 9 November 2003, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/41/a2001141.shtml>; see also Luciano Carverì’s blogpost, “Storia: quando esplose il ponte di Ivrea,” 14 January 2018, with some quotations from participants, <http://lucianocaveri.it/blog/2018/01/14/storia-quando-esplose-il-ponte-di-ivrea>
- 79 Stafford, *Mission Accomplished*, 250; Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 234–252, contains a number of primary-source documents on these missions.
- 80 “La Storia,” http://www.lambretta.it/storia_1.php?lingua=ita

- 81 Ibid. An English translation from the Italian Lambretta website is only available in archived form, although a British site maintains it as “Innocenti History,” <http://www.ilambretta.co.uk/lambrettahistory/index.html>. See also Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 273–278.
- 82 Paolo Ferrari, “Un’arma versatile. I bombardamenti strategici angloamericani e l’industria italiana,” in Ferrari, ed., *L’aeronautica italiana. Una storia del Novecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004), 411.
- 83 Memorandum of James F. Smith, 29 June 1944, quoted in *ibid.*, 409.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 408–410.
- 85 “La Storia,” http://www.lambretta.it/storia_1.php?lingua=ita. On Poletti’s role, see Paolo Caroli, *La giustizia di transizione in Italia: L’esperienza dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, doctoral dissertation, University of Trento, Faculty of Law, 2016; “Charles Poletti Dies at 99; Aided War-Ravaged Italy,” *New York Times*, 10 August 2002; and Kimber M. Quinney, “‘Less Poletti and More Spaghetti’: Charles Poletti and the Clash of Cultures and Priorities within the Allied Military Government, 1943–1945,” *Occupied Italy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (September 2021), 75–99.
- 86 Achille Rastelli, “Le operazioni aeree angloamericane in Italia,” in Paolo Ferrari, ed., *L’aeronautica italiana. Una storia del Novecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004), 378.
- 87 Pier Luigi Bassignana, *Torino sotto le bombe: Nei rapporti inediti dell’aviazione alleata* (Turin: Edizioni del Capricorno, 2008).
- 88 Marco Gioannini and Giulio Massobrio, *Bombardate l’Italia: storia della guerra di distruzione aerea, 1940–1945* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2007), 226–227.
- 89 Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp, and Richard Overy, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe 1940–1945* (London: Continuum, 2011); Claudia Baldoli and Andrew Knapp, *Forgotten Blitzes: France and Italy under Allied Air Attack, 1940–1945* (London: Continuum, 2012); Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Penguin, 2014); Marco Gioannini and Giulio Massobrio, *Bombardate l’Italia: storia della guerra di distruzione aerea, 1940–1945* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2007); Marco Patricelli, *L’Italia sotto le bombe: Guerra aerea e vita civile, 1940–1945* (Rome: Laterza, 2007), 39, mentions in passing the bombing of rail targets in Cuneo and the nearby Levaldigi airport on 17–18 June 1940.
- 90 Andrew J. Brookes, *Air War over Italy* (Sittingbourne, UK: Ian Allan Publishing, 2000); Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948, 1949, 1951); Kit C. Carter and Robert Mueller, *U.S. Army Air Forces Combat Chronology, 1941–1945* (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1991); Marco Maria Aterano, *Mediterranean-First? La pianificazione strategica anglo-americana e le origini dell’occupazione alleata in Italia (1939–1943)* (Naples: Federico II University Press, 2017).
- 91 <http://biografiadiunabomba.anvcg.it/seconda-guerra-mondiale/>. Local historians are making up for these lacunae, with detailed accounts based on municipal records and other sources. See Claudio Dellavalle, ed., *Il Piemonte nella guerra e nella Resistenza: la società civile (1942–1945)* (Turin: Consiglio Regionale del Piemonte, 2015).
- 92 “Gli aerei nemici su Cuneo,” *Piemonte repubblicano*, 1 August 1944, in Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 125.
- 93 “Relazione sulle incursioni aeree con bombardamento avvenute nel comune di Cuneo il 1/08/44,” 1 August 1944, in Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 140–141.
- 94 Lamb, *War in Italy*, 214.
- 95 *Ibid.*, 225.
- 96 “Relazione sulle incursioni aeree con bombardamento avvenute nel comune di Cuneo il 28/08/44,” 29 August 1944, in Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 145–146. Dimitri Brunetti, ed., *Archivio storico—Fondo Casa “Mater Amabilis”* (Cuneo: Comune di Cuneo, 2001), 5, 7.
- 97 Gianpiero Pettiti, “Le due suor Miriam (1ª parte),” *La Fedeltà* (Fossano), 19 July 2019, <https://www.lafedelta.it/2019/07/19/le-due-suor-miriam-1a-parte/>

- 98 Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 88, 89.
- 99 *Ibid.*, 82–83.
- 100 Pettiti, “Le due suor Miriam;” Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 84–85.
- 101 “L’Ortanotrofito di Centallo colpito in pieno—17 morti e 12 feriti,” *Piemonte repubblicano*, 30 December 1944; “I solenni funerali delle vittime di Centallo,” *Piemonte repubblicano*, 2 January 1945, reprinted in Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 129.
- 102 Letter, Carlton M. Smith to Sergio Costagli, 26 March 2001, in Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 196–198. Absent the original, I have back translated from Italian to English.
- 103 Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 195–196. Costagli published his translation of the letter from English to Italian; in the absence of the original, I have back translated from his Italian.
- 104 Transcript of oral history in Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 400.

5 Humanity

Wars often produce a demonization and dehumanization of adversaries—especially “total wars,” when societies are fully mobilized and the survival of the nation itself is at stake. World War II is a classic example. Denigrating people as insects, or anything less than human, seemed to ease the process of mass extermination—of Jews and Roma by the Nazis, for example—or by obliteration bombing of cities by the Allies. One might even identify degrees of dehumanization. Americans sometimes managed to distinguish ordinary Germans from the Nazi regime, whereas when it came to the Japanese, they were all more commonly treated as subhuman monsters. The pattern was reflected at home in the more than 100,000 people of Japanese descent rounded up and held for years in internment camps, compared to the much smaller number—in absolute terms and proportionately—of Italian-Americans or German-Americans interned. Arguably, racist dehumanization contributed to the policies of aerial destruction, with Japanese cities subject to relentless firebombing and two attacks using the atomic bomb—a weapon whose creation was justified by fear that the Germans would build one first, yet used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki months after Germany’s surrender.¹

Tens of thousands of Italian civilians perished in the Allied bombing raids of World War II—far fewer, though, than in either Germany or Japan. Does that mean that racism and dehumanization of Italians played less of a role in Allied military policy toward Italy? Did Allied political and military leaders, bombing crews, soldiers, and citizens recognize a common humanity in Italian civilians even as their countries were at war, or at least after the Armistice? Previous chapters highlighted particular individuals—Myron Taylor, Solly Zuckerman, and Aldo Quaranta—to illustrate the role that diplomacy, strategy, and resistance, respectively, played in influencing the Allied air campaign. In this chapter I focus on Vera Brittain, a British writer, pacifist, feminist, political analyst, and activist—not because of her influence on Allied bombing practices. It is doubtful she had any. Instead I rely on Brittain to provide a kind of template for what an approach to Italian civilians as human beings would imply for air warfare or even war in general, and how far the behavior of the Allies departed from that standard. For the Allies’ understanding of the status of Italian civilians, I rely on a range of sources: the statements and actions of the top military and political leaders; the depictions of Italian civilians in journalism and fiction based on the authors’ experiences

during the war and occupation; and the views of pilots and bombardiers expressed in memoirs and in the most famous novel about bombing Italy—Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*.

Vera Brittain became celebrated as a writer in Britain with the 1933 publication of her memoir, *Testament of Youth*, depicting her experiences in the Great War. She had served as a nurse on the western front in France, treating German prisoners of war as well as Allied soldiers, and had endured the deaths in battle of all of the young men she loved: her fiancé, her brother, and their closest friends. With the end of the war, believing her survival obligated her to work to avoid future wars, she took a degree in international relations at Oxford and publicly lectured on behalf the League of Nations and “internationalism” as an alternative to military conflict. In 1921 she had saved enough money to travel to Italy to visit her brother Edward’s grave in the British military cemetery at Granezza on the Asiago Plateau. Three years later, she toured various parts of Germany, as it still struggled with the devastation of the war—the situation exacerbated by unemployment, inflation, and malnutrition. Despite the fact that Germans had killed her closest loved ones and decimated her generation, Brittain never found herself demonizing or dehumanizing them, nor even voicing the slurs that fell so easily from the lips of her compatriots:

For me the “Huns” were then, and always, the patient, stoical Germans whom I had nursed in France, and I did not like to read of them being deprived of their Navy, and their Colonies, and their coal-fields in Alsace-Lorraine and the Saar Valley, while their children starved and froze for lack of food and fuel.²

Her hatred and fear of war shaped her personal life as well as the views she later expressed as one of the few public critics of Britain’s bombing strategy against the Axis starting in 1939. During 1924, she got to know George Catlin, a British political scientist who had accepted a position at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. She hesitated to marry him, even though he encouraged her to continue to pursue her career, and prayed that if she did marry and have children, they would not be boys—future soldiers. Writing in 1933, she acknowledged that her prayer was

based upon the supposition that another war would resemble the colossal infantry-massacre of the last. I did not then realise that the menacing future, which was to make my first-born the son that I had dreaded, would dedicate its diminishing resources and its keenest scientific brains to developing even more maniacal forms of aerial warfare, which, if employed, would descend with annihilating impartiality upon the innocent heads of sons and daughters alike.³

This was a prescient, albeit hardly unique, image of the consequences of a war that was still six years away. It anticipated the critique she would issue when indeed her country put its main military efforts into bombing German and Italian cities.

When the war broke out in September 1939, Brittain faced a quandary. Although a feminist, she did not draw the same conclusions as fellow writer and

pacifist Virginia Woolf. Woolf had argued the year before in her *Three Guineas* that, in British attitudes of male superiority and discrimination against women,

we have in embryo the creature, Dictator as we call him when he is Italian or German, who believes that he has the right, whether given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live.

Woolf placed side by side quotations from a British newspaper article and a Nazi propaganda tract, each pronouncing upon a woman's responsibility to devote herself to her husband and family rather than a career outside the home. She posed the question, even though "one is written in English, the other in German...what is the difference?"—thereby attracting vehement criticism, even from close friends, that she underestimated the evils of Nazism.⁴ Vera Brittain, by contrast, acknowledged the menace of the Nazi regime and was not indifferent to which side won the war. Yet she was also a harsh critic of British colonialism and found herself echoing somewhat Woolf's comparison regarding racism rather than sexism. "We tend to be moved to righteous wrath by the crimes of other nations," she claimed,

while remaining indifferent to the victims of our own policy. Even now, few citizens of this Empire realize the basic similarity of Hitler's racial doctrine of a Nordic *Herrenvolk*, and our complacent assumption of white superiority to the coloured races under our rule in Asia and Africa.⁵

During the Great War, Brittain had initially been driven by patriotism, and she sought to contribute to the national cause by serving as a battlefield nurse. She emerged from that war a pacifist, committed to nonviolence. When Germany launched the Second World War, she advocated "an armistice and an early negotiated peace."⁶ Based, presumably, on having witnessed the malnutrition that resulted from the blockade of Germany after the first war, she focused her initial efforts on running the Peace Pledge Union's Food Relief Campaign, and on serving as a "firewatcher" during the German bombings of London.⁷ In her writing, she highlighted the humanity of the victims of war and criticized the "amorphous expressions" in reports on the war that obscured the human costs. Her analysis anticipated that of George Orwell in his 1946 essay, "Politics and the English Language." "Mopping-up operations are proceeding,' we are told, 'and our troops are cleaning up pockets of enemy resistance.' 'Some damage was done, but casualties were negligible.'" Describing war as "a surgical operation," she writes, invokes the "swift, health-giving action of a surgeon's knife...It does not suggest a pitiful group of Italian peasants exhausted by fever and dysentery, whose only existence is the short, blissful silence between machine-gun and bombing attacks."⁸

In a series of letters written to her 15-year-old son, Brittain sought to convey the perspective of a pacifist during wartime. In 1942 she had the letters published for a broader audience as *Humiliation with Honour*. In its second letter/chapter, "The Decline of the Individual," she decried the way language during wartime robbed people of their humanity: "Since the War began, a new kind of standard

vocabulary has been developed which seems to be designed to conceal the individual suffering caused both by war-time adversities and by the official use of humiliation as a weapon." She explored "the multiplication of categories which blunt the perception of personal disaster by means of a neutral-tinted, collective impersonality," offering as examples how "the wounded and dying are transformed into 'casualties,' while the small householders who lose the shelter and savings of a lifetime in an air raid become 'the homeless.'"⁹

As the British war effort came increasingly to focus on air raids against cities, Brittain turned her attention to the effects of British area bombing. She joined the Committee for the Abolition of Night Bombing, later changed to the Bombing Restriction Committee. As a pacifist, she was sensitive to the impression that opposing bombing at night implied endorsing bombing during the day, and that restricting bombing implied accepting other military action.¹⁰ Still, she was so troubled by the human consequences of bombing that she took on an assignment from the Committee to write a pamphlet based on the materials its members had gathered from various press and diplomatic reports. The result, *Seeds of Chaos: What Mass Bombing Really Means*, was scheduled for publication in April 1944, but an abridged version had surprisingly been approved by British wartime censors for publication in the United States a month earlier. It appeared as the March 1944 issue of *Fellowship*, the journal of the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, under the title "Massacre by Bombing: The Facts behind the British-American Attack on Germany." Brittain's judgment of the air campaign, now being waged by the United States and Britain together, was unequivocal: "Owing to our air raids, hundreds of thousands of helpless and innocent people in German, Italian, and German-occupied cities are being subjected to agonizing forms of death and injuries comparable to the worst tortures of the Middle Ages."¹¹

"Massacre by Bombing" was a *tour de force* of detailed empirical analysis and moral condemnation. Relying entirely on what we would now call "open sources," Brittain turned up a wealth of detail on official British policy, the bombing techniques, and the consequences on the ground. She reproduced a translation of a Swiss journalist's report from *Basler Nachrichten*—one of the earliest explanations of the "fire storm," when high-explosive, phosphorous, and incendiary bombs are dropped deliberately to create an intense fire and an "air chimney" that sucks up all the surrounding oxygen. The fire consumes everything and everyone outside and suffocates those taking shelter indoors. Kurt Vonnegut later described the phenomenon in his 1969 novel *Slaughterhouse Five*, based on his personal experience as a US prisoner of war during the firebombing of Dresden—an event he survived by cowering in a refrigerated meat locker.

Brittain's critique received widespread attention in the United States. Twenty-eight leading clergy and lay figures endorsed her views in a preface to the *Fellowship* article, but most of the response was negative. The editor of *Catholic World* was dismayed to find that most critics had not carefully read the piece.

I must have read a couple of hundred attacks on Miss Brittain and her theme. They ranged all the way from expostulation to diatribe, but I'm blessed if I found one which correctly reported the precise position she had taken.¹²

Brittain's detailed enumeration of the casualties of the bombing raids, which she reported city by city, relied in part on German sources compiled by the Bombing Restriction Committee. She thus made herself vulnerable to scathing attacks such as that launched by William Shirer in the *New York Herald Tribune*:

With all due respect to Miss Brittain and her twenty-eight pacifist followers in this country, one is bound to report that many of the "facts" in this strange pamphlet turn out to be reproductions of Nazi propaganda...Miss Brittain uses Nazi propaganda to prove how frightful our bombing is.¹³

The same newspaper reported a rebuke by President Franklin Roosevelt himself. To no avail, Brittain, in her own defense, pointed out that, in her extensively documented essay, "I made exactly ten references to direct German statements, out of literally hundreds to British officials, airmen, statesmen, newspapers, etc."¹⁴

Back home the response to *Seeds of Chaos* was equally harsh, captured best perhaps by George Orwell's review. He insisted that "all talk of 'limiting' or 'humanizing' war is sheer humbug." He took Brittain to task for excessive emphasis on such "catchwords" as "killing civilians," "massacre of women and children," and "destruction of our cultural heritage."

When you look a bit closer, the first question that strikes you is: Why is it worse to kill civilians than soldiers? Obviously one must not kill children if it is in any way avoidable, but it is only in propaganda pamphlets that every bomb drops on a school or an orphanage. A bomb kills a cross-section of the population; but not quite a representative selection, because the children and expectant mothers are usually the first to be evacuated, and some of the young men will be away in the army. Probably a disproportionately large number of bomb victims will be middle-aged...On the other hand, "normal" or "legitimate" warfare picks out and slaughters all the healthiest and bravest of the young male population.¹⁵

Brittain, who had written in *Testament of Youth* of the loss of all of her young male loved ones in the Great War, did not need Orwell to remind her of that conflict's toll. Her prediction at the end of that book that the next war would impartially annihilate innocent "sons and daughters alike" was far more accurate than Orwell's understanding of the war more than three years into it. If "warfare picks out and slaughters all the healthiest and bravest of the young male population" that is because they are the ones carrying the weapons and using them against each other. Orwell's obtuse comment neglects the fact that civilians are defenseless, whereas soldiers are armed and enjoy the "combatant's privilege" to use those weapons to defend themselves. As it turned out, and as Brittain could foresee, civilian deaths eventually outnumbered military ones in World War II by a ratio of at least two to one, not least because of the Allies' emphasis on strategic bombing.

Unlike many who had embraced pacifism temporarily in the wake of the Great War, Brittain maintained her commitment to nonviolence even as Nazi Germany attacked her own country. And unlike the many English conservatives who had admired the fascist experiments in Italy and Germany, Brittain, as a socialist, had

never been taken in. Her opposition to war had nothing to do with sympathy for the Nazi regime, despite libelous charges to the contrary. Certainly, the Germans knew where she stood. After the war Brittain's name turned up, along with fellow pacifist Virginia Woolf, on the so-called *Sonderfahndungsliste G.B.* (sometimes called the Nazi Black Book) that the Nazis had compiled of nearly 3,000 politically suspect people. They were to be rounded up and arrested immediately following a successful German invasion of Britain.

For the purposes of this chapter, the most relevant sections of Brittain's pamphlet are those left out of the *Fellowship* article but included in *Seeds of Chaos*: her discussion of official British attitudes toward Italy, her coverage of the consequences of the bombing, and how she imagined Allied air crews felt about what they were doing. Regarding official views, Brittain reports on a discussion in the House of Commons following the July 1943 bombing of Italy's capital. On 28 July, a member of parliament asked the Secretary of State for Air "whether the same principles of discrimination that are applied to Rome are being and will be applied to other cities." The response was probably not what he expected: "The same principles are applied to all centres. We must bomb important military objectives. We must not be prevented from bombing important military objectives because beautiful or ancient buildings are near them." "In other words," Brittain adds, "many irreplaceable churches, monuments and other treasures must be destroyed on the off-chance of hitting one railway station or an isolated factory."¹⁶ As we saw in Chapter Two, whatever discrimination the Americans attempted in the bombing of Rome, the raid on the city's railyards still cost thousands of civilian casualties, several working-class neighborhoods, and the Basilica of San Lorenzo.

It is somewhat surprising that a British MP would have asked about the principle of discrimination between civilian and military objects on 28 July. As we saw in the Introduction, and as Brittain reports, Prime Minister Churchill had vowed in the House of Commons the very day before that "in the next few months Italy will be seared and scarred and blackened from one end to the other"—a vow that would not permit of much distinction between military targets and civilian lives.¹⁷

As in her coverage of Germany, Brittain devoted several pages of *Seeds of Chaos* to detailed accounts of the bombing of particular cities: Naples, Milan, Turin, Genoa, Rome, and Frascati. The latter town, as we saw in Chapter Two, was the headquarters of Field Marshal Kesselring, the ostensible target of the raid on 8 September 1943, the day Italians learned of the Armistice and believed they and the Allies were no longer enemies. "Once again," Brittain protests, "the endeavour to destroy a few ring-leaders by indiscriminate bludgeoning led to a heavy massacre of the innocents."¹⁸ She highlighted details that most coverage of the air campaign neglected. Following the bombings of Genoa, Turin, and Milan in mid-August 1943,

roads leading from Milan to the Swiss frontier were chocked with thousands of nerve-shattered refugees. Hundreds were said to be perishing by the way-side from exhaustion and lack of food. This was the treatment meted out to the workers in the industrial cities of north Italy, who were allies in the fight against Fascism.¹⁹

In mid-December 1943, more than three months after the Armistice, Brittain quotes a London daily to the effect that “in Turin and Genoa, which had been badly stricken with influenza, hundreds of thousands were living in caves or in the open, in eight degrees of frost.”²⁰ Although her sources may have exaggerated the numbers, they accurately convey the suffering that civilians endured from the bombing.

Another theme of this chapter that Brittain’s pamphlet anticipates is the reactions of the air crews that flew the bombing missions. She reports from the account of one attack by an RAF captain his view that the “crews have no time to dwell on the terrible nature of the attack being carried out down below; they are intent in carrying out their mission and preserving themselves.”²¹ Some seemed a bit innocent of what their mission entailed. “I never thought much about Sicily until we started bombing it a week ago,” reported a British air crew member in July 1943.²²

Brittain agrees that the crews “do not dwell today on the ghastly cost” of their “self-preservation to helpless civilians. Doubtless they do not picture the frantic children pinned beneath the burning wreckage, screaming to their trapped mothers for help.” But, she wonders,

what will be the effect of their deeds upon the more sensitive of these young flyers when in future years they come to know what the “terrible nature of the attack” really meant, and have time to think about it? They may, perhaps, be forgiven by some of their surviving victims, but will they ever forgive themselves? What aftermath of nightmare and breakdown will come?²³

The tension between air crews’ preoccupation with self-preservation and their acknowledgment of the consequences of their actions receives attention in the final part of this chapter. The next two sections discuss attitudes toward Italian civilians during the war and during the period that witnessed both Allied occupation and partisan resistance.

Attitudes Toward Civilians in Wartime

Among the Allies, the British were the first to fight against the Italians, as we saw in Chapter One, immediately following Mussolini’s opportunistic invasion of France in June 1940. The Italian army engaged British forces in Africa and Mussolini sent Italian planes to attack the United Kingdom by joining the Germans in the Battle of Britain. He claimed falsely that the Italian air forces had bombed London itself, even though they never made it that far, and Churchill saw fit to endorse that claim. In any case, as victims of Italian aggression, with their homeland’s survival at risk from Axis assault, the British could be expected to have demonized their Italian adversaries as they sought to defend themselves. In fact, even under German bombardment, opinion was divided on whether bombing civilians was an appropriate response: “In London, the most heavily bombed area, the proportion of those against retaliatory bombing, 47 per cent, exceeded the 46 per cent who supported it.”²⁴ The Americans found themselves in a different

position. Home to many Italian immigrants, some of whom joined other Americans in their admiration of Mussolini and fascism, the United States was less inclined to demonize Italians, even after Italy declared war against it in December 1941—and American civilians never came under attack from Italian planes.²⁵ Nevertheless a vast majority of Americans expressed no qualms about the use of air power against civilian objects. “A Gallup poll taken shortly after the bombing” of the Abbey of Monte Cassino, discussed in Chapter Three, “found that if military leaders believed it necessary to bomb historic religious buildings and shrines in Europe, 74 percent of Americans would approve and only 19 percent disapprove.”²⁶

In his wartime policies, Franklin Roosevelt had sought to distinguish between belligerent leaders and regimes, on the one hand, and their citizens, on the other. As we saw in Chapter Two, he did so to gain support for Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union, as assistance to ordinary Russians rather than an endorsement of communism. He made a similar distinction regarding the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini, not least to maintain support for the war from US populations of German and Italian descent. Churchill was disinclined to make such distinctions in rhetoric or behavior. In August 1942, in a meeting with Stalin in Moscow, Churchill explained his bombing policy, and its focus on undermining morale by treating the urban working class “as a military target.” As the Prime Minister put it, speaking of Germany,

we sought no mercy and would show no mercy. We hoped to shatter twenty German cities as we had shattered Cologne, Lübeck, Düsseldorf and so on.... If need be, as the war went on, we hoped to shatter almost every dwelling in almost every German city.²⁷

In practical terms, the US strategic bombing strategy, to the extent it emphasized civilian morale as an objective, was no different. A 1943 joint US–British operational plan, for example, envisioned “the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial, and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened.” That same year, Churchill reported to the British public that

the almost total systematic destruction of many of the centers of German war effort continues on a greater scale and at a greater pace. The havoc wrought is indescribable and the effect upon the German war production in all its forms ... is matched by that wrought upon the life and economy of the whole of that guilty organization.²⁸

Otherwise known for the elegance and clarity of his speech, Churchill here leaves ambiguous what he intends by “that guilty organization.” One plausibly infers that he means the whole German nation, without taking account of the possibility that some people (babies, at least?) may be quite innocent.

Churchill's attitude toward Italian civilians was no more generous, as we saw in the Introduction's overview of the urban bombing by the Royal Air Force that followed Italy's entry into the war in June 1940. Granted he considered Mussolini's attack on Britain's ally, France, a fundamental betrayal; still it is hard to resist the impression that Churchill's attitude toward the Italians as a people stemmed from a fundamental racism. In May 1943, in a whiskey-propelled conversation with Henry Wallace, the US vice president, Churchill announced that he expected "England and the United States to run the world" following the Allied victory. "Why be apologetic about Anglo-Saxon superiority?" he demanded. Wallace accused Churchill of advocating "Anglo-Saxondom *über Alles*"—a charge that Stalin would make almost three years later in response to Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech at Fulton, Missouri. The Soviet leader claimed that the former prime minister's proposals reflected "a racial theory, stating that only nations that speak the English language are full-fledged nations that are called upon to rule the destinies of the whole world," and noting, as Wallace did, its similarity to Hitler's Aryan pretensions.²⁹ This is the same point that Vera Brittain made in associating British colonial racism with Hitler's *Herrenvolk* ideology.

At a press conference during the same US visit in May 1943, Churchill elaborated on his view that the Italian people as a whole bore responsibility for Mussolini's crimes and should be subjected to pressure during the course of military operations. "I think they are a softer proposition than Germany," he averred, but to induce Italy to leave the war, "I wouldn't count on anything but the force of arms," which could provoke "a change of heart" or "a weakening of morale." Following the anticipated defeat of Italy, he insisted that "nobody proposes to take the native soil of Italy away from the Italian people. They will have their life. They will have their life in the new Europe." (It went without saying that Italy would lose its African colonies and Balkan sphere of influence.) Recognizing the control that the fascist dictatorship imposed on Italians, Churchill still considered them guilty for succumbing to it:

They have sinned—erred—by allowing themselves to be led by the nose by a very elaborate tyranny which was imposed upon them so that it gripped every part of their life. The one-party totalitarian system, plus the secret police applied over a number of years is capable of completely obliterating the sense of personal liberty.

