



Copy of Speech by
Marshal of the Royal Air Force
Sir Arthur T. Harris, Bart
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Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Arthur T. Harris, Baronet, Knight Grand Cross, The Most Honourable Award of the Bath and Office of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Airforce Cross, Doctor of Laws, Commander in Chief, Bomber Command from 1942 to 1945.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen, not forgetting our two "Milord's".

I want to thank you all for the marvellous reception you have given me tonight and if I went much further on that theme, I do not think I would be able to control my feelings. All I can say is I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Now I go from there to tell you that, as you probably know, I am an old ga-ga and garrulous.

I have a lot to say which I think you ought to hear unless you've heard it before. I realize that a lot of you came a long way and have a long way to go, therefore if any of you have to get up and leave, I can assure you that I won't be either put-off or put-out. So please take that as to what I really mean. I won't be a bit worried if you have to go because I know why, for one reason or another.

You know the work our crews did in Bomber Command and whenever I speak of the Bomber Strategic Offensive, I couple with it 50-50 our gallant American friends of the Eighth United States Airforce. Whenever I think of what they achieved, I realize that **you have never really been given adequate recognition of what you all did**. As a matter of fact, you have on many occasions been the object of the type of author or the type of journalist who knows perfectly well that where he could not find a market for the ordinary tripe he is capable of, he could always sell a good sneer or a good smear. But I get my facts straight from the horse's mouth. I do not go digging around the other end of the animal like those people I referred to. And we have some very fine horses running for us, ranging from the most senior American Commanders and, oddly enough, to the most senior German Commanders in the last war.

You will, no doubt, most of you heard of Albert Speer who was not a dyed in the wool Nazi – anyhow, to start with he was a brilliant architect and he got tied up with Hitler because Hitler liked drawing pictures, with his assistance, of the magnificent buildings they were going to erect at the end of the victorious war, in order to usher in the beginning of the 1000-year Reich which, thanks largely due to you fellows, never materialized.

Now Albert Speer, as you know, was in prison for 20 years. As a matter of opinion, I think unjustly, for doing his damndest to defend his own country. When he came out of prison, he wrote two books and he was kind enough to send me copies of both of them and he inscribed them – as one of the inscriptions he has repeated in the letter preface, what he said in those inscriptions and in his own words he has said that of all the war books that he has ever read and he has read a lot of them, **the effect of the strategic bombing of Germany is always under-estimated**.

He goes on to say and these are his own words written in his own hand, as well as repeated in the book, **that the strategic bombing of Germany was the greatest lost battle for Germany of the**

whole of the war, greater than all their losses in all their retreats from Russia and in the surrender of their armies at Stalingrad. He then goes on to develop the reasons why he makes those statements, starting right back in June 1942. There was a meeting amongst the "high-ups" in Germany as to whether or not they would do this, that and the other thing. When it came to the question of whether they would **develop the atom bomb** and don't forget that before the war the Germans **were ahead of everybody** in that particular nefarious pursuit, when it came to the question, luckily for us and the world at large, Hitler dismissed it, he said he would have nothing to do with it because it was all "Jews" science. That was a very lucky decision.

Albert Speer comments in his book, apropos of that decision, at that very date he was glad, because he could not possibly have spared the enormous amount of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour for such an ambitious project as the manufacture of the atomic bomb from the **necessity of using these people to repair the bomb damage to the German armament industry**. That was in June 1942 and of course that damage went crescendo after that.

His next statement that might be of interest to you was that he reckoned, as Minister of Armament, which he had then become, that by the end of 1943, when we were really getting going with about a quarter of the force we asked for and the Americans had really got going with their Mustang Escort Fighters, that we had already **deprived the German armies on the Russian front by bomb damage to industry of 10,000 of their bigger calibre guns and 6000 of their heaviest and medium heavy tanks**. Well that was quite a subscription towards the war – all done by the strategic bombers. But he goes much further than that. He made that remark about the Bomber Strategic Offensive being the **greatest lost battle of all for Germany** and he goes on to explain why. The 8.8 cm dual purpose anti-aircraft mobile gun was capable of competing with the very heavy frontal armament of the Russian tank. No less than **20,000 of those guns had to be taken away from the German armies**, all their fronts, kept away from them and scattered all over Germany because of the unpredictability of where the Strategic Bombers were going to strike next. Speer said that **that reduced the anti-tank ability of the German forces on all fronts by half**.