And thus they were led by intriguing leaders, who thought they had got the chance of five thousand years in aggrandizing themselves by the misfortunes of their neighbors who had not offended them in any way, into this terrible plight in which they find themselves.

I think they would be very well advised to dismiss those leaders, and throw themselves upon the justice of those they have so grievously offended. We should not stain our names before posterity by cruel and inhuman acts. We have our own reputation to consider. But after all it really is a matter for them to settle among themselves, and settle with their leaders.³⁰

According to the transcript of the press conference, the reporters were amused by Churchill's allusions to bombing the Italians into surrender: "All we can do is to apply those physical stimuli (laughter) which in default of moral sanctions are sometimes capable of inducing a better state of mind in recalcitrant individuals and recalcitrant Nations (laughter)."³¹

That same month, May 1943, British aircraft dropped leaflets over Naples with this message:

Hitler and Mussolini condemned Italy to become a no man's land. No man's land: with this name the strategists define that desolate sector between two opposing battle fronts. With the liquidation of the African campaign, Italy's place in the Axis strategy is that of a buffer or screen along which the German General Staff hopes to slow down the march of the United Nations [...] If we tell you that Italy will become no man's land, we are serious about it; your country will be exposed to bombing, machine-gunning, the most complete disorganization; countless houses will end up in flames, corpses will accumulate in cities and countryside. Cold in winter, infections in summer, dismay, hunger will multiply.³²

What Vera Brittain later reported in *Seeds of Chaos* is what her government intended. The leaflet implies that ordinary Italians bore responsibility for Mussolini's war and could and should do something about it. Such views had already been circulating in the US press in the wake of reports of the devastating bombing of the cities of Italy's northern industrial triangle (Milan-Turin-Genoa) in the autumn of 1942. A *New York Sun* article about the bombing of the latter city reinforced the views of Allied leaders who sought to blame the entire population for the sins of the dictator:

If to total war its civilian population must pay a bitter price in life and suffering, that population should charge the bill to the inventors of total war, of whom not the least important is Signor Mussolini... Unless the Italian people shall themselves throw off the yoke of their domestic and alien masters, the bombing of Genoa is but a token of the full payment that will be exacted.³³

To the extent that such views were held by political and military leaders and soldiers and bomber crews, one could expect that concern to avoid harm to Italian civilian life would not figure prominently in bombing strategies—or in the treatment of Italians under occupation once Italy had surrendered.

US military practices evinced, at best, a general indifference toward civilians. In July 1943, General George S. Patton's forces occupying the Sicilian town of Gela faced resistance from Italian and German troops. He ordered a naval bombardment, a mortar attack with white phosphorous shells. The fragments burrowed into the soldiers' limbs down to the bone and continued burning. The effects "seemed to make them quite crazy," Patton reported, "as they rushed out of the ravine, shrilling like dervishes with their hands over their heads." German artillery retaliated against the town. "No one was hurt except some civilians," Patton noted

reassuringly. “I have never heard so much screaming.”³⁴ “Some shells and bombs killed a few civilians and everyone in the town screamed like coyotes for about twenty minutes.”³⁵ Patton’s callous attitude seemed to rub off on his subordinates. A few days later, two noncommissioned officers under his command massacred dozens of unarmed Italian prisoners in two separate incidents. When General Omar Bradley queried him about the situation, Patton proposed a cover-up. He suggested, according to his diary entry,

to certify that the dead men were snipers or had attempted to escape or something, as it would make a stink in the press and also would make the civilians mad. Anyhow they are dead so nothing can be done about it.³⁶

Patton seemed to demonstrate some sense of humanity when he acknowledged to his diary the civilian toll of the Sicilian campaign. The entry for 19 July 1943 reads: “At Caltanissetta, we killed at least 4,000 civilians by air alone and the place smelled to heaven as the bodies are still in the ruins. I had to feel sorry for the poor devils.”³⁷ Five days later, as General Geoffrey Keyes’ 2nd Armored Division was approaching Palermo, Patton “called off the air bombardment and naval bombardment because I felt enough people had been killed.” Although he repeats that he refrained from bombing “because I did not wish to cause unnecessary deaths on any more civilians,” he claims “the restraint was General Keyes’ idea—a fine soldier.”³⁸

Even after Italy withdrew from the war, Italian civilians continued to face the wrath of the US Army as it confronted the Germans in southern Italy. Vera Brittain found terms like “casualties” too impersonal to describe the suffering of individuals during World War II. Nowadays we would use the even more sterile expression “collateral damage” to describe the ostensibly unintended harm Italian civilians endured in the course of legitimate fighting. But, as firsthand reports recount, the US style of warfare inflicted tremendous levels of harm. The war correspondent Richard Tregaskis describes Lt. Col. William D. Darby of Arkansas consulting his map to identify a target on 19 September 1943, 11 days after the Armistice was announced.

I want to give this a hell of a pasting. I want to start out with the mortars again tonight. I want to blast the crap out of this hill, and the living daylight out of that hill. The chemical mortars will cover that one with W.P.³⁹

The chemical, white phosphorous, is the one that General Patton described as burning so deep into people’s bones as to make them shrill “like dervishes” and scream “like coyotes.”

The next day Tregaskis came upon “Majors Max Schneider and Roy A. Murray talking with two ragged Italians” about the disposition of German forces. The Americans had been pounding their town of Angri without even knowing whether there were any soldiers there. “One of the two Eyeties spoke English,” writes Tregaskis, “with an unmistakable Brooklyn accent.” Major Schneider handed the reporter a piece of paper, saying “don’t let anyone tell you that our

artillery isn't O.K." The text was headed, "Commune (*sic*) di Angri, Salerno Province," and signed by the mayor or *podestà*:

To the English Commander: Excuse me if I communicate to you that is many days that your batteries let come on our city a shower of projectiles that make a great destructions of houses and men, women, children and so on.

All the population of the city, more than 20,000 inhabitants, are sudden fear for the men wounded and death.

Will you please change the position of your cannons and do not shot on our city. This is that appeal that all the population of Angri does to you.

Commander, save our children, save our old men, save our women, save this population, please God bless you.

Major Murray

wrote out an answer which he gave to the English-speaking Italian, and told me that he would check to see whether there were any Germans in the town or not. The message read: 'We will try to respect your wishes, as we certainly do not intend to harm the Italian population.'⁴⁰

A low point in the Allies' treatment of the Italians—aside from the devastation wrought by area bombing of cities—came with the near-disastrous landing at Salerno, the day after the Armistice saw Italy try to leave the war. In his *Naples'44*, the British intelligence officer Norman Lewis recounted in gruesome detail one particularly egregious treatment of a civilian more than a week after the Italian surrender.

Here I saw an ugly sight: a British officer interrogating an Italian civilian, and repeatedly hitting him about the head with a chair; treatment which the Italian, his face a mask of blood, suffered with stoicism. At the end of the interrogation, which had not been considered successful, the officer called in a private of the Hampshires and asked him in a pleasant, conversational sort of manner, "Would you like to take this man away, and shoot him?" The private's reply was to spit on his hands, and say, "I don't mind if I do, sir." The most revolting episode I have seen since joining the forces.⁴¹

Lewis had been told that US commanders ordered their soldiers not to take surrendering Germans prisoner at Salerno but to bludgeon them to death with the butts of their rifles—a clear war crime.⁴² Yet to beat and murder Italian civilians was something else again. The scene did not augur well for Allied treatment of Italians under occupation.

Attitudes During Occupation and Resistance

In August 1944, more than a year had passed since the king had summoned the Grand Council of Fascism to depose Mussolini, an action that induced Galeazzo

Ciano, the foreign minister and Mussolini's son-in-law, to flee Germany. It was as if the king, representing the Italian people, were following Churchill's advice "to dismiss those leaders." Yet Churchill was still finding it hard to shake the sense of betrayal provoked by Mussolini's opportunistic attack of four years earlier. Nearly a year after the Armistice that led to Italy's change in status from enemy to captive friend in need of liberation, the Prime Minister was still casting blame on ordinary Italians, again using the loose term "nation" to refer to—apparently—everybody:

When a nation has allowed itself to fall into a tyrannical regime it cannot be absolved from the faults due to the guilt of that regime, and naturally we cannot forget the circumstances of Mussolini's attack on France and Great Britain when we were at our weakest, and people thought that Great Britain would sink forever...⁴³

In conversation with Stalin at the British Embassy in Moscow in October 1944, Churchill acknowledged that, in the midst of the ongoing war and Allied occupation, "the Italians are in a miserable condition." But he personally "did not think much of them as a people." His main concern was that Stalin keep the Italian communists from causing trouble for the occupation authorities or the postwar government.⁴⁴

Churchill mistrusted the partisans fighting against the Germans and Italian fascists under the banner of the Committee of National Liberation. His suspicion of their political intentions contributed to his general hostility toward the Italians and produced confusion in British occupation policy. The situation, complained the British Foreign Office, "means trying to treat the Italians as friends and foes at the same time."⁴⁵ An Italian working with the liaison officer Major Oliver Churchill—no relation to the Prime Minister—described the major's attitude as typical of the British, "almost a caricature of the military and imperial British mentality":

He was a sincere friend of those whom he knew and felt to be pro-British and moderate but as to Italians in general they remained for him "enemy aliens," i.e., nationals of a country which had declared and made war on Britain and was still subject to an occupation regime. As an officer of a conquering army he would never have understood why the occupying forces could and should not use their authority, and if necessary the whip, to bring into line a few anti-democratic, communist and pro-communist agitators, who reminded him of the fascists and whom he thoroughly disliked.⁴⁶

The shared views of the otherwise unrelated Winston Churchill and Oliver Churchill were evidently common among the British. "The British were spiteful in their behaviour to the Italians," wrote the historian Eric Morris, "treatment that continued long after the war."⁴⁷ In a memorandum for President Roosevelt, Myron Taylor had similarly described the British attitude toward the Italians as "cold, unforgiving, and at times actually cruel."⁴⁸ A slightly more generous characterization would be "ambivalent." A year after the Armistice, and just four days before he was appointed Chief Commissioner of the Allied Central Commission

for Italy, Harold Macmillan complained to Anthony Eden, the British foreign minister: “We cannot reconcile the contradictions in our Italian policy. Sometimes they are enemies; sometimes they are cobelligerents. Sometimes we wish to punish them for their sins; sometimes to appear as rescuers and guardian angels. It beats me.”⁴⁹

Official documents were rife with cultural stereotypes of the Italians. Early in the war, a British guide, prepared for agents promoting anti-fascist propaganda, contained some points about Italians “always to keep in mind.” They “have an acute sense of humor,” are logical, jealous, vain, and theatrical.⁵⁰ From stereotype to casual racism was a short step, as firsthand accounts and fictionalized reportage revealed in the language used to describe the Italians: dago, ginzo, eyetic.⁵¹ Not even Americans of Italian descent—whose linguistic skills were essential for the occupation—escaped ridicule.⁵² They were subjected to the slur familiar from life back in the States: “wop” (apparently derived from the Neapolitan dialect’s *guappo* for a swaggerer, pimp, or ruffian). General Patton used the word in his diary description of a Ranger unit that “had killed 50 and captured 250 Wops.”⁵³ One of the subplots of *All Thy Conquests*, Alfred Hayes’ 1946 novel of Rome under US occupation, concerns a married American woman having an affair with Captain John Pollard. Racialized attitudes toward Italians come through in her physical description: “She had nice legs, a long throat, and being dark, people sometimes thought Antoinette was Italian, and then Pollard liked saying, ‘Hell no. She’s a white woman.’”⁵⁴

Harry Brown’s 1944 novel, *A Walk in the Sun*, conveys the feeling of ambivalence about their role on the part of the occupying soldiers, even when they are not viewing the Italians through racist lenses. One scene recounts a bantering conversation between two occupying soldiers, caught in the midst of uneasy transition from killing to saving Italian civilians:

“It’s a good thing they invented trains for traveling salesmen,” said Rivera.

“All right,” Friedman said. “Kill me. What’s the gag?”

“No gag,” said Rivera. “But if they didn’t have trains, all the traveling salesmen would have to walk. A hell of a job that would be.”

“You’re a traveling salesman,” Friedman said. “And you ain’t been taking any trains lately.”

“What do you mean I’m a traveling salesman? I’m a murderer.”

“You’re a traveling salesman. You’re selling democracy to the natives.”⁵⁵

The Allies’ ambivalence was a matter of life or death for Italian civilians. They were literally starving under occupation. Efforts to grow food in the territories over which the war had raged were hindered by the mines left hidden in the fields. As the Introduction mentioned, Martha Gellhorn in 1944 had predicted—inaccurately, as it turned out—that future historians would “describe how Italy became a giant mine field and that no weapon is uglier, for it waits in silence, small and secret, and it can kill any day, not only on the day of battle.”⁵⁶ Instead it was left to novelists, such as Hayes, to convey the danger. In *All Thy Conquests* he reports a conversation among two friends traveling across Rome in the back of a rickety

camionetta. They are contemplating whether the darkening skies portended a rain-storm that would aid the harvest.

“Even if there is rain, how will they cultivate the fields? They are full of mines.”

“That will be a job, clearing the mines.”

“There will be a harvest all right,” the man in the raincoat said. “A harvest of explosions. There are the magnetic mines, the bakelite ones, the glass, the cement, the wooden ones. One thing Italy has more than enough of: mines.”⁵⁷

In the waning days of the war and the first weeks of occupation, the American writer Edmund Wilson traveled extensively in Italy and wrote letters to a friend describing the situation in each region. He too highlighted the problem of the landmines. In the Abruzzi, where he traveled “all the way to the Adriatic in a jeep,” he found “the devastation is unimaginable, large towns with not a building left and the country still planted with mines, which the young men are getting killed digging up for 20 lire (20 cents) a day—miles and miles of this.”⁵⁸

Elsewhere in Italy Wilson found similar devastation. “Naples is absolutely ghastly,” he wrote.

I saw nothing but either ruined streets of pulverized plaster or battered buildings with garbage strewn on the pavements, a few gruesome cuts in the butcher shops and thousands of dirty children running about the streets. No police, no street lamps, no traffic except an occasional donkey cart.⁵⁹

He arrived in Milan

just after the partisans had taken over and the Allied troops came in. They told me that there had been wild excitement during the first days of the expulsion of the Germans, the Mussolini execution, etc., but immediately afterwards everybody relapsed into a kind of state of tense exhaustion. The people looked awful: starved and stunned and with deeply stamped expressions of anxiety and resentment such as I have never seen anywhere else.⁶⁰

Information provided to the British Foreign Office makes clear that officials back in London were aware of the dire situation on the ground, for example in Naples. David Ellwood writes that they were “well informed” on the subject of Italian starvation, “to the extent of knowing that *if* the promised March deliveries of sugar and cheese had ever arrived in Naples, the total daily calories available to each individual would have been 615, compared with 1378 on German rations.” One source of the supply problems, according to Ellwood, was “the peculiar British attitude to the treatment of Italy characterized in no small part by vindictiveness.”⁶¹

How different was the US approach? As the British and Americans sought to cooperate in occupying Sicily and southern Italy in the wake of the Armistice of September 1943, they endeavored to coordinate their efforts. In a chapter that aptly poses the question “Liberators or occupiers?” Ellwood cites conflicting

guidelines for the representatives of the Allied military government (AMGOT). The occupation directive for Sicily, for example, offered this overview:

The administration shall be benevolent with respect to the civilian population so far as consistent with strict military requirements. The civilian population is tired of war, resentful of German overlordship, and demoralized by the Fascist regime, and will therefore be responsive to a just and efficient administration. It should be made clear to the local population that military occupation is intended: (1) to deliver the people from the Fascist regime which led them into the war; and (2) to restore Italy as a free nation.⁶²

At the same time, General Administrative Instruction No. 1 directed AMGOT officers to be “guided in your attitude towards the local population by the memory of years of war in which the Italians fought against your people and your Allies.”⁶³ The British perceived the Americans as too soft on the Italians and too eager to rehabilitate them. As one official complained in February 1945 to Anthony Eden, the British foreign minister, the Americans had “never really felt themselves at war with Italy” and “wish to go full-steam ahead” in reconciliation with the Italian population.⁶⁴

Few accounts give either country’s occupation forces high marks. Grigg writes, for example, that the Allied military government “was an expensive and insensitive apparatus which, to put it mildly, did little to generate enthusiasm for the Allied cause.”⁶⁵ Ellwood is a bit more equivocal. “The question of the civil affairs officers’ attitudes, generally and individually, is one the mass of documentation produced by the occupation leaves unanswered on the whole,” he avers, “though it seems reasonable to suggest that outside headquarters the single officer, left very much on his own, ruled according to his own personality, his own prejudices, and his own civil and military background.”⁶⁶ What we know from reportage and lightly fictionalized accounts, such as John Hersey’s *A Bell for Adano* (1944), confirms Ellwood’s sense that individual attitudes made a difference. Hersey’s story, based on the US military occupation of Licata, Sicily, conveys a generally positive portrayal of Major Victor Joppolo, modeled on the Italian–American military governor, Frank Toscani.⁶⁷ A conversation between Joppolo and a military police sergeant named Borth conveys the ambiguous status of Italian civilians and the ambivalent attitude of the liberator–occupiers.

At the corner of the third alley running off the Via of October Twenty-eight, the two men came on a dead Italian woman. She had been dressed in black. Her right leg was blown off and the flies for some reason preferred the dark sticky pool of blood and dust to her stump.

“Awful,” the Major said, for although the blood was not yet dry, nevertheless there was already a beginning of a sweet but vomitous odor. “It’s a hell of a note,” he said, “that we had to do that to our friends.”

“Friends,” said Borth, “that’s a laugh.”

“It wasn’t them, not the ones like her,” the Major said. “They weren’t our enemies.”⁶⁸

Joppolo eventually impresses Borth and the locals with his efforts to revive the town's economy, but he runs afoul of his nemesis, the cruel General Martin, evidently based on General Patton, and is removed from his post.

Naples provides some of the most disturbing evidence of Allied attitudes and mistreatment of the people they were supposed to be liberating. Some accounts, such as this one by a British pilot stationed there, express considerable sympathy for the people in the bombed-out city, left without housing or food:

Walking along the back streets from the camp they were shocked to see families with bedding and their few possessions out on the pavements, living in absolute abject poverty. Men with missing limbs, looking very sullen, were standing or lying around. Some played cards, some begged, whilst the women—either very thin or bloated and in their shabby black dresses with untidy, unkempt hair—looked on hopelessly. Those same ragged children with their pot bellies they had seen in the barren homesteads of the country were now on the pavements of Naples soulfully, pleadingly watching them pass by, through their large, round, dark brown eyes.

They could hardly walk a few paces without being accosted by prostitutes and women openly offering their young daughters for bars of chocolate. There were older children begging, pestering them for money, cigarettes or chocolate.⁶⁹

The Neapolitans did welcome the Allies as liberators, and some had even risen up against the Germans and had expelled many of them in the days before the Allies arrived, events commemorated in Nanni Loy's 1962 film, *Four Days of Naples*.⁷⁰ The city had suffered both from the Allied bombing and from vast destruction and sabotage by the retreating Germans. Yet, according to many sources, their plight did not invoke sympathy. The British, writes Morris, "continued to treat the Italians with contempt."⁷¹ As he explains, the occupation troops were especially harsh:

the local people suffered the indignities of systematic looting, invariably by the second echelon and rear formations (fewer opportunities were afforded to the fighting men). There was precious little sympathy from the military authorities, who treated the Italians more as a conquered people and in the absence of sanctions, pillage and abuse were a common enough experience.⁷²

"In the towns and cities," argues Morris, "those who lived in the liberated south experienced harder times than those under German occupation" elsewhere in the country. Prostitution was widespread, one of the few escapes from starvation. "The price was so low and the importuning so persistent that the Allied soldiers regarded the local people with contempt. The Italians were dirty and ragged too, and in their ignorance the soldiery thought they were always like that."⁷³

Less than a week into the Allied occupation of Naples, the Germans' booby traps were still inflicting a horrifying toll. On 7 October 1943, Tregaskis recorded in his diary how "a great mine blew up under the Naples post office." "Noel

Monks,” a seasoned war correspondent from Australia who had been the first foreigner to witness the devastation at Guernica,

kept repeating, ‘It was awful. It was awful.’ He estimated that more than 100 people including Italian civilians—men, women and children—were killed. Other estimates were lower, but all agreed that the first-aid crews were hauling many bodies from the debris.

Tregaskis adds his own view: “The worst part of the news was that several American Army engineers had been killed.”⁷⁴

On another occasion he describes the reaction of a US Army engineer to a horrendous sight:

We stopped to ask directions of a group of shell-shocked peasants, clad in rags, some of them wearing hunks of cloth wrapped around their feet in place of shoes. Their eyes had the dull color of earth. Plainly, they did not understand why the Germans should blast their houses into the street or why our artillery should spatter the town with a steady rain of terrifying shell explosions, and why, finally, the Germans, who they had been told were allies, should take all their food and ruthlessly destroy their property.

While we wait for the bulldozer crew to push the rubble of one road block aside, we were startled by the screech of a shell coming our way. It exploded near the town. We heard the sound of airplanes. The people in the streets began to gabble frantically, and then, as the next German shell smashed into the town, ran off like rabbits into the ruins of their houses.

From one of the broken buildings we heard the voice of a woman, screaming and wailing. An American engineer sat on the curb of the street, calmly eating the cheese unit of a K-ration. He looked up and explained, ‘She’s been yelling like that all day.’

The German gun spoke again and the shell sang into the town and landed ‘burr-ramm!’ in the street, closer than the last. Suddenly, a tall, emaciated girl in dragging black stockings and a torn black dress, rushed out of one of the buildings and ran down the street, screaming hysterically: “How long will it go on! How long will it go on!” The engineer put down his cheese ration and thoughtfully watched the girl’s thin figure running toward the open country, while another shell screeched into the town and exploded. He said, without excitement, “Sometimes I feel kinda sorry for these poor bastards.”⁷⁵

Such laconic expressions of half-sympathy were among the more positive responses of the Allied soldiers.

Norman Lewis’s account of the Allied-occupied region of Campania provides some horrifying accounts of Allied brutality toward the suffering population. In Naples,

the story was that this little boy was one of a juvenile gang that specialised in jumping into the backs of army lorries when held up in traffic and snatching

up anything pilferable. We heard that they had been dealt with by having a man with a bayonet hidden under a tarpaulin in the back of every supply-lorry. As soon as a boy grabbed the tailboard to haul himself in, the waiting soldier chopped down at his hands. God knows how many children have lost their fingers in this way.⁷⁶

He describes the Allies' treatment of the city of Benevento both during the fighting and after.

This ancient city of fifty thousand inhabitants was purposelessly destroyed in May of last year [1943] by an air-raid carried out by Flying Fortresses, and now, fifteen months later, it shows no signs of resurrection. The beautiful eleventh-century Lombard-Saracenic cathedral is only a shell, and its unique bronze doors have disappeared. I am told that only one house in five has been left standing.

The Allied occupation, initially by Canadian forces, offered no respite. "The departed Canadians have left a bad memory in Benevento. It was the Sergeant-Major's habit to carry a whip with which he flogged people out of his way as he strolled through the streets."⁷⁷

Lewis seemed particularly struck by the injustice of the Allies' approach, given what he had experienced and heard of ordinary Italians' generosity toward the soldiers during the combat:

When the men were hungry they would decide on a small house they liked the look of in a village street, knock on the door, explain who they were, and ask for food. In no case was this ever denied them. After they had eaten they were often offered beds for the night, and for this purpose were shared out among the neighbours. Sometimes they were urged to stay as long as they liked—in one case to settle down and become members of the local community. Money was pressed on them. The old people in Italian villages treated them as sons, and the young ones as brothers.

Lewis stresses the Italians' sense of common humanity, even with their enemies. His words are reminiscent of Vera Brittain's sentiments, based on her service as a nurse to enemy prisoners of war.

To date I have not heard of a single instance of escaping British soldiers being betrayed to the Germans. This adds to the general impression of the civilisation and impressive humanity of our Italian ex-enemies. For this reason, since humanity is above partisanship, the Italians are no doubt equally kind to Germans who come to them for help in similar circumstances, and I find it deplorable that we should show anger and vindictiveness when cases of Italians showing even ordinary compassion to their one-time allies come to our notice.⁷⁸

The reputation of Italians for helping escaping soldiers has found its way into memoirs as well as into Roberto Rossellini's 1960 film, *Era notte a Roma*. An

escaping American pilot, Lt. Peter Bradley, played by Peter Baldwin, is asked to identify himself to the Romans protecting him. He admits to having bombed them, but they hide him nonetheless, at great risk to themselves.⁷⁹

John Horne Burns served as a second lieutenant in US Army intelligence in North Africa and Italy, including in occupied Naples, where one of his jobs was censoring letters of prisoners of war. His 1947 novel, *The Gallery*, named after the Galleria Umberto Primo, the arcade in Naples through which his characters pass, became a bestseller. Sometimes his American soldiers express such opinions as this:

When we got overseas we couldn't resist the temptation to turn a dollar or two at the expense of people who were already down...we didn't take the trouble to think out the fact that the war was supposed to be against fascism—not against every man, woman, and child in Italy.⁸⁰

Such lines induced one reviewer to claim that the author's "appreciation of the Italian people sometimes bordered on 'sentimental idolatry.'" What stands out more, however, is Burns' depiction of the opposite attitude of the occupying troops—hostility infused with racism.⁸¹ Burns' novel covers both the period of combat between US forces and Mussolini's army, as surrendering Italian soldiers are taken as prisoners of war (P/W), and the post-Armistice occupation. In the early phase, a duty officer warns "that we mustn't fraternize with the P/W."

—Fraternize, my arse, the mess sergeant said after the officer had gone. Who wants to fraternize with an Eyetie? They fired on our boys in Africa didn't they? And they're doin it now in Italy.

—They did it because they were told to, the pfc said.

He was a liberal and wore horn-rimmed spectacles.

—I say put the bastards against the wall, the mess sergeant said.

He always shouted his opinions.

—You forget the Geneva Conventions, the pfc said gently.

—Sure, we treat em white! the mess sergeant said, looking at his buddy Jacobowski. So in twenty years they can declare war on us again. What have they got to lose? They'll live better'n they did in the Eyetalian Army...Friggin wops...Dagos...⁸²

One of Burns' narrators suggests that

most Americans had a blanket hatred of all Italians. They figured it this way: These Ginsoes made war on us, so it doesn't matter what we do to them, boost their prices, shatter their economy, shack up with their women.⁸³

Although expressed more crudely, such views bear much in common with some of Winston Churchill's vindictive pronouncements about the Italians.

Some American soldiers adopted rather Churchillian views on bombing as well. Not all of them were repulsed by seeing up close the results of the Allied air raids

against Naples, for example. Burns describes the reaction of two officers visiting the city at the end of July 1944.

Major Motes appraised the ruin around Naples Harbor.

—Goddam it he cried, exalting. See what happens to people who declare war on Uncle Sam?

Lieutenant Mayberry wondered aloud:

—I wonder how many greasers are still lying under that rubble?... Well, Italy was always overpopulated. Musso sends the birthrate up, so we choose our own means of bringing it down.⁸⁴

By August, Major Motes had commandeered a palazzo that became the headquarters for the censorship of prisoners' letters. Italian civilians were hired as censors. Undernourished and weak, they requested food rations from their US employers, provoking further racist outbursts from the US officers.

—Those Ginsoes expect us to serve em a lunch! Stuki cried.

—The only logical position for a greaser, Lieutenant Mayberry said, is under a wolf, sucking her teats like Romulus and Remus.

—They're like nigras and must be kept in their place, Major Motes said.

As the censors fainted from hunger in the course of doing their work, Motes "declared that he'd never lift a finger to help feed a people which had declared war on the United States."⁸⁵

Alfred Hayes, in his 1949 novel, *The Girl on the Via Flaminia*, set in occupied Rome, conveys similarly hostile attitudes in the words of a US soldier:

Bloody young Eyetie. They were all a bloody lot, the sergeant thought, the young ones, hanging around the cafés, black marketing, with their hair oil and their swimming hot eyes. Bloodier than Wogs, standing there on the sidewalks, looking at you as though you'd just robbed the poor box. Should have knocked off a few more of them coming up the coast road from El Alamein, the sergeant thought. Better off all around. Bloody beggars.⁸⁶

His Italian characters are resentful of the American behavior and, in the soldiers' eyes, inadequately grateful.

"Why do the Americans boast so much?" she said. "Why do the Italians complain so much?" he answered.

"We've suffered!"

"We didn't cause it," he said.

"You bombed our cities."

"The Germans were in them," he said.

"And now you," she said.

He looked at her. He had become an enemy. And yet, he was no enemy, certainly not hers, certainly not anyone's in this house, not now, after having

come this distance and through this cold. And yet she accused him, or seemed to accuse him. He had packed a bag and he had brought food and he had walked across the bridge. “Be grateful,” he said, trying not to be angry. Not now, at least. “If we hadn’t walked up here from Salerno,” he said, “you’d still be doing the tedeschi’s laundry...”

“Perhaps,” she said, “it would have been better!”⁸⁷

Curzio Malaparte (born Curt Erich Suckert), a former supporter of Mussolini, describes in *La pelle* (*The Skin*), his 1949 account of Italy under Allied occupation, a mix of resentment and obsequiousness. After an American armored column runs over a man in Rome, the general in charge sends Malaparte to find his widow and children to offer them money. He finds a group of people assembled in the man’s apartment and asks a woman about the victim’s relatives.

The woman replied that he had neither wife nor children. He was an evacuee from the Abruzzi who had sought refuge in Rome after his village and his home had been destroyed in the American air raids. She added at once: ‘Forgive me, I meant the German air raids.’ All his family had been killed by the bombs.⁸⁸

Even if some Italians pretended otherwise, so as not to offend the occupiers, soldiers and reporters on the ground recognized the toll imposed by the Allied bombing on civilian life. They expressed a degree of compassion absent from official pronouncements by political and military leaders. Don Robinson, a US Army sergeant, in an account of his experiences in Italy published in 1944, describes one tragedy elicited in conversation with an Italian refugee:

“[Luigi,] why did you come to Naples,” I asked.

“My family is here.”

“How did you come?”

“I walked.”

“How long did it take you?”

“Three days.”

Like all my Italian conversations, it was choppy and strictly factual. Luigi was silent a moment. Then he said:

“Naples is beautiful, isn’t it?” I agreed with him, then tried a polite inquiry.

“How is your family?”

“My mother is dead, killed by the bombs,” Luigi said. His eyes, I noted, were red.

Robinson highlighted the contrast between Americans and Italians in the dangers faced during the war. He found himself

rejoicing that no one I knew was likely to be forced to walk three days to rejoin his family, only to find at the end of his trip that his mother had been killed by bombs. That is one thing that is appreciated by the American soldier in danger: he knows that his family is all right.⁸⁹

Perspectives from the Air

Bill Maudlin, the cartoonist beloved for his depictions of ordinary infantry “dog-faces,” in his postwar memoir also turned a sympathetic eye on civilian victims—including those of air attacks. As the liberators arrived in Sicily, “not all the natives felt like kissing our hands,” he acknowledged, based on how they had suffered during combat. Particularly troublesome were instances of strafing, when gunners in airplanes would fire their machine guns at civilians on the ground. Maudlin describes one result:

As we made our way over the hill to division we passed through a little mountainside village where the entire population, some thirty or forty people, were gathered in the square. We said “Bon giorno,” and they said nothing; they simply stared balefully at us. Then we saw the body of a little boy. He was horribly shot up, and laid out on a large stone, almost like a sacrifice on an altar. Although the people were clearly not in a chatty mood, we felt compelled to ask what had happened. One of our fighter planes had made a single strafing pass over the town, and this was the only casualty. There is no way of knowing whether the pilot thought he saw a legitimate target or was just being exuberant, but as far as the village was concerned that man had come all the way across the ocean for the express purpose of killing that child.⁹⁰

Maudlin himself had experienced the strafing that killed so many Italian civilians. He had fallen victim to a case of “friendly fire” during the winter of 1944, when US troops were “dug into the hills overlooking Bologna” and

a pair of American P-51 Mustangs were strafing us. By the time they finished their run and got turned around for another pass at our ridge, we were all covering in our holes. They made two more passes, presumably using up all their ammunition, and went home, leaving us to look for casualties and vent our opinions of our air force.⁹¹

An air force general took issue with the cartoons that resulted from Maudlin’s near-miss, and sought to convince the cartoonist how difficult it was for the crews to discriminate between civilian and military targets:

“Maudlin, I’ve seen some of those funny cartoons you’ve done about us,” the general said. “How would you like to spend a day flying around with me in a P-51? We’ve fixed one up with a back seat, and you can see how hard it is to spot ground positions from the air.”

We split-essed, zipped, roared, climbed, spun, and dove our way all over the Po Valley...Finally, as a climax, we strafed the streets of Bologna, although I couldn’t see a soul moving down there except a man on a bicycle, whom we missed. Then we flew back over the ridge where the two planes had shot us the day before. My pilot asked me to point out the US lines and the German lines. Sick and miserable as I was, I did so without hesitation. I don’t think he liked that.

“My opinions about the air force remained about the same” Maudlin concluded.⁹²

Italians too had doubts about the Allied air forces. A partisan fighting in Piedmont in spring 1944 wondered why so many bombers hit civilian targets. He observed an attack against a runway in Savigliano and noted that the Allied pilots were able to distinguish between real and decoy wooden German aircraft, hitting only the real ones and saving ammunition by ignoring the fakes. Why could they not make similar distinctions between military and civilian objectives?⁹³

Novelists, such as Alfred Hayes, captured the mix of hope and disappointment experienced by Italians caught between the hated fascists and the dangerous Allies, raining bombs from the skies. He writes of Giorgio, a Roman who

had been employed in the War Department building as a clerk, and the planes had come, the first of the days when the Alleati had bombed the stazione, and the air-raid sirens, late as usual, had sounded throughout the city.

They had poured out of the offices then, racing for the cellars, all of them, but he, Giorgio, had gone up to the roof looking up into the sky for the neat silver squadrons in the afternoon haze, and had seen them wheeling and wheeling, and they had gone over once and wheeled and come back, and when they had come back Giorgio had not been able any longer to endure it, and so great a lust for annihilation and revenge had overtaken him that he had danced on the roof in a kind of gleeful rage, waving at the sky his white pocket handkerchief, screaming to the drumming squadrons:

“Here!” here! Drop one here! This is the War Department! Imbeciles, drop one here!”

An insane act, insane, an act full of comedy and tragedy, because then the planes had gone on over, ignoring the War Department and his frantic pocket handkerchief, dropping their eggs, and what had they hit? In all this great city, full of so many splendid targets, full of such excellent material for destruction and death, of things worthy of a long delayed punishment, what had they hit? Yes, on the Via Ostia, beyond the gate of St. Paul, in the vicinity of the railroad, they had hit an apartment house which contained the apartment belonging to the wife of Giorgio’s brother, and which held some expensive furniture he had loaned to them. On this the last bomb had fallen, effectively destroying all of it, and only by some incredible charity of fate not taking his brother’s family with it.⁹⁴

The novelist Hayes does not offer any insight into the thinking of the fictional crew who flew over the War Ministry to bomb instead an apartment building near a railyard. For the views of pilots and bombardiers we turn to other sources, including memoirs as well as another, more famous novel, *Catch-22*. One of the more self-reflective memoir accounts comes from Captain Maurice Lihou, a British pilot of a Wellington medium bomber, who went by the nickname “Lee.” Most of his book is not taken up with what Vera Brittain’s RAF captain called the “terrible nature of the attack being carried out down below,” but some of it is. Lee writes of himself in the third person, describing his difficulty at falling asleep after a mission. He

became more concerned about his own character, of what was happening to him as a person. Why at the time, amidst all the thrill and exhilaration, didn't he have any feeling of guilt or of being ashamed of what was happening to the poor people down below?

Why was it that it was only "when he was safely back, that he felt any concern or compassion?"

He had been in several raids himself in England and he knew how the people on the receiving end of a raid felt... On the ground, when the shoe was on the other foot, he had called the German bombers murdering bastards—is that what the people below thought of him when he was over the target?

He would never knowingly drop his bombs at random on crowded cities, but he knew in his heart of hearts that it was inevitable that some of the bombs missed and fell on the civilian population... the nagging feeling of conscience was there, particularly when he thought about the women and kids they had seen when they first went to Foggia. What sort of person was he turning into?⁹⁵

Among his targets were "marshalling yards at Milan Lambrate," near the site of the Innocenti munitions factories. Later he describes a bombing raid on Viterbo

to create road blocks and crater the roads through the town... Two 4,000-pound bombs were seen to burst in the town. Outbound and on the return journey many fires were seen east of the Bracciano, presumably from burning motor transport vehicles on the road.

Clearly the attacks on cities and towns that had troubled Lee and made it difficult to sleep continued to preoccupy his thoughts after the war:

For years Lee wanted to do something to ease the nagging feeling of conscience that he frequently had, often concerning how many innocent people had been killed by the bombs they had dropped, particularly as doubts about Bomber Command's activities during the war were being raised in some circles. To try to ease his conscience, he always found himself coming back to the fact that maybe his crews didn't kill anyone, but they would never really know for sure. How could they?... Like many of his colleagues, he never talked about their experiences. Maybe in his case, subconsciously, he still felt ashamed.

During the war he found his state of mind improved only when the missions changed and no longer put civilians at such risk. "He had now been able to reconcile his conscience with his duty... It could have been because of the support they had been giving to the troops recently—tactical raids were always better than strategic."⁹⁶

Catch-22, Joseph Heller's 1961 novel, suggests that even air raids ostensibly conducted in support of troops can yield outcomes that trouble the conscience. On the surface, though, this is not a book about guilty consciences. Instead the novel

addresses directly the question of self-preservation that Vera Brittain and her RAF captain raised. The characters are thoroughly preoccupied with saving themselves from death. The novel's conceit is that each crew member has to reach a quota of missions before he would be sent home following the last one, but the unit commander keeps raising the quota after each successful "last" mission. Heller himself flew 60 missions from Italy as a bombardier in a B-25 medium bomber of the 488th Bombardment Squadron, 340th Bomb Group, 12th Air Force. Originally the crew were told they could go home after 25 missions. *Catch-22* is based on Heller's wartime experience. The title comes from the ruse that tempts crew members to try to get out of serving on a mission: feigning insanity. But the phenomenon of *Catch-22* "specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind," so anyone who tried to avoid those missions by reason of insanity was by definition sane and must fulfill the missions.⁹⁷

Thus, *Catch-22* reflects common wartime attitudes of soldiers who are keener to save their own lives than those of unarmed civilians. Until the Allies managed to destroy the German and Italian air defenses, flying a bombing raid was indeed one of the most dangerous military activities of the war. The British lost over 55,000 air crew members in raids over Europe between 1939 and 1945, "the highest loss rate of any major branch of the British armed forces."⁹⁸ US Army Air Force battle deaths numbered 52,173: 45,520 killed in action and the rest dying later from their wounds.⁹⁹ Fear of being shot down or seriously wounded by "flak" preoccupied Captain John Yossarian and the other characters in *Catch-22*. "All was contaminated with death," we read, "during the Great Big Siege of Bologna when the moldy odor of mortality hung wet in the air with the sulphurous fog and every man scheduled to fly was already tainted." The mission to destroy the ammunition dumps that the heavy bombers had been unable to target accurately enough was delayed by rain. "Each day's delay deepened the awareness and deepened the gloom. The clinging, overpowering conviction of death spread steadily with the continuing rainfall, soaking mordantly into each man's ailing countenance like the corrosive blot of some crawling disease."¹⁰⁰

The cumulative total of civilians killed in the Allied bombing of Bologna number nearly 2,500, with more than 2,000 wounded, and hundreds of buildings destroyed.¹⁰¹ Yet Heller's narrator, so fulsome in the depiction of the air crew's fear of death, is silent on the deaths below.

Some readers might wonder at the fictional soldiers' relative lack of concern for the civilian lives and property being obliterated by their bombs, although the RAF captain quoted by Brittain provides the likeliest explanation: "they are intent in carrying out their mission and preserving themselves." Heller, however, finds ways to smuggle in acknowledgment of the harm caused by the missions, right from the outset. The novel opens with Yossarian in hospital, faking an illness to avoid further missions. He is assigned the task of censoring letters.

To break the monotony he invented games. Death to all modifiers, he declared one day, and out of every letter that passed through his hands went every adverb and every adjective. The next day he made war on articles.

When he had exhausted all possibilities in the letters, he began attacking the names and addresses on the envelopes, obliterating whole houses and streets, annihilating entire metropolises with careless flicks of his wrist as though he were God.¹⁰²

Later in Rome, Yossarian meets a victim of bombing for the first time, a woman called Luciana, whom he takes to dinner and to bed.

He wondered about the pink chemise that she would not remove. It was cut like a man's undershirt, with narrow shoulder straps, and concealed the invisible scar on her back that she refused to let him see after he had made her tell him it was there. She grew tense as fine steel when he traced the mutilated contours with his finger tip from a pit in her shoulder blade almost to the base of her spine. He winced at the many tortured nights she had spent in the hospital, drugged or in pain, with the ubiquitous, ineradicable odors of ether, fecal matter and disinfectant, of human flesh mortified and decaying amid the white uniforms, the rubber-soled shoes, and the eerie night lights glowing dimly until dawn in the corridors. She had been wounded in an air raid.

"Dove?" he asked, and he held his breath in suspense.

"Napoli."

"Germans?"

"Americani."

His heart cracked, and he fell in love. He wondered if she would marry him.¹⁰³

The poignant moment dissolves into farce as Heller introduces another example of a Catch-22. Luciana is not a virgin, so no one will marry her, she says. Yossarian claims he will. He must be crazy, then, she says. Therefore, she can't marry him.

"Ma non posso sposarti."

"Why can't you marry me?"

"Perchè sei pazzo."

"Why am I crazy?"

"Perchè vuoi sposarmi."¹⁰⁴

Only one incident in the novel depicts indecision or regret on the part of the bombing crew for what they are doing, as opposed to the risk to their lives from doing it. The incident, it turns out, was based on an identifiable actual case.

"They'll be bombing a tiny undefended village, reducing the whole community to rubble. I have it from Wintergreen—Wintergreen's an ex-sergeant now, by the way—that the mission is entirely unnecessary. Its only purpose is to delay German reinforcements at a time when we aren't even planning an offensive. But that's the way things go when you elevate mediocre people to positions of authority." He gestured languidly toward his gigantic map of Italy. "Why, this tiny mountain village is so insignificant that it isn't even there."

... "I can see it," volunteered Havermeyer, and marked the spot on Dunbar's map. "And here's a good picture of the village right on these photographs. I

understand the whole thing. The purpose of the mission is to knock the whole village sliding down the side of the mountain and create a roadblock that the Germans will have to clear. Is that right?"

"That's right," said Major Danby, mopping his perspiring forehead with his handkerchief. "I'm glad somebody here is beginning to understand. These two armored divisions will be coming down from Austria into Italy along this road. The village is built on such a steep incline that all the rubble from the houses and other buildings you destroy will certainly tumble right down and pile up on the road."

"What the hell difference will it make?" Dunbar wanted to know, as Yossarian watched him excitedly with a mixture of awe and adulation. "It will only take them a couple of days to clear it."¹⁰⁵

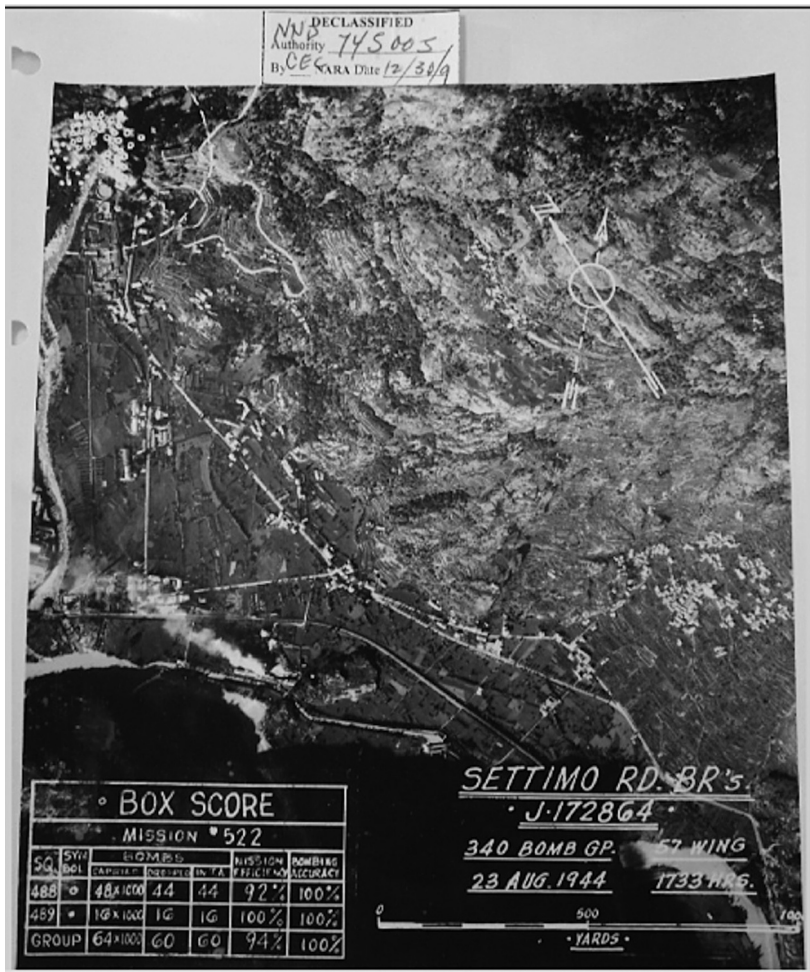


Figure 5.1 Reconnaissance photo of Settimo Bridge. US Government. 340th Bombardment Group History.

The bridge in question, bombed by the 488th (Heller's unit) and 489th bomb squadrons on 23 August 1944, was actually on Italy's border with France in the Val d'Aosta. Known in Italian as the Ponte San Martino, and built by the Romans in 25 BCE, the Allies called it the Settimo Road Bridge. Decades after the war, Roger Juglair, a local historian, undertook extensive research into US archival sources and corresponded with a surviving crew member about the mission. He set up a website with documents, including a crew list with Heller's name on it, and published a detailed study of the case.¹⁰⁶

488TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (M) AAF
340TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (M) AAF

APO 650, c/o Postmaster,
New York, N. Y.,
23 August, 1944.

SUBJECT: Ships and Crews to fly in second combat mission, this date.

TO : Operations Officer, 340th Bombardment Group (M) AAF.

1. Briefing at 1520 hrs. Pre-briefing at 1500 hrs.

		<u>NO. 43-27669 (8T)</u>		
		1st Lt. S. Aswad	P	
		Capt. H. B. Howard	CP	
		1st Lt. W. A. Davidson	N	
		1st Lt. R. R. Burger	B	
		T/Sgt. J. Lazor	RG	<u>NO. 43-4055 (8M)</u>
		S/Sgt. C. H. Snow	G	2nd Lt. R. R. Shipman
		T/Sgt. W. H. Higgins	TG	2nd Lt. H. L. Lacey
				2nd Lt. H. A. Moody
				T/Sgt. W. P. Day
				S/Sgt. H. E. Bartall
				Sgt. S. Simowditz
		<u>NO. 43-35983 (8E)</u>		
		1st Lt. H. C. Gross	P	
		2nd Lt. B. D. King	CP	
		2nd Lt. W. O. Fischer	B	
		T/Sgt. B. Greenbaum	RG	<u>NO. 43-3990 (8B)</u>
		S/Sgt. V. A. Gasperino	G	2nd Lt. G. J. Hellyar
		S/Sgt. A. E. Rosin	TG	2nd Lt. E. J. Kirk
				2nd Lt. H. F. Robinson
				Cpl. W. E. Pond
				Sgt. E. A. Iljana
				Sgt. M. R. Tafaya
		<u>NO. 43-27504 (8K)</u>		
		2nd Lt. C. C. Grosskopf	P	
		2nd Lt. E. M. Holtz	CP	
		2nd Lt. F. A. Pfeffer	B	
		Cpl. W. F. Ziegler	RG	<u>NO. 43-27752 (8N)</u>
		S/Sgt. A. E. Ewan	G	Capt. J. E. Rapp
		Pvt. G. M. Ricks	TG	1st Lt. B. A. Steed
				Capt. C. T. O'Brien
				1st Lt. T. C. Sloan
				T/Sgt. L. E. Anderson
				S/Sgt. B. E. Corski
				T/Sgt. T. L. Higgins
		<u>NO. 43-27657 (8P)</u>		
		1st Lt. W. B. Reagan	P	<u>NO. 43-4025 (8Q)</u>
		1st Lt. E. G. Sallen	CP	1st Lt. J. J. Swift
		2nd Lt. J. Heller	B	2nd Lt. E. J. Ritter
		T/Sgt. F. Hrocnick	RG	2nd Lt. D. L. Atkinson
		S/Sgt. H. L. Rackmyer	G	T/Sgt. W. S. Goodell
		S/Sgt. J. E. Smith	TG	S/Sgt. W. E. Porter
				S/Sgt. R. A. Kerkhan
		<u>NO. 43-27474 (8R)</u>		
		1st Lt. E. W. McDonald	P	<u>NO. 43-27537 (8Z)</u>
		2nd Lt. R. R. Vertrees	CP	1st Lt. M. G. Duncan
		2nd Lt. E. E. Bardnell	B	1st Lt. J. F. Mumme
		T/Sgt. R. J. Martin	RG	2nd Lt. A. S. Householder
		S/Sgt. R. Bland	G	T/Sgt. J. A. McGloin
		S/Sgt. J. W. Ryba	TG	S/Sgt. R. D. Chesney
				Sgt. A. J. Bertagna
		<u>NO. 43-4064 (8U)</u>		
		1st Lt. G. W. Clifford	P	
		2nd Lt. A. A. Genschl	CP	
		2nd Lt. F. Yohannan	B	
		T/Sgt. A. L. Green	RG	
		S/Sgt. N. E. Klinkner	G	
		Cpl. P. Sims	TG	

JOHN E. RAPP,
Capt., Air Corps,
Operations Officer.

Figure 5.2 Joseph Heller appears on the crew list for the Settimo Bridge raid. Author's photo.

In the novel, one crew member after another expresses misgivings. “Have the people in the village been warned?” asked McWatt. “No, I don’t think so,” replies Major Danby.

“Haven’t we dropped any leaflets telling them that this time we’ll be flying over to hit them?” asked Yossarian. “Can’t we even tip them off so they’ll get out of the way?”

“No, I don’t think so.” Major Danby was sweating some more and still shifting his eyes about uneasily. “The Germans might find out and choose another road. I’m not sure about any of this. I’m just making assumptions.”

“They won’t even take shelter,” Dunbar argued bitterly. “They’ll pour out into the streets to wave when they see our planes coming, all the children and dogs and old people. Jesus Christ! Why can’t we leave them alone?”

“Why can’t we create the roadblock somewhere else?” asked McWatt. “Why must it be there?”

“I don’t know,” Major Danby answered unhappily.

When Colonel Korn, the unit commander, drops in on the discussion, Danby, persuaded by the concerns of his crew, suggests spacing out the bombs to create a roadblock without destroying the village. “‘We don’t care about the roadblock,’ Colonel Korn informed him. ‘Colonel Cathcart wants to come out of this mission with a good clean aerial photograph he won’t be ashamed to send through channels.’” He reassured Dunbar that “nobody is more distressed about those lousy wops up in the hills than Colonel Cathcart and myself. *Mais c’est la guerre.*”¹⁰⁷

Later, we learn how Dunbar coped with his moral dilemma, in the opening line of the next chapter:

Yossarian no longer gave a damn where his bombs fell, although he did not go as far as Dunbar, who dropped his bombs hundreds of yards past the village and would face a court-martial if it could ever be shown he had done it deliberately.

Daniel Setzer, in his summary of Juglair’s account, describes the actual case, as 16 aircraft head toward the target:

At 1730 hours the formation reached Ponte San Martino. The people in the town heard the roar of the powerful B-25 engines. They were alarmed at the

sound, but also curious as to what was going on. They came out into the streets for a better look. In the distance they could pick out the 16 silvery specks in the sky shimmering in the hot afternoon sun.

Some noticed more silvery specks suddenly appear beneath the first. These were the deadly bombs that after a short flight fell in the center of town with three distinct impacts followed by a series of explosions that shook the ground and immediately filled the air with a dark suffocating smoke. A few of the bombs did not land in the same area as their fellows. Three overshot the town center and exploded harmlessly in a field. Judging from the pattern of the other explosions, the three bombs that missed should have hit the old Roman bridge and destroyed it.