When you realize that no army of either side ever advanced a yard without their armoured spearhead first busting a way through the defence, you can realize what is meant when the strategic bombers cut their anti-tank defences by half. He goes on to say that the requirement of being prepared to defend every German city and every German vital factory against the possibility of bombing any one of those particular places, **meant the stationing all over Germany of hundreds of thousands of men, who should have been in the forces**.

Field Marshall Erhard Milch, who commanded the German anti-aircraft defences, **said he had 900,000 fit; he stressed the word fit, men in his anti-aircraft command alone**. When he says fit, he means that they were fit to have been up in the front line of the German armies on the various fronts and not clicking their heels around Germany waiting for the strategic bombers and wondering where they were going to strike next. Well, if you know of any individual army on the allied side which, throughout the war, **deprived the German armies of well over a million men and half their anti-tank ability**, I would personally be very obliged for the information.

Now when Erhard Milch said that he had 900,000 men, **you can certainly add that another two or three hundred thousand fit men** who, because they were skilled tradesmen, had to be retained in Germany and not called up for army service because their skills were required to keep the Nazi machine ticking over and the repair of bomb damage. I mean men like electricians, plumbers, railway workers, people who ran the oil manufacturing plants and so on and so forth. So there you get that enormous subtraction from the German strength, both in artillery and manpower, which was **caused by the Strategic Bombers and nobody else**.

Now as I said, you don't seem to have got adequate credit for that, anyhow in this country but you certainly get it from the people who were immediately concerned, such as Eisenhower, "Monty" and the German leaders, as I mentioned, Albert Speer, General Sepp Dietrich, etc. etc. What Eisenhower had to say about you was this: 25 years after the war, the Americans released a lot of

stuff from their top secret archives, amongst them letters exchanged between General Marshall, the head of the American Army and General Eisenhower, and in this one particular letter, Marshall refers to the fact that the joint chiefs of staff in America had decided that our invasion of Europe was going so well that the time had arrived to take away the direct command of the British bombers and the American bombers from Eisenhower and return it to the heads of their respective services, Sir Frank Portal and General Arnold, because those two heads of services had other theatres of war to compete with as well as Europe.

In Eisenhower's reply and I have a copy of his reply, he said, although Marshall expressed his apprehension that that would result in Eisenhower getting less support from Bomber Command than he had been used to, Eisenhower said that he had no such fears and his actual words were that **he had come to regard the British Bomber Command as one of the most effective parts of his entire organization**, always seeking, finding and using new ways for their particular type of aircraft to be of assistance in forwarding the progress of the armies on the ground. That was a pretty good recommendation from that source but we have others.

You know Monty was not by any means given to praising idly but I have heard Monty say on two occasions, both vast public banquets given to him, once in the city and once in Cape town, I have heard him say that he regarded the **British Bombers as having been the greatest of all in the destruction of the German armies as a whole**. Now that was pretty good coming from a soldier not given to praising others lightly.

On the other hand I have seen articles written, in particular by a man described as a very well-known military correspondent, in which he made two remarks. He said all the Bomber Command ever did was to raise better obstacles in front of the progress of our armies than the Germans could have done themselves. That was one remark. The other remark he made was that they took no part whatsoever in the Battle of the Ardennes where the Germans, as you know, nearly broke through the Allied lines. Well, whether you like to believe that or not is a matter for your personal tastes but I would say this, that although that fellow said that we raised these appalling obstacles in front of our own army, I would agree to this extent that our grade one prize boffin, dear old Barnes Wallace, who I am sorry is not able to be here tonight but I hope you will send him your best wishes – if he had come here I would have recommended that after this dinner you should have debagged him for grave dereliction of duty in not designing the one urgent requirement of the army, which I am sure he would have done with half an hour's thought on the back of an old envelope and that was a bomb that made a self-filling crater that yawned deep and wide to embarrass and entrap the enemy but automatically filled it up as soon as it sensed the approaching footfall of an Allied soldier.

Now let's take the statement that you fellows took no part in the Battle of the Ardennes where, as you recall, in this last frantic effort by the Germans to break through our lines, was just held up on the verge of a breakthrough by what? By the Allied General on the spot (this is history as it is made) firing off at them an unheard of or unexpected secret weapon. Thinking that his position was hopeless, the Germans demanded his surrender and he fired off his weapon, which was a rather mild four letter word... and that is history "as she is wrote". But when you come down to brass tacks and find out what really happened – to stop that offensive you will find that Hitler, as soon as the offensive began to be held up, told Albert Speer to get up at the front and tell the General on the spot, Sepp Dietrich, that he was to go on at all costs – at any cost and he was not to stop. Speer relates in great detail, his tremendous difficulties in getting to the front at all.