Bomber 8K had performed a bizarre maneuver while in formation that caused the bombs to go astray. The move was very risky given tightness of the formation during the bomb run. In his report following the mission the pilot justified the move by saying that he was executing an evasive maneuver. This was quite unlikely considering that the only anti-aircraft gun protecting Ponte San Martino was a single machine gun that did not fire a single shot that day.¹⁰⁸

Setzer imagines, plausibly, that the pilot of 8K, 2nd Lt. Clifton C. Grosskopf, served as the model for Heller's character, Dunbar. Like Dunbar, his action constituted "clear dereliction of duty" and could have resulted in a court martial.¹⁰⁹

In email correspondence with Lieutenant Robert Burger, the squadron bombing officer, in November 2003, Juglair posed a number of questions about the mission. In addition to providing his answers, Burger, who was 22 years old at the time, wrote: "I have always wondered what the causalities were on this mission. Please advise the survivors and the relatives of those causalities that this mission still bothers me to this day and I feel for them." In a follow-up message, he repeated a point he had made in his initial response: "When I attacked Ponte San Martino I could easily see that there were no major highways nor railroads in the area. My thoughts were that it was a mistake and I very nearly aborted the mission."¹¹⁰

Yet because Burger, as the lead bombardier, went ahead with the mission, the rest of the planes, except for Grosskopf's 8K, dropped their bombs—some 120,000 tons of them. Much of the town, including the city hall, an elementary school, and a kindergarten, were damaged. The bridge, however, emerged unscathed. The dead numbered 130, including 40 children and nine soldiers. The diary entry for the 489th bomb squadron for that day reads: "This period was one of ordinary activity with nothing special to note."¹¹¹



Figure 5.3 Ponte San Martino: town destroyed, bridge still functional.

Ardissone, used by permission.

In the years following the attack on the village of Ponte San Martino, rightwing Italian critics blamed the Allies and the partisans for the tragedy. They argued that because the partisans were confronting the German and fascist forces, and the Allies—as we saw in the previous chapter—sometimes served as the “Partisan Air Force,” the partisans were responsible for calling in the air strike against Ponte San Martino. Juglair’s evidence clearly contradicts that claim and Setzer argues that, on the contrary, “the intense partisan activity actually served to reduce the number of air attacks and therefore casualties on the ground.” Echoing a point made in the last chapter, Setzer claims that “every successful mission carried out by the partisans,” to destroy a bridge, for example, “resulted in a bombing mission being canceled by the Allies.”¹¹²

Juglair's research leads him to place the blame for the attack in a broader context:

the massacre of Ponte San Martino on 23 August was not an anomalous event, extraneous to any rule and strategy of war, but like tens of thousands of other civilian deaths in many villages scattered throughout Italy, the military cause is to be sought only in the Allied strategy, in this case, the interruption of the means of communication, in the course of a terrifying war against the Nazi-Fascist dictatorship.

"But if someone wants the real culprit," he argues, it is Mussolini, for his insistence in joining Nazi Germany's wars.¹¹³

Heller's final word on civilian deaths in the Allied war against Italy comes in his chapter, "The Eternal City," when Yossarian and Aarfy spend their leave in Rome. Aarfy has raped an Italian woman and thrown her out the window to her death.

Aarfy seemed a bit unsettled as he fidgeted with his pipe and assured Yossarian that everything was going to be all right. There was nothing to worry about.

"I only raped her once," he explained.

Yossarian was aghast. "But you killed her, Aarfy! You killed her! . . . You've murdered a human being. They are going to put you in jail. They might even hang you!"

Aarfy's reply conveys the moral tension implicit in a war that entailed hundreds of thousands of deaths of combatants and civilians alike, and an air campaign that killed countless civilians, both unintentionally and intentionally ("dehouse," "terrorize and paralyze the population," "hot up the fire to the utmost," to mention just Churchill's formulations). Yet deliberate murder of an individual was still considered a crime. Aarfy asks Yossarian: "I hardly think they're going to make too much of a fuss over one poor Italian servant girl when so many thousands of lives are being lost every day. Do you?" Heller the author answers the question when the military police arrive. They arrested Yossarian for being in Rome without a pass. "They apologized to Aarfy for intruding and led Yossarian away between them, gripping him under each arm with fingers as hard as steel manacles."¹¹⁴

Notes

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- 3 *Ibid.*, 853.
- 4 Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938), Apple Books, 326–327.

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- 6 Y. Aleksandra Bennett, Introduction to Brittain, *One Voice*, xii.
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- 9 Brittain, *One Voice*, 15.
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- 14 *Ibid.*
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- 16 Brittain, *One Voice*, 169.
- 17 Brittain, *One Voice*, 109.
- 18 Brittain, *One Voice*, 156. Here, by relying on German-controlled French radio reports, Brittain cites a figure for casualties that turned out to be highly exaggerated.
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- 20 *Ibid.*, 155.
- 21 Brittain, "Massacre by Bombing," 60.
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- 24 Overy, "Constructing Space," 603.
- 25 Justin H. Vassallo, "The Americans Who Embraced Mussolini," *Boston Review*, 17 February 2021; Katy Hull, *The Machine Has a Soul: American Sympathy with Italian Fascism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).
- 26 Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 441.
- 27 Martin Gilbert, "Churchill and Bombing Policy: The Fifth Churchill Lecture," *Finest Hour*, no. 137 (Winter 2007–08), 32.
- 28 Robert C. Batchelder, *The Irreversible Decision, 1939–1950* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 174–175.
- 29 The conversation with Wallace is described in Atkinson, *Day of Battle*, 21. Stalin's views were presented in the form of responses to an interviewer's questions and published in *Pravda*, 14 March 1946.
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- 32 The leaflet, preserved in the prefectural archives in Naples, is quoted in Martina Gargiulo, "Uscire dalla catastrofe. La città di Napoli fra guerra aerea e occupazione alleata," *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2018), 5.
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- 36 Atkinson, *Day of Battle*, 116–119; Patton diary, 15 July 1943.
- 37 Patton diary, 19 July 1943, 4.
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- 41 Norman Lewis, *Naples '44*, Apple Books, entry for Salerno, 20 September 1944, 64.
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- 89 (Sergeant) Don Robinson, *News of the 45th* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1944), 142.
- 90 Bill Maudlin, *The Brass Ring* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 177.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 233.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 234.
- 93 Reminiscences of Giuseppe Fissore, Cuneo, 19 April 2006, quoted in Costagli, *Bombe su Cuneo*, 91.
- 94 Hayes, *All Thy Conquests*, 22–23.
- 95 Lihou, *Out of the Italian Night*, 35–37.
- 96 *Ibid.*, 37, 90, 107, 173.
- 97 Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), originally published 1961, 170.
- 98 Mark Fielder, “The Air War, and British Bomber Crews, in World War Two,” *BBC*, 17 February 2011, archived at https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/air_war_bombers_01.shtml. See also <https://www.airmen.dk/stcdaloss.htm>
- 99 Office of the Adjutant General (1953), “Battle casualties by type of casualty and disposition, and duty branch: 7 December 1941 – 31 December 1946,” cited in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army_Air_Forces#cite_note-cas53-177.
- 100 Heller, *Catch-22*, 108.
- 101 Comune di Bologna, “Bombardamenti aerei subiti da Bologna,” <https://www.storiaememoriadibologna.it/bombardamenti-aerei-subiti-da-bologna-95-evento>
- 102 Heller, *Catch-22*, 8.
- 103 *Ibid.*, 158.
- 104 *Ibid.* The accent on the Italian word for “because” is incorrect. It should read: *perché*.
- 105 *Ibid.*, 326.
- 106 Roger Juglair with Silvana Miniotti, *Ponte San Martino: Martirio di un paese valdostano* (Saint-Christophe: Musumeci Editore, 2008). For a summary in English, see Daniel Setzer, *Raid on the Settimo Road Bridges*, 2010, <http://www.dansetzer.us/Settimo.pdf>
- 107 Heller, *Catch-22*, 327.
- 108 Setzer, *Raid on the Settimo Road Bridges*.
- 109 *Ibid.* See also, Thomas McKelvey Cleaver, *The Bridgebusters: The True Story of the Catch-22 Bomb Wing* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2016), ch. 9.
- 110 Setzer, *Raid on the Settimo Road Bridges*; Juglair, *Ponte San Martino*, 45–46.
- 111 Quoted in *Ibid.*
- 112 *Ibid.*
- 113 <https://23agosto1944.wordpress.com/le-vittime/storie/>
- 114 Heller, *Catch-22*, 417–419.

6 Memory

In May 1945, a few weeks after the war in Europe ended, James Agee, writing in *The Nation*, praised John Huston's just-released documentary, *The Battle of San Pietro*, as the best war movie he had ever seen. That the filmmakers were themselves combat veterans explained for Agee "how they all lived through the shooting of the film; how deep inside the fighting some of it was made; how well they evidently knew what to expect."¹ We learned years ago—although many film critics and viewers still seem unaware—that Huston and his crew were not actually present during the fighting that destroyed the village of San Pietro Infine in December 1943. Huston reconstructed the battle and restaged and filmed the combat scenes over the course of the following months. He manipulated his viewers to believe that they were witnessing a real battle as it unfolded, and in subsequent interviews and his own memoirs he maintained the falsehood.

The story of Huston's manipulation is not new. Lance Bertelsen first uncovered it in an award-winning 1989 article, and Mark Harris recounted it in a later book.² Italian historians and film scholars have provided even more detailed evidence of how Huston actually made the film. The story itself is fascinating—but, in some sense, beside the point. Bertelsen himself—while exposing the false pretenses under which Huston presented *San Pietro*, nevertheless, justly praises it as

one of the most harrowing visions of modern infantry warfare ever filmed: a documentary that conveys the raw, repetitive grind of battle and the grim vulnerability of the men who fought it with a respect and bitterness unprecedented in the history of film.³

The Italian reception of Huston's film is even more fascinating—and of greater consequence, because it speaks to the way Italians have remembered the war and how they regarded the "friends" who came to liberate them, but who destroyed much in the process. *San Pietro* has come to represent the horrors and futility of war and has contributed to an abiding sentiment of pacifism in the Italian public. In Italy, the image of the destruction of San Pietro Infine, a village of about 1,400 people first settled in the 11th century, has become inseparable from Huston's cinematic rendering.⁴ In the Italian collective memory, *The Battle of San Pietro* represents war more vividly than the experience of World War II itself. The film's

portrayal of the Allied campaign has become fused with the actual memories of the war and its aftermath. Some survivors of the carnage remember Huston's depiction of their experiences rather than what actually happened. They put themselves into his movie at times and places they don't belong. And they put him into their lives where and when he was absent. The citizens of San Pietro (*Sampietresi*) have employed their destroyed village and Huston's film in the service of what Svetlana Boym called "reflective nostalgia," a pattern of "longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance."⁵

The imperfection of those memories served to soften popular attitudes that might have been far more critical of the Allies, given the destruction wrought by their bombs and artillery shells. One of the pragmatic arguments Vera Brittain had made in her pleas to spare civilians in the Allied bombing campaigns was to consider the postwar consequences. The title of her pamphlet—*Seeds of Chaos*—conveyed the point. She wrote of the millions injured or made homeless by the bombing and the friends and relatives of those killed. They "will remember," she predicted. Writing particularly of the Germans, she suggested that "their memories will be even more dreadful than those of the post-war blockade of 1919, which was a chief origin of Nazism." The so-called continuation blockade carried out by Britain following the Armistice with Germany contributed to tens of thousands of deaths by starvation and disease, along with considerable political upheaval and, she argued, set the stage for the rise of Hitler.⁶ Neither in Germany, nor Japan or Italy did the destruction of World War II produce such a backlash or lead to the rise of postwar dictators. No doubt the provision of economic aid to rebuild war-torn Europe and Japan accounts in large part for the difference. Yet, for Italy, how the war was remembered also plays a key role in Italians' views of the Allies and of war itself.

As we have seen, some of the most destructive fighting of the Italian campaign took place following the Allied landing at Salerno in September 1943, as the troops making their way along Highway 6 through the Liri Valley toward Rome came under assault from well-entrenched German forces in the mountains surrounding them. The "liberation" of the village of San Pietro Infine is associated in Italian memory with other prominent symbols of the war's devastation, such as the Allied bombing of the 14th-century abbey at nearby Monte Cassino, discussed in Chapter Three, during the long campaign to take Rome. Although San Pietro was destroyed mainly by artillery fire directed at the entrenched Germans, Italians remember it as one of many victims of Allied bombing (*bombardamento*), along with the abbey.⁷ Continuing Italian reception of Huston's movie reflects all the ambiguity of the circumstances prevailing at the time of the battle and ambivalence at the outcome—gratitude for liberation from a brutal Nazi occupation tinged with resentment over the destruction caused by the combat itself.

This chapter summarizes the story behind the making of the film, but then focuses on another story mostly unknown except to some Italian historians—the role *The Battle of San Pietro* has played in the way Italians remember the war. In Italy hardly any media discussion of Huston fails to mention *La Battaglia di San Pietro*.⁸ The film figures prominently in retrospectives of the director's work and of

cinema related to war—including a festival of war movies shot in and around the village of San Pietro Infine itself—and also in museum exhibits and general commemorations of World War II. In the 1990s, Huston's film played a role in helping to fend off Silvio Berlusconi's attempts to rehabilitate wartime fascists in the service of his political coalition. The chapter concludes by putting *San Pietro* into the context of contemporary Italian views on war and peace.

In 1943 the US Army Signal Corps commissioned then Captain John Huston to film a documentary intended to convey to Americans what their soldiers were fighting for in Italy—and why it was taking so long. Huston, whose previous credits included *The Maltese Falcon*, produced a film that seemed to portray the horror of war too vividly for his army superiors; they refused to release *The Battle of San Pietro* for general public viewing until the war in Europe was nearly over, and only after extensive cuts.⁹ The film that resulted—too late to serve its intended purpose—presented a number of inaccurate images, aside from the reenacting of the battle scenes revealed much later. It shows, for example, crowds of inhabitants welcoming the American liberators. In fact, many had fled, and those who remained by the time Huston's crew arrived on the scene had to be reassembled to act out their welcome.

The film alludes to some elements of the Allied war effort that today's Italians would prefer not to remember. The Americans' difficulty in scaling the mountains under German fire led to a command for all of the available resources of the Fifth Army—including artillery and tanks, as depicted in the film—to be trained on San Pietro Infine, effectively destroying it to save it. The celebrated war reporter Richard Tregaskis later recalled the night of 6 December 1943, when

the guns blasted away continuously. Next day a couple of correspondents dropped in to tell me that it was the heaviest bombardment so far in Italy. It had been directed against San Pietro, the next town beyond Venafro, on the road to Cassino.¹⁰

The battle itself extended over more than a week, from 8 to 17 December, during which the village was constantly pounded as entrenched German forces continued to fire on the approaching infantry troops. The *Philadelphia Record* called San Pietro the “bloodiest battle of the war, thus far,” according to a clipping saved by the relatives of Daniel Petruzzi, an Italian-American soldier from Pennsylvania who fought there.¹¹

Huston's film also portrays the initial rebuilding of the village after its liberation. Yet it was never rebuilt. Instead a new town was built nearby and San Pietro Infine was left as a ruin to commemorate the war's destruction. The only functioning building left there is a museum, with a poster of John Huston.

Manipulation in the Presentation of *San Pietro*

To acknowledge that the combat scenes in *San Pietro* were reconstructed after the fact is not to denigrate the quality of the film itself or to suggest it does not deserve

to be considered a “documentary”—a genre that few would claim represents an unmediated reality.¹² Jan Mieszkowski has pointed out that even today, when

anyone with a computer or a smartphone can access combat footage from around the world...the spectacle of warfare remains curiously uninformative...News outlets that have shared battlefield videos shot from soldiers’ helmet cams have found it necessary to curate this material extensively, cutting it and interweaving it with oral or written narratives to the point that the “raw” footage becomes anything but.¹³

In fact, it is Huston’s artistry that makes *San Pietro* such a forceful work and explains its enduring impact on Italian popular memory of the war. But because that memory is at variance with much of what happened, it is worth recounting Huston’s techniques of manipulation in some detail before turning to the issue of remembrance and reflective nostalgia.

The manipulation of reality in Huston’s *San Pietro* starts before any footage from the village or any combat even appears on the screen. Although not included in every version of the documentary available nowadays on the internet, Huston’s film began with a prologue by General Mark W. Clark, commander of the Fifth Army in Italy, explaining the purpose of the Italian campaign—the ostensible topic of Huston’s film. Clark’s remarks constitute a manipulation of the facts as most historians have come to understand them and the truth that seemed apparent to many, including the soldiers themselves, at the time. Clark stands outside, looking a bit ill at ease, and begins to recite, out of the corner of his mouth:

In 1943 it was one of our strategic aims to draw as many German forces as possible from the Russian front and the French coastal areas and to contain them on the Italian peninsula, while liberating as much of Italy as might be possible with the means at our disposal.¹⁴

Was this the reason US soldiers were in Italy?

By December 1943, when Allied forces were slogging through the Liri Valley in the mud and winter rain, they had good reason to wonder why they were in Italy at all. Mussolini’s fascist cronies had arrested the dictator in July. Badoglio signed the Armistice in September. The Italian Army disintegrated, as soldiers headed home or were arrested and sent to Germany; the Italian fleet escaped capture by the Germans and surrendered to the British at Malta. Italy was out of the war. As John Griggs writes, “with the fall of Sicily and the signature of the armistice, was there any point in going on” to invade mainland Italy?¹⁵ As we saw in Chapter One, US military advisers did not think so. Clark’s notion that the Italian campaign was drawing German troops from elsewhere disregards the fact that it also required Allied troops that could have been used elsewhere—namely in attacking Germany through France. As Clark’s soldiers were slogging their way to Rome, “twenty-eight Allied divisions were keeping twenty-four German divisions in Italy.”¹⁶ Were the Allies “containing” the Germans on the peninsula, or was it the other way around?

Once the decision to invade Italy was made, did it make any sense to approach Rome from the south, through valleys observed and defended from looming mountains? After all, nearly every invader since Hannibal and his elephants had approached it from the north. “Anyone holding a topographical map of Italy could sense a problem in this plan,” as Tim Brady put it. “The geography of the country made it obvious that the German defenders would hold the high ground and all the mountain passes.”¹⁷ As an official British history puts it, “the Germans had always held the territorial advantage in a country that time and time again produced the situation and inspired the monotonous cliché, *ideally suited to defence*.”¹⁸

Clark’s prologue ignores such questions as it focuses in on the battle at hand:

San Pietro, in the Fifth Army sector, was the key to the Liri Valley. We knew it, and the enemy knew it. We had to take it, even though the immediate cost would be high. We took it, and the cost in relation to the later advance was not excessive.¹⁹

Here again Clark distorts the situation by downplaying the cost of the campaign. “The battle for San Pietro is a case study of a Pyrrhic victory,” argues Peter Maslowski, “since the Allies achieved minimal gains at an enormous cost both to the fighting forces and to the villagers. . . . Allied casualties were staggering.”²⁰ As we saw in Chapter Three, by the time Rome was liberated on 4 June 1944 the toll of Allied casualties—killed, wounded, or missing—reached over 43,000, with German losses estimated at 38,000.²¹ At San Pietro alone there were some 1,200 military casualties, including 150 deaths—and a similar number of civilians killed.²²

And why was capturing Rome necessary? Chapter Three described how President Roosevelt emphasized the symbolic importance, while admitting the lack of military urgency. In his official history, Linklater makes the same points more dramatically:

The occupation of the capital would go far to redeem and fortify our promise to liberate the countries of Europe from their tyrannous masters. In Italy we had won our first foothold on the continent and when Rome, that mighty landmark through the ages, became the first capital to raise its multitudinous voice in freedom, the world and all our soldiers would hear such assurance of our final victory as they had long been waiting for.

“As a purely military operation, however,” he acknowledges, “the taking of Rome would be of comparatively small importance.”²³

The Battle of San Pietro was commissioned to explain the enormous sacrifice of the Allied troops, yet the film lacked any of the upbeat, morale-building tone of its successful predecessors, such as William Wyler’s *Memphis Belle* (1944). Bertelsen is right—its vision is harrowing, and its narration, composed and delivered by Huston, is bitter and ironic. “Still badly shaken by the loss of life he had seen in Italy,” writes Harris, Huston “had chosen to make a documentary that was true to his own emotional experience, a film that emphasized the terrible cost of the Allied campaign in Italy rather than its strategic importance, tactics, or ultimate success.”²⁴

In his memoirs, Huston was scathing in his criticism of the military decisions taken at San Pietro—especially the attempt to send tanks up an exposed, narrow road where stone-walled terraces provided insuperable barriers. Thus, it is ironic that the ultimate manipulation in Clark's prologue is the work of Huston himself. For all his doubts about the Italian campaign—and the fact that the film itself offers the clearest refutation of the general's claim that the cost was “not excessive”—it was Huston who wrote the text Clark recited. He composed a draft of what he thought Clark might want to say, expecting that the general would revise it. Instead, Clark memorized and repeated exactly what Huston had written.²⁵

Manipulation in the Making of *San Pietro*

Perhaps Huston was struggling with some cognitive dissonance when he drafted Clark's prologue. He had already been told by his Signal Corps supervisor in Italy, Colonel Melvin Gillette, that his narration for the film was too preoccupied with the goal of liberating Italian towns such as San Pietro. As Gillette wrote to Huston in October 1944, “most prefer to think that the objectives of the war are far greater than liberating towns of an enemy country.”²⁶ It is telling that Gillette refers to Italy as an *enemy* country, more than a year after the Armistice agreement took Italy out of the war and provoked its occupation by German troops. Huston's *San Pietro* is sympathetic to Italian civilians to an extent that was quite rare among Allied military officials and rank-and-file soldiers, who—as we learned in the previous chapter—even after liberation often treated Italians with disdain.

Or maybe Huston just wanted his film to see the light of day and thought that Clark's imprimatur would do the trick. Huston's original version was ready by the summer of 1944 and ran nearly an hour. But the army brass who constituted the audience for his first screening was hostile. As Huston recalled,

I was told by one of its spokesmen that it was ‘anti-war.’ I pompously replied that if I ever made a picture that was pro-war, I hoped someone would take me out and shoot me. The guy looked at me as if he were considering just that.²⁷

General George Marshall, the army chief of staff, supported the project, however, arguing that a realistic portrayal of battle would be useful at least for training purposes.

The version finally released to the public in July 1945 was about 32 minutes long.²⁸ It was widely and favorably reviewed, in *Time*, the *New York Post*, and *The Nation*. All the reviewers seemed to believe that they were seeing actual footage of the battle, rather than reenactments, an impression that Huston—in interviews, for example—did nothing to dispel.²⁹

We know now, thanks to memoirs and interviews conducted by diligent scholars, that Huston was not present at the battle for San Pietro, which began on 8 December 1943. Huston and his crew apparently arrived in the zone of operations by the 14th, in time to have filmed some of the actual battle. But when he reported to Major General Fred L. Walker, commander of the 36th Division, he was told that it was too dangerous to accompany an infantry attack, because his camera

operators would come under enemy fire.³⁰ Huston drove to San Pietro Infine after the Germans had begun their retreat—most likely on 17 December.

When he visited San Pietro the first time Huston was accompanied by his colleagues Eric Ambler and Jules Buck, a film crew, and an interpreter. The account by Ambler from his memoir is generally considered more reliable than Huston's own, despite the title with its double entendre: *Here Lies Eric Ambler*. Driving in a jeep toward San Pietro they came across a company of soldiers from Texas waiting to pursue the retreating Germans. The soldiers asked that their pictures be taken, so Buck filmed a number of close-ups. Huston later included them in his documentary. Ambler reports, "it was the only part of the film that moved me when I saw it; I knew that all those smiling young men had long been dead."³¹

Although he did not film the actual battle, Huston seems to have been among the first to enter the ruins of San Pietro Infine, following the German withdrawal, but before army engineers had finished checking for booby-traps and mines—and, indeed, before the Germans had ceased shelling the ascent to the village to protect their retreat.³² So when Huston's crew arrived at San Pietro there was still a risk of intermittent shelling and attacks by snipers—a risk Huston chose to ignore. As he and his colleagues climbed the terraced hill toward the town, they came under mortar fire and dove into a ditch for protection. Huston insisted that Buck film the attack. Ambler described the task as "attempting the impossible," according to "rule one for makers of war films: shots of bursting high explosives are only convincing when they have been properly set up by a good studio Special Effects department." As a result,

the only usable film that Jules shot during that minute showed the earth spinning round the sky as he tried to anticipate wherever the next ear-shattering blast would come from and at the same time keep his head out of the hail of earth and splintered stone that came with it.

Huston subsequently "used this spinning in his film as cutaway footage instead of conventional optical dissolves."³³

The next day, Huston and company returned to San Pietro, assured by army intelligence that the way was clear. All that was left of San Pietro, in Ambler's words, were "mounds of rubble," with "one or two stumps of wall still standing, but nothing, not even the church, that could be identified as a particular building." Petruzzi's recollection concurs: "The town itself was totally annihilated. Not a single stone and cement house seemed to be intact."³⁴ As Huston was directing Buck to set up his camera for an establishing shot from what was left of the main *piazza*, the crew came under attack by German howitzers. They sheltered in the crypt of a destroyed church with six exhausted villagers—an elderly man, two middle-aged women, and three children.³⁵

Although his film includes scenes of *Sampietresi* villagers welcoming their American liberators, in Ambler's account, which Harris also credits, these were the only civilians Huston encountered in San Pietro before he and his crew made their escape back to the jeep—and they were not filmed. The next day Huston was safe in Naples, where, according to Ambler, they "spent a boozy night" with a visiting Humphrey Bogart.³⁶ Huston did return to San Pietro Infine to do additional

filming, but not until the middle of January 1944, a month after the German retreat. As Harris concludes, the “idea to document the celebratory liberation of a town with villagers timidly emerging to cheer on the American troops was a fantasy.”³⁷

Huston used his autobiography to embellish his unsuccessful attempt to film the actual liberation of San Pietro, as Harris explains: “And he invented a joyous scene after the battle had been won—‘What a welcome the people of San Pietro gave us! Whole cheeses and bottles of wine appeared from God knows where.’”³⁸ We know from both US and Italian sources how false this claim is—and even the reenacted movie belies it. According to interviews with surviving residents of San Pietro Infine, the Germans had abandoned the town during the night of 15/16 December. The first Americans to arrive were a small patrol of soldiers who stopped by on the 17th to verify that the Germans were gone and then continued on into the Valle della Morte. The appearance of Huston, Buck, and Ambler on the outskirts of the town apparently failed to attract the attention of whoever was hiding in the *grotte*—the caves that the locals had dug into the hillside to shelter from the Germans and the bombing. The next morning, 18 December, the first substantial numbers of Americans arrived, noted first by local children who ran back to spread the word, at which point the *Sampietresi* left the caves to greet their liberators. Far from saving hidden stores of wine and cheese, people were near starvation—subsisting on dried figs, constantly short of water, and crawling with lice from lack of sanitation. In their hungry state they were fascinated by these soldiers who were constantly chewing but never swallowing anything—their first acquaintance with gum.³⁹

William Allen, a photographer from Associated Press who accompanied the US soldiers as they entered San Pietro on the 18th, confirms this basic account in a letter he wrote to his wife that same day. “Honey, you have never seen, nor could you imagine, such a sight...not one building had been spared.” He makes no mention of John Huston or a camera crew. Allen walked with the soldiers through the town to the outskirts, encountering only an elderly woman on the way.