The Ardennes country is terribly difficult country, almost impossible even for tracked vehicles to cross country. There are only two comparatively poor and precipitous road routes through it and everybody especially the French, saying that the Germans will never come through there. So it was quite likely to offend you and the said that in spite of the fact that this was the third occasion that the Germans had come through since 1870. Well Speer relates the tremendous difficulties in getting up there at all. He says that sometimes he only made good a mile in an hour's struggle and you can bet as Hitler's representative he would have been pushed, pulled and carried, car and all, round, over and above any obstacles that existed. Finally he arrives at the headquarters of the

advanced armoured force on which the whole offence depended. Their job was to break through the join between the American and the British Canadian armies, turn sharp to the right northward, pushing them into the sea again for another Dunkirk and there they were, held up by that rude American General who made that remark which apparently forced those tough Germans who had fought through all that way regardless of shot and shell – to rock back on their heels, turn round, burst into tears and go home and complain to mother about that rude man – that is now history.

When Speer eventually got to Sepp Dietrich's headquarters, he encountered that one German General who dared even mildly answer back Hitler. The reason being that he started his career as Hitler's private chauffeur in the early days of Nazidom and had once, very unfortunately for us and everybody, saved Hitler from being assassinated, so he could mildly answer back and Speer relates how he said to Sepp Dietrich that the Fuhrer's orders are to go on at once at all costs, you are not to stop and the answer he got was not a four-letter word even like the one the American General used but just a statement to the effect – "Go on? How can we go on, we have no ammunition left and **all our supply lines have been cut by air attack**"? Well that of course is a fairly potent reason for not going on with an offensive. And who cut the supply lines? **You fellows cut it and nobody else** and the reason it was you and nobody else was that in the atrocious weather that existed over those critical day and nights, all our bases on the Continent were almost permanently shut down, the American bases in East Anglia to the extent where they couldn't use their ordinary formation escorted daylight tactics but you fellows, your crews, would get off in any muck and mire, even if they could not see.

As one cockney gunner once remarked to me, "you couldn't see y' hand in front y' bloody face!" He said that they'd get off in those conditions provided there was somewhere to get down in the morning and luckily where on base went out, one came in and so on and so forth. At the end of the day you fellows did the job and Speer gives a very informative account of what he called his "nocturnal discussion" with Sepp Dietrich that night. As they sat there listening to the unending roar of heavy engine bombers overhead in the fog and the crash of bombs behind them, Sepp Dietrich remarked to him, "You know, people don't understand that **not even the best troops** (meaning his own troops and they were picked troops), **could stand this mass bombing**. One experience of it and they lose all their fighting spirit". Speer's concluding remarks of that conversation was "what a scene of German impotence, we've no defences anywhere". Well you know what happened after that. Monty attacking in the north with the 21st Army Group and some borrowed Americans, and George Patton, the famous Cavalry Leader with the American armoured force attacking in the south, sent those weeping "boche" back to where they came from and a lot further as well.

Well now, that remark of Sepp Dietrich's was not patent to him by a long way. Shortly after our invasion got established in France, **Rommel remarked to his superiors, "if you can't stop the bombing we cannot win**, and it is no good going on because all we get by going on is to lose another city every night". He said, **"Make peace, or drop the atomic bomb if you have got it"**. But of course I told you why they hadn't got it. He was not the only fellow that made that remark by a long way. As our armies advanced along the north coast of France, they urgently required the channel ports such as Le Havre, Boulogne and Calais, etc. Those ports were manned by 20,000 German soldiers, not only sworn to die but under a master who they knew very well would see that they died if they didn't do as they were supposed to. **They all surrendered – 20,000 troops, with a total loss of 150 casualties to our armies. Thanks entirely to mass bombing**. In the pocket diary of a senior German Commander who surrendered at Boulogne, were written the words, "Can anybody survive this carpet bombing? Sometimes **one is driven to despair when at the mercy of the Royal Air Force** without any protection. It seems that all fighting is in vain and all losses are in vain". Well, there you are, one after another, the German Generals said the same thing.

Now when it comes to our side and the American side, I told you what Eisenhower had thought of us but after the bombing that did so much in the battle of the Ardennes, he sent me a "Thank you" message and I replied thanking him for his message and I said that his message had been passed on to the crews responsible and I finished my signal by saying, "you know by now you can always depend on my lads for anything short of the impossible". Tedder relates how that signal of mine was circulating around Eisenhower's headquarters and scrawled across my signal in Eisenhower's

handwriting were the words "**Goddammit** (you know in the American language that is all one word), **they have already achieved the impossible**".