There was a ravine here that led out of town and I saw a couple of Italian men standing there. I went up to try to talk to them and saw a small opening in the side of the hill. As I came up, a little boy came out of the opening and in a few minutes he was followed by several others. It went on this way until there were about 250 people along a path that led from this small hole. They had been living in caves all together to get out of the terrific pounding that had been necessary to give the town to get the Germans out. When we arrived, it was the first time they had been in the daylight for days. There were tears in their eyes as they recognized us as Americans. Old men kissed my hands. One old woman hung on my arm and cried. I never felt so helpless in my life. There was nothing I could do for them.⁴⁰

He should have offered them some of Huston’s wine and cheese!

Having established that Huston was not present at the battle for San Pietro Infine, historians and film scholars have sought to understand how he created such a realistic portrayal of combat and where exactly he obtained such convincing footage. In recent years, Bertelsen’s pioneering work has been supplemented by Harris’ book and by the painstaking research of Italian scholars, most of it unknown outside Italy.

From his study of the unedited footage stored in the National Archives at College Park, Maryland, Bertelsen found that several scenes in the finished version of *San Pietro* “appear on two or more reels and indicate that once a scene was set up, several cameramen would record the action simultaneously from different angles.” He describes the creation of one scene where soldiers toss smoke grenades into a farm building in order to force out any enemy troops who might be hiding there.

During one sequence, in which a camera continued to roll after the “action” had stopped, we see a soldier in a knit cap come into the frame and attempt to kick a smoking grenade away from the door while the troops stand around watching. Behind the building a second cameraman is visible, and as the soldier who kicked the grenade moves away from the building a third cameraman comes into view on the right.⁴¹

Bertelsen’s work also benefited from his interview with Captain Joel Westbrook, a survivor of the battle. Westbrook was a fellow officer and close friend of Captain Henry Waskow, a company commander in the 36th Division and the subject of the most famous dispatch by any American journalist during World War II, Ernie Pyle’s “The Death of Captain Waskow.”⁴²

The verisimilitude of Huston’s battle scenes owes much to the fact that Captain Westbrook was assigned as a consultant to the director. “He recalls that he and Huston would go over maps together, with Westbrook describing parts of the battle and Huston asking if they could be recreated. Huston would then be assigned troops and move to the designated areas”—not necessarily, as we shall see, where the actual combat took place.⁴³ Any shortcomings in the realistic nature of the battle scenes owe to Hollywood conventions rather than to any memory lapses on Westbrook’s part. As Bertelsen explains,

the careful viewer will notice a remarkable number of left-handed soldiers, and even a bolt action rifle with the bolt on the left side. These shots have been reversed following the Hollywood prescription that the good guys must always attack in the same direction so as not to confuse the audience.⁴⁴

In a longer version that began circulating after the publication of Bertelsen’s essay, the reverse shots have been corrected, some additional material is included, the order of some of the shots is rearranged and, oddly, Mark Clark’s prologue is missing. There are fewer left-handed grenade throwers, but still many shots suggesting that more than one cameraman was able to get into a trench far ahead of advancing US troops, even though ostensibly under heavy fire from the Germans, and then film a “soldier already in perfect focus jumping in after him.”⁴⁵

The historian Giuseppe Angelone and the journalist Roberto Olla, a film specialist with the Italian state television network Rai, between them have reconstructed reasonably well the sequence of Huston’s shooting schedule. They relied on the memoirs of the camera operators on Huston’s team, analysis provided by Maslowski in his 1998 book, *Armed with Cameras*, and especially, their own study of unused footage in the National Archives. Most of the reels are labeled, although not always accurately. From Angelone’s research he determined that of 46 tags corresponding to the same number

of 35 mm film rolls, nine are undated, 33 are dated after the battle, and only four date from the period of the battle itself—including presumably the material Jules Buck managed to film on 17 December before and while coming under fire.⁴⁶ Angelone supplemented Bertelsen's sophisticated visual study of the original archival footage with local knowledge of his native province of Caserta, whose towns of San Pietro Infine and Mignano Monte Lungo suffered some of the fiercest fighting on the road to Rome, and whose victims—although not direct relatives—share Angelone's name.

On this basis it is apparent that from 4 to 14 January 1944 Huston's crew worked with soldiers from the 143rd regiment of the 36th infantry division of the Fifth Army, based at a rest camp in Alife. This is the same regiment whose 2nd and 3rd battalions had fought at San Pietro, but it is not known what proportion of the actual participants was available to reenact the battle. The 143rd required 1,100 replacement troops in the wake of San Pietro and the casualties incurred there.⁴⁷ One day was spent filming a scene with anti-aircraft artillery and an attack of armored vehicles and tanks. From mid-January until mid-February Huston worked in San Pietro and the surrounding valley, at the Infantry Replacement Depot at Caiazzo and the 111th Field Hospital, where he filmed scenes of wounded soldiers. From 12 to 15 February Huston restaged the attack on San Pietro of the previous 12–13 December, but on Monte Sambúcaro (what the Americans called Mount Sammucro) rather than at San Pietro Infine.⁴⁸

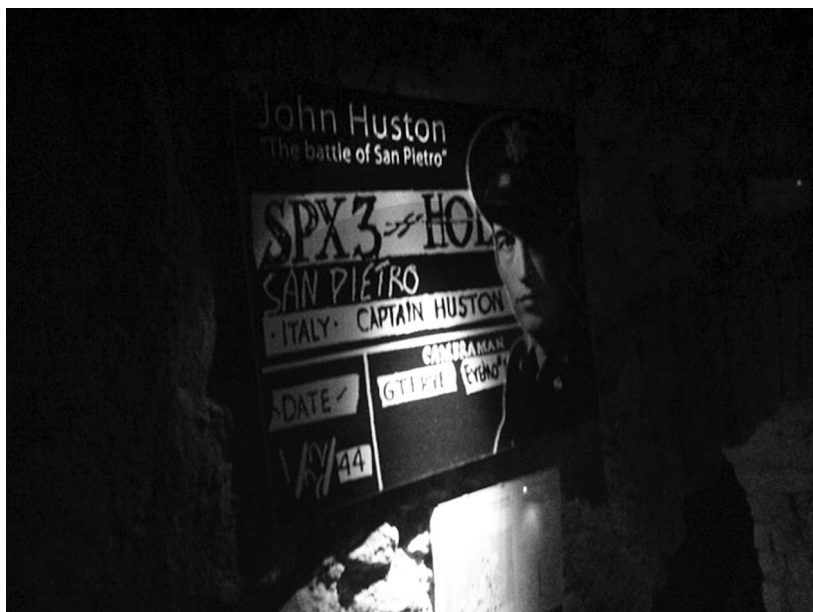


Figure 6.1 Photograph of an original slate from Huston's filming in San Pietro Infine, with the director's image superimposed—a photo montage created by Giuseppe Angelone. It shows the date of 22 January 1944 (more than a month after the battle) and the name of the camera operator, Gordon Frye. Located in the museum/visitors' center of the Parco della Memoria Storica, San Pietro Infine.

Author's photo.

Aside from the analysis of the labels, and material from memoirs and interviews, the Italian scholars have made much use of visual evidence from the completed film as well as the unedited footage. They provide ample evidence that Huston filmed much of his documentary in locales other than San Pietro Infine and his subjects were not its residents. Even the disturbing scenes of burying dead soldiers and civilians were filmed far from San Pietro, in temporary cemeteries elsewhere in the region.⁴⁹ The work of the Italian scholars confirms Bertelsen's conclusion that Huston's disclaimer—"for purposes of continuity a few of these scenes were shot before and after the actual battle," but all "within range of enemy small arms or artillery fire"—is not merely misleading, but "patently false."⁵⁰

A particularly affecting scene of Huston's film shows a man crying after a house explodes and crumbles and his wife's dead body is extracted from the ruins. The narrator anticipates the scene with these words: "The townspeople were warned of enemy mines and booby traps, which were in the process of being cleared." The widower's grief was genuine, but it had nothing to do with the battle for San Pietro or a German mine. The scene was filmed by Gordon Frye, Huston's lead cameraman, while the director was carousing with Bogart in Naples. The explosion took place in Caiazzo, when an air attack damaged the middle school where the 163rd Signal Photo Company was quartered and destroyed the building across the street. The bombs were not German but American. Members of the US bomber crew mistakenly believed they had reached the German line at Cassino and dropped their bombs on Caiazzo instead. Frye himself escaped the building but was seriously wounded by flying debris in the street. Nevertheless he returned to the third floor to grab his camera and film the devastation below.⁵¹ It was Huston's decision how to describe what his viewers were watching. As Harris quotes the director's notes, "the woman that is dug up from the ruins should be a casualty caused by German shelling."⁵²

War, Peace, and Memory in Postwar Italy

In the United States, the extent to which the reenacted nature of *The Battle of San Pietro* is understood varies widely, among film critics, historians, and the general public. The same is true in Italy. Despite the careful analysis of Angelone and Olla, the basic fact that Huston did *not* film the *actual* battle for San Pietro Infine has escaped the attention even of people who have studied the film and its history.⁵³ For many Italians, especially those whose families suffered most during World War II, the important point is not whether Huston recorded a battle accurately as it took place, but that he produced a different kind of truth: an unassailable condemnation of war. In the memory of the war, *San Pietro* has become an icon of pacifism, "the most solemn protest against war that ever appeared on a screen," in the words of film critic Morando Morandini.⁵⁴

The Italian interpretation seems true to Huston's purpose. If "the best anti-war film has always been the war film," it is not surprising that *San Pietro* so often appears at the top of the list of best war films.⁵⁵ The more we see of the footage that Huston originally intended to include, the more we understand the film as a bitter denunciation of the folly of war. Bertelsen and others have called attention to the ironic tone of the narration at the film's start, when a panoramic shot of

snow-capped mountains towering over the Liri Valley accompanies a description that would appear to suit a travelogue:

In winter the highest peaks of the Liri range ascend into the snow. But the valley floor, with its olive groves of ancient vines, its crops of wheat and corn, is green the year around—that is, in normal times.

At this point the images on the screen—broken and burned trees, scorched earth—make clear that these are not normal times. Huston drily understates the obvious: “Last year was a bad year for grapes and olives, and the fall planting was late. Many fields lay fallow.”

In an early scene introducing the village, included in the original full version, the bitter irony of the contrast between the narration and the image is even more striking. “The Italian peasant is a born mason. He cuts and lays and mortars in the stone with great skill and patience, building—not for himself alone—but for future generations.” The scene is not of masons building a house, but of men sifting through the rubble of several destroyed buildings, salvaging the more intact rocks. As the narrator intones “for future generations” the camera shows a young girl lying dead on the ground, a water bucket still draped over one arm. Then the camera zooms in from another angle for a close-up of her face. She was evidently killed by incoming artillery or mortar fire while trying to fetch water—most likely from the Allied side, since during the battle the Germans were firing *from* the town. No wonder Huston thought his army superiors might want to shoot him. This scene, along with others that lingered over dead bodies, Huston removed when editing the publicly released 32-minute film, but it has been reinserted into the 38-minute version, available on the internet.

The Battle of San Pietro has remained prominent in Italian public memory of the war, thanks in part to political developments—both local and national. At the local level, residents of San Pietro Infine, along with their relatives who emigrated to North America, have sought to preserve the memory of its destruction as a symbol of peace, and—pragmatically—as a source of revenue for the town through tourism.⁵⁶

In the immediate aftermath of San Pietro’s destruction, it was not obvious that the town would be abandoned and left as a ruin or a monument. A few families whose houses were barely inhabitable did move back, for lack of anywhere else to go. The Italian authorities declared that the town had been destroyed to a level of 98 percent. Only five towns in the area—including Cassino—had suffered more damage and were judged to have been 100 percent destroyed.⁵⁷ In September 1970 an earthquake further damaged what was left of the old San Pietro Infine and the town was abandoned for good. A couple of years later the authorities in the new San Pietro financed a project to plant trees around the ruins. The idea at the time was “to cancel out in some way the signs of war and revitalize the zone, creating a quiet place suitable even for picnics.” Over time the trees themselves have obscured the ruins and their roots have contributed to the “slow but inexorable destruction of what remains.”⁵⁸ In the 1980s people began buying or stealing materials from the destroyed buildings and even the public streets of the old town. In the early 1990s, a fund to employ local young people was used to clear rubble and brush from the center and to light the *vecchio centro* to attract tourists, thousands of whom visited during those years. But when the funds ran out, the trees and weeds resumed their encroachment.



Figure 6.2 The ruin of San Pietro Infine, May 2013. In Huston's ironic narrative he calls attention to this church, built in 1438, and destroyed by Allied bombing and artillery: "Note interesting treatment of chancel."

Author's photo.

In 1991, the US National Film Registry selected Huston's *San Pietro* for permanent preservation. About the same time residents of the village of San Pietro Infine were becoming increasingly convinced that the original site should also remain preserved—in its destroyed state. With the 50th anniversary of the town's destruction in 1993, the idea arose to try to get the old center declared a UNESCO protected site. An effort was also launched to provide evidence that San Pietro Infine, through its suffering, merited the *Medaglia d'Oro al Merito Civile*—the gold medal of civic merit awarded by the national government. Local historians—most notably Maurizio Zambardi—reconstructed the cost of the war in physical and human terms, describing in detail the reprisals and wanton murder carried out by the Nazi occupiers in the weeks leading up to the Allied assault, and compiling a list of the names of the scores of civilians killed in the course of the unremitting Allied bombardment. In 1998, at a ceremony in the old town attended by national and international figures, San Pietro Infine was declared a "world monument to peace." After resisting for years—San Pietro received a silver medal in 2000—in 2003 the Italian government agreed to award the gold medal in "recognition for so many civilian victims of both the bombings and the German killings, as well as the total destruction of the village."⁵⁹

The individual stories of the victims of the battle for San Pietro go a long way toward explaining how the war and *The Battle of San Pietro* are remembered in

postwar Italy. The Germans emerge as clearly villainous, but the deaths caused by the Allies in San Pietro outnumber those caused by the Germans ten to one. The Germans were killing civilians intentionally. The Americans were killing them mostly unintentionally—according to some accounts because they believed the town had been evacuated. In most quarters the Americans have been forgiven, yet the civilian losses are mourned to this day.⁶⁰ The Nazi depredations were particularly cruel and unforgiveable. The occupiers forced all males between 18 and 45 years of age to build trenches and fortifications, to haul ammunition, and to plant landmines; they deliberately executed anyone who tried to avoid conscription. They requisitioned food and took all of the village livestock and its four automobiles. Anyone who was caught wearing German boots or clothing, even if taken from soldiers who had died, would be shot on sight. In the meantime, to drive the residents out while they turned San Pietro into a redoubt, the Germans forbade access to water and deliberately poisoned wells by throwing animal carcasses into them.⁶¹

With the men in hiding or working for the occupiers, women and children were responsible for trying to obtain water during the week-long battle—and they sometimes died in the process. In one case American artillery troops deliberately tracked and fired at the two Zambardi brothers, aged 12 and 14 years old, as they dashed away from the cistern, mistakenly thinking that the gleaming flasks of water they carried were stocks of ammunition intended for the German defenders. So, as Maurizio Zambardi writes of his relatives Antonio and Eduardo, “their fears were justified, but the danger” this time “came not from the Germans but from the Allies.” The boys survived, but Rosa Fuoco, a tall woman running just behind them, was incinerated by a smoke bomb, intended to help the soldiers concentrate their artillery fire.⁶²

Because the Americans literally destroyed the village to liberate it, the *Sampietresi*—and Italians overall—are disinclined to consider World War II unambiguously the “Good War.” As we saw in previous chapters, it was common for people to flee one area under combat for safety in another, only to find that the war had followed them, with fatal consequences.⁶³ Despite their suffering under Allied bombardment, *Sampietresi* welcomed the Americans when they entered the destroyed town and those who survived have maintained fond—if not entirely accurate—memories.

The continuing importance of Huston’s film reveals itself in the way the survivors blend their own memories with what the film portrays, no matter how contradictory the result. One of the hopeful scenes inserted toward the end of *The Battle of San Pietro* is of a teenage girl holding a baby. Locals have identified her as Maria Cortellessa and the baby as her brother, Rosvelto—evidently named in honor of the US president. In 2011, a journalist tracked down Rosvelto Cortellessa and recorded this wonderful story, ostensibly of his appearance in Huston’s film at the liberation of the village:

My name is Rosvelto Cortellessa. I was born on 15 December 1943, here at San Pietro Infine, in the caves, under the bombs. Yes, I’m named after the president of the United States, Roosevelt. I was baptized by an American chaplain who asked my father, “what should we call him?” The soldiers said,

“like our president,” and my father agreed. Here none of the refugees knew of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, but the Americans, yes, they knew him well. My mother always told me how the American soldiers passed me from arm to arm when I was only a few days old. And even today when my fellow villagers meet me in the street they call, “Oh, it’s Rosvelto, the president of the United States.”⁶⁴

It is a touching story, but one that actually undermines the authenticity that Huston claimed for his film. Huston was not at San Pietro Infine to film the newborn Rosvelto or his baptism in December 1943. In the scene from *The Battle of San Pietro*, reproduced as a photo, Rosvelto looks to be at least a couple of months old—he is able, for example, to hold his head up on his own. If Huston filmed him, or any *Sampietresi*, on 17 December—something Ambler denies and Harris and others doubt—Rosvelto would have been only two days old. It makes sense that a baby born during the battle for San Pietro would have to await the arrival of the Allies for his christening. The Nazis had arrested the parish priest, Don Aristide Masia, even as he lay ill, and deported him to a camp in Germany.⁶⁵ It is possible that Rosvelto was not, in fact, baptized in December but in February, when, according to his mother, he also received his Christian name, Michele—one he never used.⁶⁶ This circumstantial evidence has been confirmed by Giuseppe Angelone, who located the relevant roll of film at the National Archives and established a date for the photo of 22 February 1944—further confirmation that Huston did most of his filming at San Pietro Infine long after the battle.⁶⁷

Another survivor of the battle has evidently blended her memory of the time with Huston’s artifice. Erminia Colella, who passed away in 2014, was 84 years old when interviewed in 2011, and the mother of the mayor of the relocated San Pietro Infine. In the film she was a smiling girl of 16 years old. “I was the first to be photographed,” she told a journalist. “It was before Christmas.”

‘Hello,’ I heard. ‘Alò,’ I responded. There was a single American with a camera. He made a sign for me to smile and took the first photos. Yes, I was the first to be photographed. Then this American opened his jacket and pulled out some chocolate. Yes, this day John Huston was by himself. Then he went into the village and little by little met other children, other mamas, and took a photo of each one.⁶⁸

It is a tribute to John Huston that so many *Sampietresi* want to be associated with him and the movie that depicts how the Allies destroyed their town—however inaccurate or completely false the memories.

Non c’è futuro senza memoria: The Janus Face of Television

If the brutal experience of war made it difficult for Italians to think in terms of good guys versus bad guys, some have argued that the government of Silvio Berlusconi, for its own political purposes, took that position to an extreme. At the beginning of the 1990s San Pietro Infine became caught up in the transformation

of Italian politics occasioned by the *Tangentopoli* bribery scandals and the collapse of the Christian Democratic and Socialist parties, the mainstays of postwar governments. This was the dawn of the era of Berlusconi, the television magnate from Milan who came to dominate the Italian political scene for the next two decades. His efforts risked distorting the memory of the war in a way that would have dishonored the experience of the people of San Pietro Infine—something like the restorative nostalgia that Boym contrasted to the reflective version.⁶⁹ Yet the *Sampietresi* responded by reasserting their understanding of the war and promoting it throughout the country. Ironically, given Berlusconi's control of TV and mass media, they were aided by sympathetic television producers who shared their view that "there is no future without memory."⁷⁰

In 1994, a series of programs regarding the Second World War in Italy was shown on the Italian national television network Rai-Uno. The first show was broadcast on 5 April, a little more than a week after Berlusconi and his new party, *Forza Italia*, had won the national elections. To put together a coalition Berlusconi needed allies on the right, and his choices proved controversial. The *Lega Nord* favored the break-up of the unitary Italian state and independence for its richer, northern regions. The *Alleanza Nazionale* was the successor to the Italian fascist party. To broadcast a widely advertised multi-program series on World War II at a time when possible inclusion of "post-fascists" in the government was on the table was bound to provoke controversy. The nature of the broadcast was itself quite unusual. It stemmed from the discovery by Rai's Roberto Olla of a trove of unedited footage in the US National Archives, some 3,000 rolls filmed by the US forces as they invaded and occupied the Italian peninsula. Thus the English-language title for the series: *Combat film*. Among the material Olla obtained were all the outtakes from John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro*.

What made the series controversial, besides its timing, is explained in a fascinating study by Simona Monticelli.⁷¹ For our purposes two points are worth making. First, the series put both the Allies and the partisans of the Resistance in unfavorable light and treated as well-meaning patriots the young fascist recruits to the army of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic. We know from the discussion in Chapter Four that this is far from how the partisans and those who wrote their history remember the war. *Combat film* also violated some familiar conventions of Italian cinematic portrayals of the war, starting with Roberto Rossellini's 1945 neorealist classic, *Roma, Città Aperta* (Open City). Rossellini's portrayal of an anti-fascist priest and a communist partisan making common cause in the Resistance—and suffering a common fate of torture and murder at the hands of the Gestapo—found broad resonance in a country whose wartime experience took on much the character of a civil war following the Armistice. *Open City* was the top-grossing film in Italy during the 1945–46 season; it contributed to the emerging self-image of *Italiani, brava gente*—Italians, good people, who, with the exception of some fanatics, were basically anti-fascist victims of a dictatorship and who actively engaged in liberating themselves through the Resistance. Yet this was the portrayal that *Combat film* challenged—apparently, some argued, in the service of Berlusconi's attempt to rehabilitate the post-fascists sufficiently to have them join his coalition government.⁷²

Rossellini's vision was short-lived: With the onset of the Cold War, the cooperation between Catholics and communists broke down, and the Communist Party—Italy's second-largest—was consigned to permanent opposition. The end of the Cold War promised new political alignments, however, as the main successor to the Communist Party—at first called the Democratic Party of the Left—pursued a reformist course, shedding a more radical faction that formed its own party, and seeking a broad progressive coalition by making overtures to former members of Catholic and centrist parties.⁷³ This is precisely what Berlusconi sought to prevent by pursuing his own new coalition possibilities with the post-fascists. Berlusconi's strategy combined a seemingly anachronistic red-baiting of the Democratic Party ("anti-communism without communists") and a rehabilitation of the *Alleanza Nazionale* without acknowledging what its tradition represented ("anti-fascism without fascists"). His initiative paved the way for the gradual rehabilitation of the post-fascists to the point where the *Fratelli d'Italia*, led by former *Alleanza Nazionale* member Giorgia Meloni, emerged as the most popular political party in the 2022 Italian elections.

The second point about *Combat film* is that it revived interest in Huston's *San Pietro* by exposing audiences to the outtakes in the National Archives. A subsequent series of DVDs drawn from the TV program included "La guerra di John Huston," making those images available to a wider audience still. Huston's anti-war sentiments offered an alternative route to national reconciliation that avoided the communist vs fascist confrontation that many Italians preferred to consign to history. By reviving interest in Huston's work, *Combat film* supplied "ammunition" for the opponents of Berlusconi's hyperbolic anti-communism and attempted rehabilitation of fascism, thereby offering a way to neutralize the effects Monticelli identified.⁷⁴ Huston's approach fit well the sentiments of many Italians at the turn of the millennium—condemning the role fascism played in dragging Italy into a devastating war, grateful to the Allies as liberators, but not unreservedly so. After all, the Allied military strategy—the overreliance on bombing and the decision to fight Nazi Germany for two years on Italian soil—had come at a high cost for Italy, something *The Battle of San Pietro* had conveyed like no other film.

Following up the interest generated by *Combat film*, San Pietro Infine sought to promote itself as a location where film and history meet by drawing upon Huston's legacy. As a film, *The Battle of San Pietro* provides a link to Italian and international cinema. Huston's cinematic style presaged in some ways Rossellini's neorealism. Both *Open City* and *San Pietro* seek to occupy that creative border zone between fiction and documentary, each approaching it from the other direction.⁷⁵ The town has played host to international film festivals, held under the rubric *Storie nella storia* (Stories in history) that aim to connect San Pietro to the past and the future of the cinema of war and peace. Then mayor Fabio Vecchiarino was encouraged by the announcement of Italian president Giorgio Napolitano in March 2008 to designate old San Pietro Infine a "national monument." The mayor worked with Angelo Villani as artistic director in staging the first international film festival in 2010. Both the film festivals and the declaration as a national monument and winner of the gold medal attracted favorable national attention for San

Pietro, with several television documentaries produced—all of them using footage from Huston's film.

Already in 1959 San Pietro Infine served as the backdrop for several scenes in Mario Monicelli's anti-war comedy about the First World War, *La grande guerra* (The Great War). Notable documentaries made in later years include *Ritorno a San Pietro* (Return to San Pietro), a project of cinema students under the direction of Carlo Alberto Pinelli of Suor Orsola Benincasa University in Naples, shown at the 2010 festival, and Giuseppe Angelone's 2009 *Benvenuti all'inferno* (Welcome to Hell), crafted from film of the Caserta region during the war found at the Imperial War Museum in London and the US National Archives and shown at the 2011 festival.⁷⁶ In 2014 director Luca Gianfrancesco worked with Angelone to produce a documentary, *Terra bruciata* (Scorched earth), part of which was filmed in the ruins of San Pietro Infine. The film recounts the fate of more than a thousand victims of Nazi reprisals in the Caserta region and the birth of what the director called a "proto-Resistance" or "larval Resistance." As such, it constitutes an important effort to counter the Berlusconi-era denigration of the partisans.⁷⁷

At the 2010 festival the organizers sought to go beyond World War II to the wars of the present by screening *The Hurt Locker*.⁷⁸ Promoters of San Pietro try to maintain their Hollywood connection not only through the link to John Huston, but to more recent figures as well. They make much, for example, of the fact that the multimedia features introduced in 2008 at the museum of the Parco della Memoria Storica were designed by the Italian special effects (SFX) artist Carlo Rambaldi, "the father of E.T.," the 1982 Steven Spielberg movie.⁷⁹

Television specials focusing on the war in San Pietro and surrounding regions rely heavily on Huston's footage. In one documentary, the mayor of Monte Lungo, site of some of the fiercest fighting in the autumn of 1943, describes the failures and successes of the Italian soldiers who fought against the Germans on the Allied side for the first time. The screen, however, shows not actual footage of the Italian soldiers, but images from *The Battle of San Pietro* of American soldiers reenacting the parts of Italian soldiers.⁸⁰

In addition to attracting foreign films to their international film festivals, supporters of San Pietro Infine were also keen to "export" their product—John Huston's film and their interpretation of it. In 1987 they were pleased that the Irish rock band U2 chose Huston's images of the children of San Pietro to include in a video for its song, *In God's Country*. Bono's humanitarian activism represents sentiments that the *Sampietresi* and many Italians share. In 2006 several of those same images were projected onto the grand pyramid and castle that adorn Porta San Paolo-Piazzale Ostiense in Rome as part of a celebration of the 63rd anniversary of the Armistice. The event included an outdoor screening of documentaries such as *Ritorno a San Pietro* and drew a crowd of nearly a thousand visitors, almost overwhelming the organizers. The main attraction at Porta San Paolo was an exhibit of photos culled from Huston's filming in and around San Pietro Infine that ran for three months. According to the preface of the invaluable collection of essays published in connection with the exhibit, curator Giuseppe Angelone chose the photos to produce "the emotional effect that Huston himself" intended, "that is to communicate visually more the tragedy" of the civilian victims "than the exaltation of the victors."⁸¹



Figure 6.3 Viewers watch a recent film of interviews of the survivors of the battle for San Pietro at Piazzale Ostiense in Rome, while images from John Huston's *San Pietro* are projected onto a pyramid and the Porta San Paolo, to celebrate the 63rd anniversary of the Armistice, 8 September 2006. The event kicked off a photographic exhibit, "Da San Pietro Infine a Porta San Paolo," curated by Giuseppe Angelone, which continued at the Museo della Via Ostiense until mid-December 2006. Photo by Cesare Esposito.

Source: Angelo Pellegrino and Maurizio Zambardi, eds. *San Pietro Infine: L'avanzata delle truppe alleate verso Roma da San Pietro Infine a Porta San Paolo* (Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, 2006). Used by permission.

"Pompei of our times"

Owing mainly to its anti-war message, Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro* continued to attract Italian audiences in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the "Global War on Terror" that seemed never-ending. Even in an era when governments sought to justify the use of military force—with greater or lesser plausibility—for humanitarian purposes, as in Libya in 2011, or Ukraine and Syria a few years later, many Italians still remain staunchly pacifist. The subtitle of a study of the use of Italian military force abroad in the post-Cold War era is revealing in that regard: *Just Don't Call it War*.⁸² The publicity associated with *San Pietro Infine*'s international film festivals has amplified that message. When director Massimo Spano was interviewed on television after his film, *Figli strappati*, won the 2010 festival's first prize and he was asked his views on the genre of war films such as *San Pietro*, he at first hesitated: "For me, war...I'm a pacifist by nature, so I'm against any kind of war, so when I speak of war I feel bad even hearing the word."⁸³ Festival director Villani echoed the same sentiment: "I am not interested in war, but in telling people's stories."⁸⁴

Visiting and reading about *San Pietro Infine*, one often hears the old town described as "a kind of Pompei of our times."⁸⁵ The residents and their supporters have certainly made every effort to promote that image—to make their understanding of the lessons of the battle for San Pietro permanently fixed—with Huston's film as their main resource. Angelone says of the importance of *San Pietro* that "the documentary recounts the suffering not only of the troops, the combatants, but also of the civilian population. It is a real anti-war manifesto...it mainly documents the tragedy of the civilian population." Giuseppe Troiano, a resident of

the town suffered that tragedy personally—as a small boy, he lost an eye during the conflict, and was lucky that the infection was halted before it blinded his other eye. Troiano made a practice of visiting schools to talk about his experience and show Huston’s film. He reported that the children drew a different conclusion from experts such as Angelone on what *San Pietro* shows about the relative pain endured by soldiers and civilians. For whatever it says about war in the 21st century (or what they are taught about war), the Italian schoolchildren Troiano met said they *expected* civilians to be harmed. They were amazed, Troiano said, to see that not only the civilian population suffered during war but also the soldiers. The military are supposed to be heroes, but they are victims too. Troiano pointed out to the students that the military are trained to defend themselves against armed enemies, whereas civilians are not—a basic point, but one, as we recall from the last chapter, that even as astute an observer as George Orwell missed in his polemic against Vera Brittain. Civilians “hide in caves, they die without knowing why. The soldiers know why. This is the difference between soldiers and civilians.”⁸⁶

It seems that promoters of *San Pietro*’s message, such as Giuseppe Vecchiarino, the mayor elected in 2011 on the Peace and Progress list, have their work cut out for them in maintaining the memory of war and the hope for peace in successor generations. For although one journalist was inspired by the showing of Huston’s *San Pietro* at the town’s film festival to declare *San Pietro Infine* “a community that had won, at long last, the war against war,” in fact it is an ongoing struggle.⁸⁷

The legacy for Italy of the civilian losses and destroyed towns of World War II is persistent anti-war sentiment. It has found expression in revivals of the memories and manipulations made permanent in Huston’s *The Battle of San Pietro*. People who identified most with the death and suffering immortalized in his film included political and artistic leaders from *San Pietro Infine* and its vicinity who made efforts to broadcast their message of peace by memorializing their parents’ and grandparents’ war experience.

War films can be powerful anti-war statements. People who embrace the anti-war message are drawn to the films that carry that message. Even with its authenticity as historical record in doubt, Huston’s film remains an accurate and detailed portrait of war. For many viewers, especially in Italy, it illustrates a universal truth about war’s futility which remains relevant today. As with much of the Allied air campaign to defeat Nazi Germany and liberate Italy, distinctions between the message, the record, and the individual and collective memory of the lived events have become distinctions without a difference.

Notes

- 1 James Agee, “Films,” *The Nation*, 26 May 1945, 608.
- 2 Lance Bertelsen, “San Pietro and the ‘Art’ of War,” *Southwest Review*, (Spring 1989); Mark Harris, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 267–270, 279–284, 331–334, 382–384. All page references are to the Kindle version.
- 3 Bertelsen, “San Pietro,” 231.
- 4 Huston’s narrative quotes a figure of 1,412 “at the last census.” Maurizio Zambardi, the preminent local historian, provides similar figures in “San Pietro Infine,” in Angelo

- Pellegrino and Maurizio Zambardi, eds., *San Pietro Infine: L'avanzata delle truppe alleate verso Roma da San Pietro Infine a Porta San Paolo* (Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, 2006), 8; and "San Pietro Infine: Civili uccisi per errore nel dicembre 1943," 31 December 2001, available on the website, dalvoluturnoacassino.it
- 5 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.
 - 6 Vera Brittain, *Seeds of Chaos: What Mass Bombing Really Means* (London: New Vision, 1944), published for the Bombing Restriction Committee. Vera Brittain, "Massacre by Bombing: The Facts behind the British-American Attack on Germany," *Fellowship*, vol. 10, no. 3 (March 1944), 54; N.P. Howard, "The Social and Political Consequences of the Allied Food Blockade of Germany, 1918–19," *German History*, vol. 11, no. 2 (April 1993), 161–188.
 - 7 Valentina Valeriani, "76° anniversario della Battaglia di San Pietro Infine 11 dicembre 2019," 1 December 2019, <http://www.deanotizie.it/news/2019/12/01/76-anniversario-della-battaglia-di-san-pietro-infine-11-dicembre-2019/>
 - 8 For example, "Dalla 'Battaglia di San Pietro' ad 'Annie': il cinema di John Huston, regista ribelle," *Corriere della Sera*, 12 May 2001.
 - 9 The film's original title was *San Pietro*, which still appears on the title screen, against the backdrop of an image of the town's patron saint. Since the announcement of the first public screening in the *New York Times*, 25 April 1945, it has been known as *The Battle of San Pietro*. I use both titles interchangeably.
 - 10 Richard Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary* (New York: Random House, 1944), 224.
 - 11 Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War: Against the Land of My Ancestors* (Irving, TX: Fusion Press, 2000), 146.
 - 12 Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (London: Verso, 1994).
 - 13 Jan Mieszkowski, "War, With Popcorn," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* blog, 18 July 2014. For historical discussion, see Mieszkowski, *Watching War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).
 - 14 General Mark W. Clark, Prologue to John Huston, dir., *San Pietro* (1945), https://ia902300.us.archive.org/12/items/battle_of_san_pietro/battle_of_san_pietro_512kb.mp4
 - 15 John Grigg, *1943: The Victory That Never Was* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980), 110. The best overall account of the Italian campaign is Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007). It includes a chapter on the battle for San Pietro.
 - 16 Robert S. Ehlers Jr., *The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 329.
 - 17 Tim Brady, *A Death in San Pietro: The Untold Story of Ernie Pyle, John Huston, and the Fight for Purple Heart Valley* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2013), 139 (Kindle version).
 - 18 Eric Linklater, *The Campaign in Italy* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1951), 148 (original emphasis). This the second of an eight-volume set of official histories intended for a popular audience.
 - 19 Clark Prologue to *San Pietro*.
 - 20 Peter Maslowski, *Armed with Cameras* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 77.
 - 21 *Rome-Arno 1944*, US Army Center for Military History Publication #72-20, 23.
 - 22 On civilian deaths, see Zambardi, "San Pietro Infine," 8.
 - 23 Linklater, *Campaign in Italy*, 210–211.
 - 24 Harris, *Five Came Back*, 332.
 - 25 John Huston, *An Open Book* (New York: Perseus Books, 1994), 138; Morando Morandini, *John Huston* (Milano: Il Castoro, 1996), 36.
 - 26 Letter from Colonel Melvin E. Gillette to John Huston, 28 October 1944, quoted in Harris, *Five Came Back*, 333.
 - 27 Harris, *Five Came Back*, 332.
 - 28 This version is available at https://archive.org/details/battle_of_san_pietro
 - 29 Giuseppe Angelone, "'Real War versus Hollywood War': Il regista John Huston e le riprese per il film 'San Pietro,'" *Quaderni Vesuviani Campania*, vol. 1 (2008), 73–74.

- 30 Angelone, "Real War," 72.
- 31 Eric Ambler, *Here Lies Eric Ambler: An Autobiography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), Kindle edition, loc. 3732.
- 32 Angelone, "Real War," 73; Ambler, *Here Lies*, loc. 3826.
- 33 Ambler, *Here Lies*, loc. 3779.
- 34 Petruzzi, *My War*, 147.
- 35 *Ibid.*, loc. 3886.
- 36 *Ibid.*, loc. 3920.
- 37 Harris, *Five Came Back*, 269.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 279.
- 39 Author's discussion with Nicola Nardelli at the museum of San Pietro Infine, May 2013; and Maurizio Zambardi, "San Pietro Infine: La guerra dei civili," in Pellegrino and Zambardi, eds., *San Pietro Infine*, 34.
- 40 The letter of 18 December 1943 was uploaded by William C. Allen, Jr. on 15 June 2011 to the website, https://archive.org/details/battle_of_san_pietro
- 41 Bertelsen, "San Pietro," 253.
- 42 The article is available at <http://www.pbs.org/weta/reportingamericaatwar/reporters/pyle/waskow.html>. Bertelsen's "San Pietro" insightfully links Pyle's journalism with Huston's filmmaking.
- 43 Bertelsen, "San Pietro," 253.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 250.
- 45 Harris, *Five Came Back*, 280.
- 46 Angelone, "Real War," 76, n. 45.
- 47 "36th Division in World War II," Texas Military Forces Museum website, <http://www.texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org/36division/archives/sanpiet/sanpietr.htm>
- 48 Angelone, "Real War," 76.
- 49 Giuseppe Angelone, "Cimiteri temporanei di guerra nel Medio Volturno," *Annuario A.S.M.V. [Associazione Storica del Medio Volturno] – Studi e ricerche*, 1 April 2014.
- 50 Bertelsen, "San Pietro," 254. The 38-minute version of the film, unlike the 32-minute one, does not include the disclaimer at the end.
- 51 Angelone, "Real War," 76–79, drawing on Maslowski, *Armed with Cameras*; Roberto Olla, *Combat film* (Rome: RAI-ERI, 1997), 44.
- 52 Harris, *Five Came Back*, 280.
- 53 For example, Marco Pellegrinelli, *La Battaglia di S. Pietro di John Huston* (Venafro: Edizioni Eva, 2002).
- 54 Morandini, *John Huston*, 32.
- 55 Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), x–xi.
- 56 The Associazione Famiglie Sanpietresi di Montreal is especially active.
- 57 Maurizio Zambardi, "La ricostruzione del cassinate da parte dell'Ericas negli anni 1949–1953," in Pellegrino and Zambardi, eds., *San Pietro Infine*, 13.
- 58 Zambardi, "San Pietro Infine," in Pellegrino and Zambardi, eds., *San Pietro Infine*, 9.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 10–11.
- 60 For a critical view of the Allies' campaign in the south, see Gigi Di Fiore, *Controstoria della Liberazione: Le stragi e i crimini dimenticati degli Alleati nell'Italia del sud* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2012).
- 61 Zambardi, "San Pietro Infine: Civili uccisi per errore nel dicembre 1943," "Gli eccidi tedeschi di San Pietro Infine," and "Al di là del filo spinato...per non morire di fame," all available on the website, dalvolturnoacassino.it
- 62 Zambardi, "San Pietro Infine: La guerra dei civili," 32.
- 63 For some examples: Antonio Grazio Ferraro, *Cassino: dalla distruzione della guerra alla rinascita nella pace* (Cassino: Francesco Ciolfi editore, 2007), 39–41; Zambardi, "Gli eccidi tedeschi di San Pietro Infine." <http://www.dalvolturnoacassino.it/asp/doc.asp?id=080>

- 64 Antonio Ferrara, "Il festival di guerra a San Pietro Infine: 'Mi chiamo Rosvelto, come Roosevelt,'" *La Repubblica* (Naples edition), 29 August 2011.
- 65 Zambardi, "San Pietro Infine: La guerra dei civili," 27; The parish ceased to exist. When the town fell to the Allies, a monk at the Abbey of Monte Cassino wrote in his diary entry for 17 December 1943 of "the tragic death of the parish of San Pietro Infine." Faustino Avagliano, ed., *Il bombardamento di Montecassino: Diario di guerra di E. Grossetti e M. Matronola con altre testimonianze e documenti* (Montecassino: Pubblicazioni Cassinesi, 2011), 43.
- 66 In a television interview, Cortellessa confirms his birthdate of 15 December 1943, but also mentions the name "Michele" that he was given in February 1944. Catholics are typically expected to baptize their children with saints' names. Interview with Vito D'Ettore on the TV2000 program, "Nel cuore dei giorni," 29 May 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhWfONCOQM8>
- 67 The roll is 111-ADC-613, dated 22 February 1944. I am grateful to Professor Angelone for sharing this information in an email message of 28 September 2014.
- 68 Ferrara, "Il festival di guerra."
- 69 Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, ch. 4.
- 70 This was the title of a documentary produced by Stefania Forlini and Elia Rubino, promoting the international film festival at San Pietro Infine in 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CowBjNGANo>
- 71 Simona Monticelli, "National Identity and the Representation of Italy at War: The Case of Combat Film," *Modern Italy*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2000), 133–46.
- 72 Unfortunately this characterization simplifies Monticelli's subtle and sophisticated argument, by not providing her convincing visual and other evidence. For a similar argument about the political implications of the series, see Giorgio Bocca, "I due falsi storici del 25 aprile," *La Repubblica*, 14 April 1994.
- 73 For an overview, see Matthew Evangelista, "Italy in Crisis: *Eppur si muove*," in Evangelista, ed., *Italy from Crisis to Crisis: Political Economy, Security, and Society in the 21st Century*, (London: Routledge, 2018), 3–32.
- 74 In May 1995 *Combat film* was screened in an open-air showing at Piazza del Popolo in Rome, in a program that included films on the Nazi looting of Italian artworks and efforts by a special unit of Resistance fighters that sought to save them. Roberto Olla participated, suggesting that however the Rai broadcast of *Combat film* seemed to serve Berlusconi's interests in denigrating the partisans (Monticelli's thesis), the filmmaker himself did not necessarily share that goal. "RAI: 'Combat film' in Piazza a Roma," https://www1.adnkronos.com/Archivio/AdnAgenzia/1995/05/27/Spettacolo/RAI-COMBAT-FILM-IN-PIAZZA-A-ROMA_102200.php
- 75 Pellegrinelli, *La Battaglia di S. Pietro*, 46.
- 76 *Ritorno a San Pietro* is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQzO83UuSi8>
- 77 Interview with D'Ettore. The film's subtitle is "the Italian laboratory of Nazi ferocity." I thank Giuseppe Angelone for additional details.
- 78 Antonio Ferrara, "Storie di guerra a San Pietro Infine: Il festival dal 24 al 27 agosto," *La Repubblica* (Naples edition), 23 August 2011.
- 79 *Ibid.*, and author's interview with Nicola Nardelli, San Pietro Infine, May 2013.
- 80 Interview with D'Ettore.
- 81 Angelo Pellegrino, preface to Pellegrino and Zambardi, eds., *San Pietro Infine*.
- 82 Fabrizio Coticchia, with Giampiero Giacomello and Piero Ignazi, *Italian Military Operations Abroad: Just Don't Call It War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For a detailed account of the attitudes of Italian peace activists toward recent wars, see Andrea Catanzaro and Fabrizio Coticchia, *Al di là dell'Arcobaleno: I movimenti pacifisti italiani tra ideologie e contro-narrazioni strategiche* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2018).
- 83 "Festival cinema – Storie nella storia, seconda parte," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=galrtjQhndw>
- 84 "Festival cinema – Storie nella storia, prima parte," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIrAlMmIU-A&t=1s>

85 Ferrara, "Storie di guerra."

86 Interviewed by D'Ettore.

87 Giampiero Casoni, "Il Parco della Memoria di San Pietro Infine," *Cancello ed Arnone News*, 24 March 2011.

7 Conclusion

Bombing among Friends has explored the Allied air campaign against Italy from 1940 to 1945 with a particular focus on the harm inflicted on Italian civilians. It discussed five dimensions of the war—Diplomacy, Strategy, Resistance, Humanity, and Memory—associating each with an individual at the center of the story. It is fitting, then, for a concluding discussion of the legacy of the bombing of Italy to revisit the five individuals and see how the war influenced their lives subsequently.

Among the conclusions we draw about the impact of the bombing on civilians is that perceptions vary tremendously depending most obviously on whether one is on the sending or the receiving end of the bombs. The most powerful accounts by journalists of the civilian consequences of bombing insist on reminding their readers of how rarely those who order or carry out the attacks think about the victims. Reporting on the Soviet bombing of Helsinki in the Winter War of 1939, for example, Martha Gellman recalled her dispatches on the fascist air raids against Madrid three years earlier and the first dead body she encountered:

Now as then there was no identification left except the shoes, since the head and arms had been destroyed. In Spain the small, dark, deformed bundle wore the rope-soled shoes of the poor, and here the used leather soles were carefully patched. Otherwise the two remnants of bodies were tragically the same.

Although Gellman's austere and understated style differed from the passionate jeremiads of a Vera Brittain or Marie Louise Berneri, her anger was no less intense: "I thought it would be fine if the ones who order the bombing and the ones who do the bombing would walk on the ground some time and see what it is like."¹

We saw in previous chapters that some of those "who do the bombing"—Joseph Heller and his crewmates, for example—on rare occasions at least thought about the innocent civilian victims of their attacks. Randall Jarrell, a poet and Army Air Force veteran of World War II, knew from experience that only the air crew members who crash and burn suffer the same losses—their own lives—as the people they kill. In a 1955 poem, he wrote:

In bombers named for girls we burned
The cities we had learned about in school—
Till our lives wore out, our bodies lay among

The people we had killed and never seen.
 When we lasted long enough they gave us medals;
 When we died they said, "Our casualties were low."
 They said, "Here are the maps"; we burned the cities.²

A *Rashomon* effect—with different accounts representing the different perspectives of those who ordered, those who carried out, and those who suffered from the attacks—would be evident in almost any case of bombing. For the purposes of this chapter we examine two: the virtually unknown example of Alba and the infamous one of Cassino, including the town of that name and the nearby Abbey of Monte Cassino. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the legacy of the war for Italians, drawing on examples from the two towns and beyond, and for aerial bombardment in the 21st century.

Following the Introduction's overview of the war, Chapter Two focused on the diplomatic efforts of Myron Taylor, President Roosevelt's envoy to the Pope, who sought to convince the Allies to spare Rome from aerial bombardment. The bombings of 19 July and 13 August 1943, along with the destruction of nearby Frascati on 8 September, signaled the failure of his mission. Subsequent attacks in the first half of 1944 against Castel Gandolfo, site of the Pope's summer residence, brought papal attitudes toward the Allied air forces to a low point. As described in the chapter on *Diplomacy*, Taylor had called the attention of the War Department to the fact that the Vatican was sheltering some 15,000 refugees, including many Jews. Allied commanders went ahead with the air raids anyhow, killing hundreds of civilians and causing—according to the Vatican—some 191 million lire in property damage.

Despite Taylor's apparent failure at high-stakes diplomacy around protecting Rome from bombing, his own reputation seems not to have suffered either in Italy or in the United States. President Harry Truman invited Taylor to continue his role as presidential envoy to the Vatican into the postwar years. Indeed, it was Taylor who met with Pope Pius XII in 1954 to negotiate US reparations for the damaged Vatican property of ten years earlier—for an amount about half of what the Pope's estimates had claimed.³ The negotiated agreement marked an unusual coda to an unusual diplomatic career.

In the wake of Europe's devastation in the Second World War, Taylor made a certain contribution, albeit an indirect one, to preserving peace in the postwar era. In 1941 he had donated his Italian residence, the Villa Schifanoia, in San Domenico di Fiesole, above Florence, to the Catholic Church to create an institute of fine arts.⁴ The villa was built on an estate said to have been the site for the events of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and its current address is Via Boccaccio. In the 1980s the property became part of the European University Institute (EUI) and since 2016 has housed the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. The EUI was founded as a symbol of European unity, based on proposals dating to 1948 from the European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the European Union, to create "a centre for nuclear sciences." Instead, that original proposal evolved into "one focused on the human sciences, promoting a cultural exchange between member states."⁵ The Institute opened its doors in 1976 and began to offer PhD



Figure 7.1 Villa Schifanoia, San Domenico di Fiesole, Myron Taylor's former estate.

Photo by Sailko, used with permission.

degrees in four fields: Law, Economics, History, and Political and Social Sciences. Arguably, the EUI has contributed to mutual understanding among students of the 23 contracting states that support it, as well as scholars throughout the world who engage in its activities. To the extent that international scholarship and learning improve relations between states and diminish the risk of war, Myron Taylor's donation serves the goal that his diplomacy failed to achieve. He died in New York City in 1959 at the age of 85.

Solly Zuckerman, the focus of the chapter on *Strategy*, continued to pursue his interests in military-technical affairs, even as he took up various university positions after the war. He served as chief scientific adviser to the British Ministry of Defence from 1960 to 1966 and published numerous books on science and public policy. As we saw in Chapter Three, Zuckerman also published memoirs that sought—unsuccessfully, I argue—to vindicate the positions he advocated on bombing strategy against Italy and France. He promoted his position in other ways as well, some of which led to betrayal of former friends. In December 1960, the novelist C.P. Snow gave a lecture at Harvard where he spoke of the wartime disagreements between F.A. Lindemann (Lord Cherwell) and Henry Tizard on the efficacy of bombing and argued that Lindemann had been wrong to advocate “dehousing” as a means to German defeat. Snow repeated the critique by P.M.S. Blackett, reported in Chapter Three, that Lindemann's calculations were faulty.

When J.D. Bernal read an article in the *Times* about Snow's charges, he proposed to write a letter endorsing the latter's assessment of Lindemann. Bernal invited Zuckerman, with whom, as we also know from the same chapter, he had studied the effects of bombing during the war, to co-sign. Instead, Zuckerman dissuaded Bernal from sending the letter, evidently not sharing his colleague's criticism of Lindemann. As we have seen, Zuckerman had worked with Lindemann during the war trying to answer such questions as "How many tons of bombs does it take to break a town?" Perhaps he feared being associated with the view that Bernal apparently shared with Blackett and Snow of Lindemann's "fanatical character." In their opinion, it "had led to his complete belief in the efficacy of bombing to 'the almost total exclusion of wider considerations.'"⁶

Zuckerman evidently bore some kind of animus against Bernal, even after the latter's death, judging by his comments at a memorial service in January 1972. To the astonishment of Bernal's friends and family, Zuckerman pronounced a litany of contributions Bernal had *not* made to the war effort—none to "the conduct of military operations," he had invented no weapons, "he planned no assaults, nor did he go on any." The last point contradicted the evidence from Bernal's diary—shown to Zuckerman by Bernal's widow (and Zuckerman's former lover), Margaret Gardiner—that he had embarked on the beaches of Normandy shortly after D-Day. Zuckerman declared Bernal's account a fantasy and made a point of ensuring that subsequent historians would report his version rather than Bernal's. Yet Bernal's biographer has summoned convincing evidence that Bernal was telling the truth, that he hit the beaches wearing his Royal Navy lieutenant's uniform to assess the ongoing operation.⁷ Zuckerman seemed to need to denigrate those who disagreed with him in order to justify his own positions, however erroneous, and boost his self-esteem. The debate, recounted in Chapter Three, between Zuckerman and the American economists, carried out in the pages of *Encounter* magazine in the 1970s, over the merits of his preferred bombing strategy, creates much the same impression.

Bombing provided a link between Zuckerman's wartime advice to the British military and political authorities and his work for the Ministry of Defence in the postwar years. With the onset of the atomic age, however, the idea that nuclear weapons could be used for military purposes as during the Second World War struck Zuckerman as unrealistic. But he was particularly concerned about the risk of accidents. He informed Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in a letter from September 1962, a month before the Cuban Missile Crisis, that an American colleague, John Foster, director of the Lawrence Livermore nuclear laboratory, "and the most enthusiastic designer of nuclear weapons on the other side of the Atlantic, gave me his private opinion that before 10 years have passed, the chances are almost 100 percent that there would be one disastrous accident."⁸

Zuckerman's concern about the safety of nuclear weapons during peacetime developed into a criticism of their use during war. In a collection of essays published in 1966 he described the consequences of a one-megaton nuclear bomb dropped on a city such as London:

Those who had been trapped in the wreckage of buildings and could still fend for themselves would know that if they themselves could not crawl to safety, the chances would be that there would be no one to help them. Able survivors would either be fleeing or searching for food, for relations, for help or for some form of shelter better than the one in which they happened to be when the bomb went off.⁹

Lacking the literary skill of a Vera Brittain or Martha Gellhorn, Zuckerman nevertheless tried to describe what he called the “human picture” of bombing urban centers—an element wholly missing from his wartime writing when he advocated precisely that strategy.

Zuckerman’s memoirs and essay collections express pride in the scientific advice he provided to his country’s military forces, but a certain unwillingness to accept responsibility for it. In a 1975 book called *Advice and Responsibility*, he wrote:

I myself cannot see why scientists should be blamed because of the defects of man’s vision as he peers into the future, any more than I see why scientists should blame themselves because the unexpected happens. The decisions and actions which determine the way scientific knowledge will be applied are not decisions based on scientific considerations alone. They are nearly always affected as much as [*sic*: by] social, political, economic, and financial factors as by those which are basically scientific.¹⁰

He might have added that the decisions are sometimes affected by the fierce lobbying and conflict among partisans of competing views, as we saw in his advocacy for a bombing strategy focused on urban transportation nodes. Bernal once described Zuckerman’s career as “marked by extraordinary persistence and steady advancement.” He called the wartime scientific advice promoted by Lindemann and Zuckerman “Court science,” dependent on close relations with a patron—in the case of Lindemann, Prime Minister Churchill. Zuckerman, “too, depends on his ability to get on with people. This has been exercised not on one patron but many—the Service Chiefs to start with, but the scientific world as well.” If Zuckerman “had a fault,” wrote Bernal, “it was being too easily influenced by the military opinion of the time.”¹¹

The early 1980s brought a new wave of nuclear anxiety associated with the military policies of Ronald Reagan’s administration and the geriatric leadership of the Soviet Union. Zuckerman jumped into the fray with a small book called *Nuclear Illusion and Reality*, and dedicated it to Harold MacMillan.¹² He offered a moderate critique of the Reagan administration’s nuclear policies—not a difficult task, given that its officials were prone to extreme remarks, for example, about surviving a nuclear war: “If there are enough shovels to go around, everybody’s going to make it.”¹³ But in an effort to assert the importance of deterrence rather than treaties and law as a way to avoid war, Zuckerman showed himself surprisingly out of date on the actual legal norms. “If war has no fixed rules,” he wrote,

there are certainly conventions and laws that have been enshrined in treaty language, and which are supposed to govern its operations. One may destroy an enemy's crops, kill his citizens, but one does not poison his wells. Prisoners of war have to [be] treated in a humane way.

Chemical and biological warfare are banned. "That is where the conventions of warfare end," he claimed.¹⁴

To suggest "one may destroy an enemy's crops" recalls Zuckerman's description from his memoir, recounted in Chapter Three, of Lindemann's proposal to disrupt the German food supply by "dropping small bombs, or steel spikes, among growing crops so as to interfere with the work of harvesting machines." Such warfare by starvation, always of dubious morality, as Vera Brittain insisted during both world wars, had been made formally illegal in the First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, adopted in 1977, five years before Zuckerman's book, and is considered prohibited by customary law.¹⁵ As for the argument that one may kill an enemy's citizens, that practice has never been legal unless the citizens were enemy soldiers. As we have seen, believing it legal, or at least acceptable, to kill unarmed civilians (through "dehousing," for example) was a prerequisite for the Allies' bombing campaigns during World War II. Zuckerman apparently still held such a view four decades later.

One can hardly imagine a greater contrast with the scientific adviser to Conservative British government officials than the figures who featured in the next two chapters, Aldo Quaranta and Vera Brittain. Aldone, the rebel commander whose story weaves through the chapter on *Resistance*, is one of many partisans who held high hopes for the postwar period. His movement of committed antifascists, *Giustizia e Libertà* (GL), looked forward to creating a secular democratic republic after liberating their country from Nazi and fascist occupation. Founded in 1929 in Paris, GL established a branch in Turin, led by Carlo Levi and Leone Ginzburg until their exile. The GL activists, including fellow Turin members Ada Gobetti and Vittorio Foa, were opposed to both fascism and the monarchy that had enabled it. Their commitment to liberty and liberal values put them at odds with communists, although they endeavored to cooperate with all antifascist groups. Aldone was cheered when Ferruccio Parri, the GL partisan leader known as Maurizio, and "one of the most prestigious figures of the Resistance," became prime minister of Italy in June 1945.¹⁶ Like Quaranta, Parri was born in Piedmont, in the Alpine town of Pinerolo, and he too graduated from the University of Turin, albeit some 20 years earlier. He worked as a teacher and served as editor of the Milan newspaper, *Corriere della sera*, before being sent into exile during Mussolini's reign. During the war Parri served as head of the Committee of National Liberation and the major liaison with the Allied occupation headquarters in Rome.

His wartime experience made "Parri an almost mythical figure of antifascism. His lifestyle, the cenobitic sobriety that inspired him, the spirit of sacrifice with which he dedicated himself to his task transformed him into a sort of 'myth' of good governance."¹⁷ Yet confronted with the actual task of governing in fractious postwar Italy, he fell far short of expectations. In December 1945, less than six months after taking office, Parri resigned as prime minister. As Caroline Moorehead

put it, everything Ferruccio and his “friends had believed in and fought for, the idea of a true democracy founded on new grass-roots organisations uncontaminated by the past, could not compete with the political realities of peacetime.”¹⁸ Parri was succeeded by the Christian Democratic leader Alcide De Gasperi, who served nearly eight years under US patronage.

Aldone Quaranta shared the feeling of disappointment that the wartime sacrifices had not yielded the just and free society that the GL partisans had fought to achieve. One day toward the end of March 1947 on a sidewalk in Cuneo he ran into the father of a fallen comrade, Ildebrando (Ildo) Vivanti. He asked if Aldone would write an article to commemorate his son’s death. Because Quaranta’s brigade had been named in Ildo’s honor, he decided to write an account not only about him but about the partisans’ experience in the Valle Gesso during the war. He proposed to use the proceeds from the sale of the memoir to build a monument in their honor. Ildo’s father worked at a local printing press, whose owner offered to supply the paper and the use of the machines for free, and the printers volunteered their time in the evening to produce the pamphlet. On 25 April 1947, in Cuneo’s Piazza Galimberti, recently renamed for a legendary partisan leader, the pamphlet’s run of 2,000 copies sold out by the end of the day. The monument was constructed the next year.

In a preface to a 1998 reprinting of his pamphlet Quaranta summarizes the background and goes on to express his disappointment at the state of affairs in what he calls the “post-Parri” (*dopo Parri*) period in the country. It “had not become the Italy dreamed of by the Partisans who are under the ground, nor by me!”¹⁹ The dedication of the original text conveyed the same view:

To the partisans of the Ildo Vivanti brigade and to the inhabitants of the Valle Gesso, because they still feel pride in how little or much they did during the war of liberation. Even if today it can seem that they fought in vain.²⁰

Aldone, like many partisans, blamed the Allies for the replacement of the left-leaning liberal Parri with the conservative Christian Democrat De Gasperi, and in general for the shattered hopes for a more thorough rejection of the industrial and agricultural élite who had supported and profited from the fascist order. For Aldone, the course of events reinforced the lesson he claims to have learned as a student from Professor Luigi Einaudi, that “in economics, but also in politics, the bad money chases out the good.”²¹

The animus of the partisans was particularly focused on the British, whose preference for the Italian monarchy and antipathy toward the communist and other leftwing partisans was never kept secret. In October 1950, Aldone sent a copy of his pamphlet to the Imperial War Museum in London with a peculiar, handwritten dedication offering the contribution of “my little grain of anger (*il mio granellino di rabbia*) to the history of the European Resistance.” The Museum later disposed of Quaranta’s book and the Cornell University Library subsequently acquired it, at my request. The notion of “the Resistance cancelled” by the Allies, although questioned by historians, remains a prominent theme in memoirs of the partisan movement.²²

LARS/MK
 12 1/2 October 1950.

33858

Dell'Imperial War Museum
 London.

Il mio procellino di rabbia
 alla storia della Resistenza
 Europea -
 Con simpatia.
 A Aldo Quaranta

Figure 7.2 “My little grain of anger” —Aldo Quaranta’s dedication to the Imperial War Museum.

Author’s photo.

Quaranta continued to write about his experience of the war as well as his postwar activities. We recall from Chapter Four his extraordinary descent on skis through the Alps from Entracque to Nice. Mountaineering remained his passion after the war, and he discovered many unknown trails and routes. He was elected secretary general of the Italian Alpine Club. Wanting to share his love of the mountains with visitors, he promoted the development of chairlifts for skiing at Limone Piemonte and became director of the *funivie* or cable cars in the mountain village of Courmayeur and president of the Parco dell’Argentera near Lake Maggiore. He pursued his political interests as a member of the small *Partito repubblicano* founded by fellow GL members and was elected mayor of Entracque and a municipal counselor.²³

Perhaps his most significant postwar political achievement, the one to which he devoted most of his energies, was to environmental preservation. In particular, he fought a 16-year battle—which he analogized to a second war of resistance—against the state energy company ENEL as it built Italy’s most powerful dam and hydroelectric complex in Aldone’s father’s home village of Entracque. He did not oppose the complex itself, named in honor of his former teacher and later

president of Italy, Luigi Einaudi. But he and his fellow activists feared that the plans for excavating the tunnels associated with the dam risked creating earthquakes and threatened to pollute the pristine mountain streams and ruin the enjoyment of the area for residents and tourists alike. In 1985 Aldone declared victory when ENEL revised its plans to take into account the environmental concerns of the *Entracquesi*.²⁴ Thanks to his efforts and those of fellow activists ENEL now highlights “Green Power” and environmental consciousness in its public relations. It claims that its

commitment in the upper Gesso was not limited to the construction of an avant-garde power plant but particular attention was paid to safeguarding the natural beauties and characteristics, increasing the presence of greenery in the areas where the materials were deposited from the excavations and planting 6,000 specimens of different tree species.²⁵

Aldone continued writing and publishing books on his favorite themes—the weak (*il popolo magro*) against the strong (*il popolo grasso*), the importance of liberty and secularism, the legacy of the Resistance, and his love of the mountains—until the very year of his death in 2002 at the age of 93.²⁶ Entracque has named a street in his honor and various websites commemorating the *Giustizia e Libertà* movement include his biography.

Like Aldo Quaranta, Vera Brittain was also concerned about threats to the environment in the postwar world—but mainly those emanating from the testing of nuclear weapons and the risk of nuclear war. Concern about the nuclear danger was something she shared with Solly Zuckerman. Unlike Zuckerman, however, she based her analysis and prescription on her abiding pacifism, increasingly influenced by Christian beliefs. As we saw in Chapter Five, during the mid-1920s, Brittain’s husband George Catlin taught at Cornell University. She spent some time with him in Ithaca, but soon moved back to London with their children, John and Shirley. Eventually Catlin resettled in England as well, as he sought to turn his political theories into practical politics. After the war Brittain returned occasionally to the United States to lecture, including once in 1958 when she gave a seminar as part of Cornell’s Campus Conference on Religion. The *Cornell Daily Sun* summarized her remarks. Brittain argued that in the last 50 years, “man’s moral nature has not kept up with his intellect.” She described the present age as an “apocalyptic” one, with ideological conflict fostering “the growth of inhumanity” and “violence in the world.” She described love as “the constructive element in man, which is his divine spark,” and is “inextinguishable.” She praised Mahatma Gandhi and “also cited the Red Cross, the Save Europe Movement after the war and the Society of Friends as evidences of the existence of love today.”²⁷

Brittain was in Canada in 1958 when Bertrand Russell founded the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and launched “Ban the Bomb” activities, but she joined as soon as she returned home. Some pacifists were suspicious of CND for the same reason they had criticized the Bombing Restrictions Committee during the war: If pacifists joined campaigns to ban one type of weapon or military practice, did it not imply that they accepted the others? Brittain took a more pragmatic approach, describing nuclear disarmament as “a half-open door to

world peace. Those pacifists who do not push against this door after hammering on locked gates for two decades may well be losing an opportunity which will never recur.”²⁸ Brittain also supported the Committee of 100, an offshoot of CND that advocated nonviolent civil disobedience and unilateral nuclear disarmament. Her activities posed a problem for her husband George and daughter Shirley, both of whom espoused more moderate views and nurtured political ambitions that her actions could undermine. As two of her biographers write, Brittain’s husband

George objected even more strongly to Vera’s ‘Ban the Bomb’ activities than he had to her outspoken pacifism. At sixty-four he had set his sights on a peerage, and Vera tried to avoid any publicity which might compromise either his or Shirley’s political prospects.²⁹

Vera Brittain died in London in 1970. George Catlin died nine years later. Their daughter, Shirley Williams, had become a leading figure in the Labour Party. She left in 1981, however, as one of the “gang of four” who founded the Social Democratic Party. They were motivated by opposition to the leftward orientation of Labour under Michael Foot, and, particularly, to the party’s adoption of a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament—the very policy that Williams’ mother had long favored. Williams was the first of the gang of four to win election to parliament under the SDP banner, but she lost her seat in the 1983 general election. Thereafter, she maintained an active political career as a member of the Liberal Democrats, formed from a merger between the Liberal Party and the SDP, and as a professor at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. Several of her new Harvard colleagues, authors of a 1983 book with the complacent title, *Living with Nuclear Weapons*, shared Williams’ skeptical approach to nuclear disarmament.³⁰

John Huston’s views on war, although not explicitly pacifist, were probably closer to Vera Brittain’s than to her daughter Shirley’s. As we saw in Chapter Six, Huston’s film *The Battle of San Pietro* did not receive a positive response from military authorities. They found his portrayal of the horrors of war so authentic as to make soldiers and civilians alike question its merits. General George S. Marshall, the army chief of staff, salvaged the project with the argument that the troops could find a realistic depiction of combat valuable for their training. Captain Huston was not so lucky with his next project for the Army: a documentary on the plight of soldiers suffering psychological problems stemming from their experience in the war. With the full cooperation of the staff and patients, Huston spent three months filming at Mason General Hospital on Long Island, New York, while working on the script in the evenings. He accumulated some 70 hours of footage. Mark Harris suggests a personal, even autobiographical motive for the project. Huston wrote of the veterans as “casualties of the spirit... born and bred in peace, educated to hate war, they were overnight plunged into sudden and terrible situations.” The description was not far removed from the one he offered of himself as “someone raised in conventional America—taught to abhor violence and believe that killing was a mortal sin,” who, after what he had seen in Italy, felt he was “living in a dead man’s world.”³¹

The film, which became known as *Let There Be Light*, is a convincing portrayal of the psychological impact of war. Less convincing are the scenes of “quick fixes”

of problems such as inability to speak without stuttering, memory loss, or psychosomatic physical ailments cured by hypnosis or injections of sodium-amytal. Less convincing still—especially based on what we know of the making of *San Pietro*—is the director’s claim in the opening credits that none of the scenes was staged. At a minimum, the baseball game on the hospital grounds that closes Huston’s film “was likely arranged for his benefit,” as it shows all of the patients having fully recovered from their physical and mental trauma. Huston felt good about his accomplishment. “He knew that he had done his job without either sweeping the plight of the mentally ill under the rug or exploiting it for shock value. And in doing so, he had finally started to regain his own bearings.”³² Yet despite the film’s happy ending, “the army was disturbed,” writes one biographer, by Huston’s “often shocking penetration into the treatment of mental disorders—it was too unsettling, it opened a whole Pandora’s box of the evils of war and the effects on not only the vanquished but also the victors.” This time the authorities succeeded where they had failed with *San Pietro*: “As far as the Army was concerned, John Huston had made a Top Secret film.”³³ Originally completed in 1946, the film was “forbidden civilian circulation by the War Department”—a “disgraceful decision,” according to James Agee, writing in *The Nation*, the same reviewer whose enthusiastic and credulous praise for *San Pietro* we read in the opening of Chapter Six.³⁴ *Let There Be Light* was kept from the public until 1981, but is now readily available online.

The Army’s formal objection to releasing the film was concern for the privacy of the patients depicted, even though Huston had been allowed to publish stills from the film when he wrote about the psychiatric toll of war for *Life* and *Harper’s Bazaar* magazines. His efforts to enlist Agee and other critics who had seen his copy of the film failed to sway the Army to change its decision. Harris argues that “the experience left Huston with a profound feeling of skepticism and dejection about his years in the army.”

In the Second World War “I had as high hopes as anybody,” he said. “It looked to me as if we were on our way to some kind of understanding of life.” What he came to feel instead was that he had colluded in a lie. The army “wanted to maintain the ‘warrior’ myth,” he wrote,

which said that our American soldiers went to war and came back all the stronger for the experience, standing tall and proud... Only a few weaklings fell by the wayside. Everyone was a hero, and had medals and ribbons to prove it.³⁵

Despite this setback, Huston went on to pursue a successful career as director, actor, and screenwriter, completing some 37 feature films. Yet he always retained an ambivalent attitude toward the United States, especially after the imprisonment of the Hollywood Ten in 1950 during the anti-communist hysteria promoted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. In 1964, he renounced his US citizenship to become a citizen of the Republic of Ireland—less as a political statement probably than out of a desire to pay lower taxes.³⁶ Huston later returned to the United States and continued his activities up until his death in 1987 on Rhode Island, at the age of 81. Regarding his suppressed film, as Harris describes,

he never stopped petitioning the government to allow the release of *Let There Be Light*. The Pentagon rejected the formal request he submitted in 1952, reiterating that the documentary was a violation of the privacy of its subjects, and rebuffed him again in 1971. Finally, after intervention from Vice President Walter Mondale, the army agreed not to stand in the way of an unauthorized showing of an old print of the movie in 1980. It opened the following year in New York City and is now preserved, along with Huston's other wartime film work, in the National Archives and at the Library of Congress.³⁷

Aside from his artistic legacy overall, the films Huston produced for the Army constitute a distinct contribution to the anti-war canon.

★ ★ ★

The *comune* of Alba is a small city in the province of Cuneo, set in the area of Piedmont known as the Langhe, famous for white truffles, cheeses, and wines produced there. Piedmont, as we have seen, is itself famous for producing the partisan resistance movement that helped liberate northern Italy even before the arrival of the Allied armies. Although a frequent target of Allied bombing, Alba finds no mention in the three-volume official US history of the air campaign or any standard work on Allied military operations in Italy, including those devoted specifically to the air war. Giovanni Lafirenze missed it in compiling his extensive list of Italian towns bombed during the war.³⁸ Yet the case of Alba is worth examining as a way to conclude a study that seeks to explore the impact of bombing on Italian civilians and the difference in perspective of those ordering the air raids, those dropping the bombs, and those on the receiving end of aerial destruction. The better known, even infamous, example of the bombing of the abbey at Monte Cassino and the nearby town provides a second case.

We know of Alba during the war thanks to a memoir published in 1946 by its bishop, Luigi M. Grassi, called *The Torture of Alba*.³⁹ Better known are the writings of Alba's native son Beppe Fenoglio. They include his short story, first published in 1952, "The 23 Days of the City of Alba," describing the events in which he participated, when "two thousand Italian partisans took the city of Alba on 10 October 1944, and two hundred lost it to the Fascists on 2 November." Grassi claims that Alba "had to submit to only very few non-terroristic bombings," but that seems mainly because he was preoccupied with the more direct atrocities carried out by the Nazis and their fascist allies within the city and region. Grassi often served as intermediary between the partisans and the Germans, so he was privy to their most heinous crimes—hostage-taking of local residents, torture and executions of suspected partisans, roundups and transport to Germany for forced labor, and so forth. The harm caused by the Allied bombing made less of an impression on him.⁴⁰

By contrast, Oscar Pressenda, a student during 1944–45, kept detailed diary accounts of every air raid on the city. They appeared in book form in 2014, put

out by a small publishing house in Boves, a *comune* 6 km south of Cuneo, with a preface by Ettore Paganelli, a member of the Christian Democratic Party and former mayor of Alba in the 1960s.⁴¹ Owing to Pressenda's documentation, we have the opportunity to compare his first-person account from the perspective on the ground with three others of the same event: Grassi's brief mention in his memoir, an article in the local Italian fascist press, and the report of the air crew that dropped the bombs. As with the case of Cassino, the comparison yields an almost *Rashomon*-like effect.

Pressenda's account comes in two parts.

17 July [1944], Monday

10 am: the alarm sounds: the citizens don't pay any attention; it has sounded so often! And nothing had ever happened. The streets continued to fill and empty of people: it's Monday; the open shops don't indicate anything abnormal. About 25 minutes have passed since the sound of the siren when a heavy rumbling of motors is heard: everyone in the squares and the streets looks out to count them: there are 11. They sparkle like silver under a blazing sun. The sky is clear and serene, marked only by a...

At that point, the diary entry is interrupted. Pressenda returns to it later to document in more detail what happened, including information he learned later:

The start of the air offensive directly against Alba. The bridge over the Tanaro attacked, a hit toward 10:25 am. Immense, indescribable panic. The population evacuates the city in a grand mass in the afternoon, fearing a new attack. The ferment over the first military offensive against Alba is general and lasts for many days. Around 50 bombs are dropped, 16 of which are 250 or 500 kg. Number of victims: 7

Number of planes surveilling or attacking: 11 Mitchell medium bombers

Approximate tonnage of explosives dropped: around 8000 kg.⁴²

Pressenda's account reinforces Bishop Grassi's point that the Allied bombing of Alba was not intended to terrorize the population, as its target was the bridge over the Tanaro. Grassi does not mention the civilian casualties recorded in Pressenda's diary. He does, however, report that the partisans subsequently stepped up their own sabotage activities, with a particular focus on bridges and lines of communication. In mid-August 1944 they derailed an empty train and sent it crashing into a bridge pylon to hinder any attempts at repair; they demolished three out of four bridges leading out of Alba, severing connections with Bra, Turin, and Cuneo. "Little by little the partisans blew up all the other bridges that connected to the east with Asti, Alessandria, etc., and to the southwest with Liguria, increasingly restricting the circle of communications."⁴³ We know from Chapter Four that the partisans sabotaged bridges not only to hinder German mobility, but also to preempt the Allied air raids in support of Operation Dragoon, the landing in southern France, and thereby to spare the civilian harm that resulted from those inaccurate attacks on bridges.

Thus, Grassi's account unintentionally elides the connection between the Alba bombing and the partisans' subsequent actions, spurred by concern for civilian casualties.

The coverage in *Piemonte repubblicano*, the regional newspaper, by contrast, was deliberately misleading. The fascist press always faced a dilemma: To report on the Allied attacks was implicitly to acknowledge how poorly the regime was defending the population; but to ignore the attacks was to miss an opportunity to propagandize against the Allies as enemies of humanity. Journalists typically opted for the latter approach and—regardless of the actual situation—would stress the absence of any legitimate military reason for the attack. In this case the paper covered the story with the title, “The ‘liberators’ have bombed Alba!” The reporter explains, “as is well known, the city is totally devoid of any and all military objectives.” Thus, “the bombs of the Anglo-American assassins of the air hit numerous civilian dwellings.”⁴⁴ He fails to mention the Allies' military objective of targeting bridges to limit German mobility.

The summary report from the unit that carried out the bombing—the 319th Bombardment Group of the US 12th Air Force, based in Allied-controlled Sardinia—reads as follows:

Twenty-four ships took off in the morning and 18 in the afternoon, hitting the Alba bridge and the Casale Monferrato bridge, getting good concentrations and direct hits on both. Both bridges, formerly serviceable, now are impassable. A squadron officers' party at the group officers' beach club was unusually replete with girls, including Italians, nurses, Red Cross girls and three entertainers from a USO show. The featured beverage was christened “The Last Mission.”⁴⁵

The Last Mission is a reference to the theme we recognize from Chapter Five's discussion of the novel, *Catch-22*, where air crews are preoccupied with their own mortality to the extent of putting out of their minds the fate of the people they are bombing, as they think only of when they can return home to safety.

In contrast to Alba, which, with some exaggeration, Bishop Grassi claimed the Second World War “left in peace until July 1944,” Cassino became the focus of Allied bombardment starting on 10 September 1943, “when the city was in a festive euphoria for the announcement of the armistice two days earlier: it was believed that now the war was over on our territory.” That first attack killed 102 residents and three German soldiers.⁴⁶ The Allies bombed Cassino multiple times *every month* from then until its total destruction in March 1944, and even several more times after that.⁴⁷ The abbey had already been bombed to rubble on 15 February 1944, as bombers from the strategic and tactical air forces dropped 351 tons of bombs on the complex.⁴⁸

Captain Daniel J. Petruzzi was serving in the Fifth Army military government, stationed with the 36th Texas Division near Cassino in February 1944. On the 9th, he wrote in his diary, inaccurately, as it turned out, that “airplanes bombed Mt. Cassino today reportedly. Large flights went over all morning.”

The actual attack did not take place until the 15th. He added: “Had a wonderful meal tonight: gnocchi, potatoes, meatballs, etc. We are now within seventy-five yards of the Monastery on Monte Cassino, but the city is unresolved.”⁴⁹ Petruzzi later used his diary to prepare a memoir, initially for his children, but eventually published. In it, he records his reaction when the monastery was destroyed.

So there I stood, sports fans—your doting father who hates to kill a bug—lustily cheering the annihilation of a monastery as if it was Friday-night football. And as you fellows know I wasn’t even a big football fan then, let alone a Texan. Pennsylvanian Petruzzi—dedicated lover of art, more fervent lover of Italy, but somewhat lukewarm lover of Catholicism—stood along with everybody else, from GIs to Generals in mud under the burned and broken trees and applauded scores of bombers flying overhead toward Monte Cassino.⁵⁰

The years seem to have added some irony to his account, if not much reflection on the consequences of the bombing.

Helena Janeczek, in *Le rondini di Montecassino* (The Swallows of Monte Cassino), her unusual mix of novel and history, imagines how the Allied soldiers must have felt, constantly vulnerable to German surveillance. Perhaps they were wondering why the big deal about protecting the abbey, given the reckless destruction of so many other Italian cities and religious monuments.

The men, the boys, felt crushed by the eye of the abbey, exposed in every action and movement, and there was nothing to be done to subdue that impending and immaculate threat? And then what was all that hypocrisy, as if someone had protested more than once when the British, then the Americans, and finally the Germans had bombarded Naples, several centuries older than Rome, reducing to rubble a part of the Gothic basilica of Santa Chiara and many secular art treasures, destroying ten thousand palaces and almost as many human lives? Even Rome had been bombed, even the windows of the dome of St. Peter’s in the Vatican, Michelangelo’s masterpiece, had been shattered thanks to the explosive load of a single airplane. What did the abbey of San Benedetto have that was more holy than San Lorenzo and Santa Chiara? What made those dozen monks and an unknown number of refugees more valuable?⁵¹

Rick Atkinson offers a complementary account of the soldiers’ perspective, although it is unclear how representative it might be: “Italy had annealed those whom it had not destroyed. The fiery crucibles from Sicily to Cassino left them hard and even hateful.” For the air crews, “every payload dumped by a B-17 became a personal token of malice.” “We get quite a kick out of the devastation wrought by our Fortresses,” wrote one member. “War is like that: you actually enjoy the knowledge that you are killing countless numbers of your enemies.”⁵²

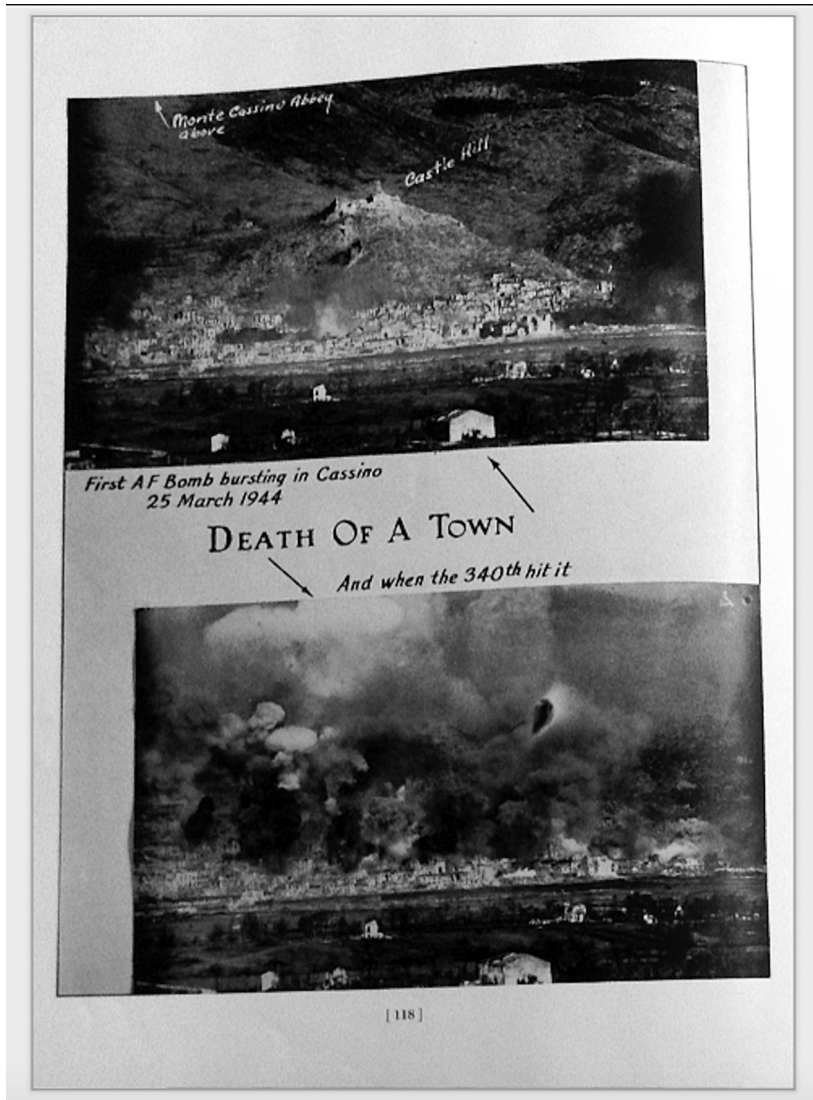


Figure 7.3 From Everett B. Thomas, *'Round the World with the 488th*, Sidney Schneider Papers, Cornell University Library.

Compared to Janeczek's invented soldiers' perspectives on Monte Cassino, actual accounts of the bombing of Cassino town tend to be matter of fact. On 15 March 1944, the 488th bombardment squadron of the 340th bombardment group, Joseph Heller's unit, flew 12 sorties against Cassino, and, according to the official squadron history, dropped 48 1,000 lb. bombs "in [the] northeast quarter of target area...with hits on both roads as well as in the center of town."⁵³ An informal history published in 1946 for the veterans of the 488th described the same event in a more jocular tone:

On the 15th of March, the Allies must have gotten mad at the Germans who in spite of bombings and shell fire were still entrenched in the Cassino Abbey and the town below and making life tough sledging for our slogging infantry. We were told to level the damned town and four other medium groups and eleven heavy outfits were sent along to help us.⁵⁴

A report from the correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, visiting the area two months later, provides a more compelling description of the devastation of Cassino and the monastery:

High above the town the Monastery stood like jagged spikes of rock on the hill-top. It was no more like any building than is the natural rugged peak of a mountain. Yesterday it had been like the sullen smoking crater of some volcano, and for most of the day one could watch smoke both ascending and descending round its shattered precincts.

He got a closer look at Cassino town:

One writes about the “centre of the town.” To-day it is but a guess which or what was the centre of the town... There is a stinking quagmire, with disabled tanks half-buried in its mud; craters coloured a dirty yellowish green with the slime of stagnant water; blasted trees, the gaunt remains of a stone wall or two, a medley of twisted metal—all the mess and disarray of horror that comes in the chaos of ceaseless shelling and air bombardment. That, we were told, was the centre of the town; the piazza had just passed into unquiet oblivion.

A convent “stood like a crazy house of cards about to collapse. In one of its walls was embedded a tank, a reminder of the days when New Zealanders had fought along this way.”⁵⁵

As Chapter Three described, destroying Cassino and Monte Cassino did not expel the Germans, but rather allowed them to dig in. As late as 22 March there was still “very bitter fighting,” reports an official British history,

but its profits were immaterial. The battle was over, and the end was deadlock. Though the Germans had been driven from all Cassino but its western fringe, their hold on that was strong; and by their possession of the Monastery and its satellite peaks they still dominated the ruined town.⁵⁶

The official US Air Force history is unequivocal in its assessment of the destruction of the abbey and of the town:

the tragedy in the case of Monte Cassino is made more bitter by its futility as a military act. The same was true at the town of Cassino which was literally razed by U.S. bombers on 15 March in an effort to crack the Gustav Line.⁵⁷

Regarding the destruction of Cassino, the authors point out that General Ira C. Eaker, commander of the Allied air forces in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations,

was flatly against a tactic which he thought more likely to impede, by craters and rubble, than to help the advance of armor; when ground forces moved in too slowly to take advantage of the momentary shock the heavy pounding gave German defenders, the operation failed as he had predicted.⁵⁸

As we saw in Chapter Three, it was not mainly a matter of the ground forces' failure to exploit the air attack fast enough: the consequences of the bombing itself had made it impossible for them to move quickly. A further negative consequence of the destruction of the abbey at Monte Cassino for the Allies was the German exploitation of the attack "for propaganda purposes, provoking international outrage over the destruction of a religious and cultural treasure."⁵⁹



Conventional histories rarely address the civilian consequences of the destruction of Cassino and the monastery. Perhaps their authors consider that the total razing of a town and the turning of a mountaintop abbey into something resembling a smoking volcano speak for themselves. That is far from the case. In the introduction we noted in Italian histories of the Allied bombing campaign the phenomenon of "historical localism," and the concern that it prevents a more holistic account of the war. If not for the extensive efforts of the residents of towns such as Alba and Cassino to record the local impact of the Allied attacks and the war in general, however, we would miss not only a great deal of information, but also some important insights. Here we highlight two.

First, the civilian harm from the Cassino campaign differed from the mass strategic bombing raids, firebombing, and atomic attacks on Germany and Japan, whose victims numbered in the tens of thousands per raid. Precisely the extended nature of the campaign constituted the difference. In the Cassino area the numbers of direct casualties were far fewer than in those other cases, although in all about one in ten perished. The agony inflicted on civilians was prolonged as well, and multidimensional in its manifestations. Cassino was bombed regularly in a gradual buildup to its final destruction, rather than "out of the blue," as with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for example. In cities such as Turin, Milan, and Genoa, subjected to repeated bombardment, people would flee to the countryside if possible, hiding in caves or out in the open fields, if they could not find shelter. In the case of Cassino, "the inhabitants sought refuge on the surrounding hills, on the coast, in Monte Maggio, in San Michele, in Portella, in Terelle, in Monte Cassino, in houses in the country." In November 1943 those who remained in the general vicinity became victims of the German *rastrellamenti*, roundups that

ended up depopulating the territory: many civilians were transferred to the northern centers of the province of Frosinone, others were taken to the north-east of Italy, still others, on railway wagons, deported to Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, to work in the airfields or in German industries.⁶⁰

The periodic and selective (not to say precise, because it was not) nature of the multiple bombings before the final onslaught meant that the casualties too were spread out over time. Civilian deaths in Cassino, including the *frazioni* of Caira and Sant'Angelo in

Theodice within the municipality, number just over two thousand, according to a “provisional list” published in 2000.⁶¹ What is striking is that the pattern of deaths, as revealed in the list, shows how people died day by day, family by family, sometimes all at once and sometimes spread out over time. On 3 March 1944, for example, Michele Angelucci died with four of his children, Anna, Antoinetta, Franco, and Raffaele, ranging in age from 6 to 12, as well as his sisters Teresa and Francesca. Between 8 November 1943 and the end of the war the extended Evangelista family lost 29 members.⁶²

The ordeal of the inhabitants of the Cassino area did not end with the defeat of the Germans—as we saw in Chapter Five’s discussion of the plight of other Italians struggling under Allied occupation. “Only after the liberation of Rome, on 4 June [1944],” explains one account,

and after the passage of the Allied troops with the retinue of journalists, special envoys and film operators, did the citizens of Cassino make their first courageous and pitiful visits to the rubble of their city. But not everything was over yet: the numerous rotten corpses, mines and unexploded bombs were waiting for them, the tribulations of hunger, the lack of everything, the malaria that still claimed many, many victims.⁶³

The process of rebuilding extended over decades, and locals attribute much of the credit to Antonio Grazio Ferraro, the Christian Democratic politician known as the “mayor of reconstruction.” He was elected five times to govern the city, along with service as municipal counselor and as president of the provincial administration.⁶⁴

A second insight of the “historical localism” of Cassino relates to military casualties. The journal *Studi Cassinati* published a list not only of the civilians who perished in the bombing but also the residents of Cassino who died in the war as soldiers and sailors. What stands out is that the vast majority of them (82%) died outside Italy: in eastern and southern Africa, Albania, Algeria, Australia, Croatia, Egypt, India, Poland, Russia, Tunisia, and at sea in the Atlantic and Mediterranean oceans. We recall from Chapter Six the case of Giuseppe Troiano who, as a child, survived the Allied destruction of his hometown of San Pietro Infine, 14 km southeast of Cassino, but lost an eye during the battle. As an adult Troiano would visit local schools to convey to the children the horrors of war and to show excerpts from Huston’s film. He was struck by the students’ surprise to see Huston’s depiction of soldiers dying in battle. They had been under the impression that only civilians died in war. Perhaps it should not be so surprising, though, if the children had learned about the war from relatives who lived through it. Their grandparents saw mainly civilians die; they never saw the Allied soldiers who were killing them from above. Nor did they see the distant battlefields or countries where their soldier-sons and brothers fell in combat.

One of the abiding legacies of Mussolini’s wars, including World War II, has been the reluctance of Italians to send troops to fight wars abroad. We mentioned already in Chapter Six the noteworthy subtitle of a book about the deployment of Italian missions outside the country starting in the 1990s: “just don’t call it war.”⁶⁵ Italian soldiers have joined military operations abroad, usually as part of a coalition of countries, but the missions have usually been defined in terms of “peacekeeping.” One intriguing study found that Italian military culture, compared to that of other armies engaged in the same peacekeeping missions, is quite distinct. Even in


missions pursued under the same United Nations mandate in the same countries, the deployment of French forces, for example, would emphasize “force protection,” as troops patrolled with weapons at the ready and in armored vehicles. The Italians, by contrast, interpreted their mission as one of providing humanitarian aid through direct contact with the population.⁶⁶

In might not be too much of a stretch to argue that the memory of the humanitarian disaster that befell Italy in the wake of the Allied liberation has played some role in the development of postwar military culture. In any case, following Italy’s participation the multinational “humanitarian” intervention that helped destroy Libya in 2011, whatever enthusiasm Italians expressed for peacekeeping in the early years following the Cold War subsequently diminished.⁶⁷ That sentiment has carried over even to what many would consider just wars. In February 2022, for example, Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine led to an outpouring of support for civilian victims and, in some quarters, material support for the defense of Ukrainian territory. Three weeks into the war, however, Italian airport workers at Pisa refused to load a plane designated for delivery of humanitarian aid to Ukraine when they discovered the crates actually contained weapons. Their union issued a statement strongly denouncing “this real fraud, which cynically uses the ‘humanitarian’ cover to continue to fuel the war in Ukraine.”⁶⁸


The memory of the Second World War, and especially of the tens of thousands of civilians killed by the Allied bombing campaign, continues to shape Italian attitudes toward war. Many of the local historical materials that informed this study, the testimonies of individuals, the collection of basic facts, were motivated, as Claudia Baldoli quoted the goal of one community’s website, “to say never again to wars.”⁶⁹ Cassino’s Centro Documentazione e Studi Cassinati, founded in 2001, promotes the study of any aspect of the region’s history and culture, including archaeology, but it is also sponsors scholarship and collection of data on the war and the bombing. One of most extensive online collections of material concerning the war around Cassino was established the year before as a voluntary activity by two Italians from elsewhere in the country.⁷⁰

Some towns have drawn specifically on memories of the war and Resistance to inform current views. We saw in the last chapter how San Pietro Infine has preserved its town as a ruin and has promoted John Huston’s film about its destruction to convey an ongoing opposition to war. Antonio Ferrara, the longtime mayor of Cassino, forged sister-city or “twinning” (*gemellaggio*) relationships with more than a dozen cities worldwide—an effort he understood as one of his most important contributions to overcoming the legacy of the war that destroyed his hometown.⁷¹ In October 2019, activists from *Donne in nera contro la guerra* (Women in Black) in Alba specifically referenced the 75th anniversary of “Twenty-three days of the City of Alba,” when the partisans liberated it from the Germans and fascists, to promote an upcoming demonstration. They denounced a range of policies related to Italy’s sale of arms to Turkey and membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and Turkey’s intervention in Syria and suppression of the Kurds.⁷² Two months later, residents of Turin confronted a vivid reminder of the war and the Allied air raids, when the discovery of an unexploded British bomb prompted the evacuation of almost ten thousand people from the historic center and restrictions on the movements of another 50,000 residents. The previous year a smaller piece of

unexploded ordnance, left over from one of the many Allied air attacks aimed at Torino Porta Nuova train station, had been found in the same area. Via Nizza was blocked off while bomb squads deactivated it. A headline after the second incident captured an attitude familiar from the war: “Another present from the ‘liberators’ diffused.”⁷³ Such events help sustain interest among the residents in a range of websites, museum exhibits, and regular press coverage of the legacy of the Allied attacks on Turin, “the most bombed city of all of Italy!” as one headline exclaimed.⁷⁴



NO
ALLA GUERRA
E AI SUOI MASSACRI



Nella ricorrenza dei “23 giorni della Città di Alba”

esprimiamo tutta la nostra solidarietà alle donne kurde
per la loro coraggiosa resistenza
per il loro impegno nella creazione di una società democratica e paritaria

manifestiamo tutto il nostro sgomento
per la guerra scatenata dalla Turchia contro il popolo kurdo,
per le centinaia di morti, per le migliaia di profughi,
per la sofferenza delle donne che - come sempre nelle guerre di oggi - pagano il prezzo più alto.

dichiariamo la nostra vergogna
per le corresponsabilità del nostro Paese in questa guerra:
- Italia e Turchia sono “alleanze”: entrambe membri attivi e importanti della NATO
- l'Italia gestisce la missione NATO di “difesa” missilistica “Active Fence” sul confine sud orientale della Turchia, minacciando lo spazio aereo siriano
- negli ultimi quattro anni l'Italia ha rifornito di armi la Turchia per 463 milioni di euro.

**Con questo sgomento e questa indignazione
ci rivolgiamo a coloro che ci rappresentano nelle istituzioni democratiche
dal Comune al Parlamento:**

- vogliamo che l'Italia smetta immediatamente di rifornire di armi la Turchia e ritiri subito il sistema missilistico “Active Fence”;
- vogliamo che l'Italia esca dalla NATO, che è diventata un'alleanza di paesi aggressivi e prepotenti
- vogliamo che l'Italia sostenga un embargo europeo sulla vendita di armi verso la Turchia
- vogliamo che l'Italia si adoperi in tutte le sedi internazionali per il ritiro dell'esercito turco dalla Siria del Nord.

Manifestiamo - in silenzio - sabato 26 ottobre - dalle 18 alle 19 - in via Maestra
Donne in nero contro la guerra - gruppo di Alba - dinalba13@gmail.com

Figure 7.4 Poster advertising a demonstration on 26 October 2019 to commemorate the “23 days of Alba” and criticize the military policies of Italy, Turkey, and NATO.

Author's photo.

Some research projects combine the collection of facts with promotion of an anti-war message. Giovanni Lafirenze, for example, carries out his meticulous historical accounting of Allied air attacks on Italy during the war under the auspices of an organization originally formed in March 1943 as the National Association of Families of the Fallen (*Associazione Nazionale Famiglie Caduti*). Now called the National Association of Civilian Victims of War, the nonprofit, nongovernmental organization tracks wartime violence against civilians throughout the world.⁷⁵

Clearly Italians have drawn lessons from the aerial destruction of more than 60 of their towns and cities in the course of the Second World War and the Allied liberation. As we have seen, at the time many Italians agreed that Mussolini's decision to drag Italy into the war on Hitler's side was ultimately what led to the Allied bombing. Yet few accepted the premise, articulated most strongly by Winston Churchill, that Italians themselves were to blame for bringing Mussolini to power and that they should be punished until he is removed—and even after that.

★ ★ ★

The idea that civilian subjects of militaristic dictators bear the responsibility and should endure the consequences for their country's aggressive actions is still widely held by the heirs of Allied strategic bombing campaigns of World War II. At the turn of the millennium, US Air Force officials often appeared congenitally unable to resist the temptation to embrace punitive bombing strategies. Even if they foreswore direct attacks against the population, they considered it important that the military effects of bombing make civilians' lives difficult. The views of Major General (ret.) Charles Dunlap, former deputy advocate general of the US Air Force, are not uncommon: "Experience shows that the erosion of the 'will' of an adversary through the indirect effects of aerial bombardment on civilians is a key element of victory in modern war." Echoing George Orwell's critique of Vera Brittain, quoted in Chapter Four, Dunlap claimed that "the life of the civilian—'innocent' or not—is not intrinsically more worthy than that of the combatant."⁷⁶

Despite the proliferation of laws governing warfare in the wake of the devastation of World War II, countries' compliance with norms to protect civilians has been uneven at best.⁷⁷ The 21st century has witnessed numerous instances of warfare where destruction of civilians seemed deliberate—the intervention led by Saudi Arabia against the Houthis in Yemen, the destruction of Aleppo by Russian forces in Syria's civil war, or the US punitive siege and assault on Fallujah in Iraq, to name a few egregious cases.⁷⁸ Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 represents a particularly brutal and lawless example, yet also a predictable one: In the previous quarter century or more, post-Soviet Russia had been waging "warfare by war crime" in Chechnya, intentionally destroying civilian dwellings, deliberately attacking hospitals, establishing and then bombarding "humanitarian corridors" of fleeing civilians, and engaging in kidnapping, torture, and extrajudicial killing.⁷⁹

Yet these are not the wars most comparable to the "bombing among friends" phenomenon discussed here. A closer parallel would be wars waged against authoritarian regimes accused of committing atrocities against their own citizens, where foreign military forces come to the rescue. Consider the Kosovo War, widely

judged an exemplar of such a “humanitarian intervention.” When the North Atlantic Treaty Organization launched its first war ever in March 1999 against Serbia over that country’s treatment of ethnic Albanians in the province of Kosovo, its strategy was to bomb Serbian cities to induce its leader Slobodan Milošević to withdraw his forces. The campaign would be “zero-casualty” for the NATO side. Not so for Serbia (or Kosovo). In the negotiations that preceded the war, US Air Force Lieutenant General Michael Short issued an ultimatum to the Serbian team. According to what he later claimed in an interview, he told his counterparts

you can’t imagine what it’s going to be like. The speed and the violence and the lethality and the destruction that is going to occur is beyond anything that you can imagine. If, indeed, you’re not going to accept my terms, we need to break this meeting right now. I suggest you go outside, get in your car and ride around the city of Belgrade. Remember it the way it is today. If you force me to go to war against you, Belgrade will never look that way again—never in your lifetime, or your children’s lifetime. Belgrade and your country will be destroyed if you force me to go to war.⁸⁰

This was no bluff. General Short preferred bombing Belgrade to directly attacking the Serbian Third Army in Kosovo, and his staff had identified several hundred targets, including bridges, the electrical grid, and a television and radio station. When General Wesley Clark, the supreme Allied commander, asked what Short would recommend if Milošević responded to NATO’s war by accelerating “ethnic cleansing” of Kosovar Albanians (as he did), he replied, “I’m going to go after the leadership in Belgrade.” Short later recalled “General Clark nodding, and there was general acceptance that that was the right answer.”⁸¹

Later, in the wake of the ostensibly accidental targeting of the Chinese embassy, when Short was obliged to explain to the press his rationale for bombing Belgrade, he said, directing his comments to “the influential citizens of Belgrade,”

if you wake up in the morning and you have no power to your house and no gas to your stove and the bridge you take to work is down and will be lying in the Danube for the next 20 years, I think you begin to ask, “Hey, Sloba, what’s this all about? How much more of this do we have to withstand?” And at some point, you make the transition from applauding Serb machismo against the world to thinking what your country is going to look like if this continues.⁸²

Short seemed unaware that Belgrade had been the site of months of extensive mass protests against the Milošević dictatorship, ignored at the time by a US leadership that valued “Sloba” as a negotiating partner. NATO bombing raids had hit some of the most anti-Milošević areas of Serbia, such as Nis and Novi Sad, depriving them of electricity and killing many civilians. This “bombing among friends” in Serbia was reminiscent of Churchill’s decision to attack Italian cities such as Turin, Genoa, and Milan, whose workers were among the staunchest opponents of Mussolini’s fascist regime.

A final consideration links to our discussion in the chapter on *Humanity*. There we considered what it takes to induce political and military leaders, the soldiers who follow their orders, and the citizens who go along, to kill enemy civilians, or even—as in the case of Italy after September 1943—civilians who are now ostensibly friends. The United States promoted the 2003 war in Iraq in part on humanitarian grounds, to rid the country of Saddam Hussein, a dangerous dictator who was supposedly pursuing “weapons of mass destruction.” Yet many soldiers on the ground lacked basic respect for or sense of shared humanity with the Iraqi civilians they confronted. An Army survey conducted in 2006 found that

only 38 percent of marines and 47 percent of soldiers responded affirmatively to the question, [whether] “All non-combatants should be treated with dignity and respect.” Even more disturbing, only 40 percent of marines and 55 percent of soldiers said they would report a fellow unit member for “injuring or killing an innocent non-combatant.”⁸³

Those findings bring to mind the crimes of Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and the so-called black sites throughout the world where the United States prosecuted its Global War on Terror.⁸⁴ They also recall several events reported in Chapter Five: the British officer beating an Italian civilian under interrogation with a chair and then ordering his execution; General Patton’s cover-up of his soldiers’ crimes against surrendering Italian soldiers; and Aarfy’s query in *Catch-22* after murdering an Italian prostitute: “I hardly think they’re going to make too much of a fuss over one poor Italian servant girl when so many thousands of lives are being lost every day. Do you?”

More disturbing still is recent research that suggests, as Chapter Five speculated, that racist attitudes contribute to willingness to bomb civilians. When US leaders blame foreign civilians for the sins of their governments, and then impose economic sanctions or carry out bombing attacks, Americans with racist views are the ones most susceptible to that message. Scholars have examined this issue in regard to US popular attitudes toward Iran, as the United States put pressure on the country, even to the point of assassinating its nuclear scientists and military leaders, and supported Iran’s regional adversaries, Israel and Saudi Arabia. “Surveys reveal a strong pull of retribution” as motive for supporting US military action “and a tendency for individuals to rationalize the killing of others by claiming that it was their fault...What was surprising was the number of Americans who suggested that Iranian civilians were somehow culpable” for the actions of their autocratic government “or were less than human.”⁸⁵ Further research has suggested that white Americans who harbor racial resentment against other groups at home are most likely to hold such views. They tend to support bombing or invading countries that are perceived as racial “others.”⁸⁶

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The Allied bombing campaign against Italy during World War II destroyed scores of cities and killed or maimed tens of thousands of civilians. Its memory shaped

the views of generations of Italians. In the postwar years, others have suffered comparable harm, from Korea and Vietnam to Afghanistan, Chechnya, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen, to provide only a partial list. We hope never again to see the level of destruction inflicted on a global scale during the years of “total war” from 1940 to 1945. Still, racist and dehumanizing views, and the impulse to punish civilians for their governments’ transgressions, or for supporting opposition forces, remain features of international conflict today, and merit continuing concern and vigilance.

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