Now, there is a so-called famous military correspondent saying that Bomber Command did nothing but make an infernal nuisance of themselves where our armies were concerned on the Continent, and the Commanding Chief saying that you fellows achieved the impossible on behalf of the armies. Who would you like to believe? Well, I have got very little more to say except that quite apart from the fact that those facts I have given you do indicate beyond doubt, agreement with Albert Speer's statement that **the Strategic Bombing of Germany was the greatest losses of all their losses in the war**. I would say that you also scored the biggest air victory of the war; because you did what Baume said was the one thing you had to do to defeat an enemy was to drive them on to the defensive and you certainly did that.

Over the last year or two of the war, the Germans did nothing with their air force, which had been the major cause of their easy sweep right across Europe, Poland and every else at the beginning of the war and their easy victories but **they did nothing over the last year or two of the war but make fighters and trained fighter pilots** in a despairing effort, which failed in its object to protect the Fatherland from the Strategic Bombing and that was a fact. The effect of that was firstly, that it put an entire stop to the bombing of this country. It is quite true they started off with these comic rockets and things. Well you know the V2 rocket for instance, the thing that created quite a bit of alarm and despondency. The maximum possible production of these V2 rockets was a thousand a month and **it took 5000 of them to carry as much explosives as on attack by the Strategic American and British bombers**. So there are the comparative values.

Now and I told you I think, that you have won certainly one of the major ground battles. What I told you about Albert Speer certainly one of the major air battles in driving them entirely on the defensive but what you have never been given any credit for – you certainly won the major battle of the European war. Who said so? Speer again. I have read an account by a so-called expert naval correspondent, who said that in all the war, Bomber Command only sank one submarine.

What did Speer say – he was responsible for the production of submarines and everything else. This simple sentence in one of his books – "We would have kept our promised output of submarines for Admiral Doenitz' U-boat war **if the bombers had not destroyed a third of them in the ports**. Well, who was right? The navy wanted to pinch all our Lancasters to go looking for haystacks all over the Atlantic – looking for needles in the haystacks, or we who set the pace, to get the submarines where they came from.

The German Admiral in charge of the training of U-boat crews in the Baltic wrote a letter in which he said, "Without trained U-boat crews you cannot have a U-boat offensive and I cannot train crews if **you cannot keep these damned air-raid mines away from my training ground**". Well, they could not keep them away, although the major expensive effort by the German navy during the war was trying to conquer the 30,000 tons of mines that you fellows laid in waters approaching every port that the Germans used from the Baltic, through the whole of the North Sea coast and down to the Bay of Biscay. You can be quite certain that apart from the other wreckage they caused, those mines certainly accounted for quite a number of other submarines who disappeared (if my German pronunciation is right, I'm not very good at it) "Speroz der sank" – 'disappeared, sank without trace'. Those mines incidentally, coupled with **the bombing, virtually annihilated the German Merchant Marine** on which they depended for the import of vital ores from Scandinavia for their basic industries and the Swedes who were **forced** to participate in that trade, when they realized towards the concluding stages of the war that the German pistol in the back of their neck was no longer a serious threat, they withdrew what was left of their Merchant Marine from the same trade, sooner than put up with additional losses of men and ships.

So that is what you achieved in the naval war but **that was by no means all**. Few people realise that at the beginning of the war the German navy had a high seas fleet consisting of about 17 absolutely super battle wagons ranging all the way from the big fellows, the TIRPEZ (Willy Tait

finished off the TIRPEZ with his merry boys), the BISMARCK, all the way down to the heavy battle cruisers and the pocket battleships, etc. – 16 or 17 of them. What happened to them? Did you ever hear? No, well I'll tell you what happened to them. The Navy sank three of them, the Fleet Air Arm sank 1 – that's 4 (I have to add up on my fingers in my old age), the Norwegian shore defences sank one during the invasion of Norway – that's 5. The Russians navy did so much damage to one that it was out of action for nearly the whole of the war – that's 6, **Bomber Command kept two out of action by repeated damage**, so that during the war that they would never really have been available for anything in the nature of fleet action – that's two more gone – where have we got to – that's 9. **Bomber Command sank 6 and really hardly got a "Thank you"** for it – so there you are – two left – the Prince Eugen and Nuremberg.

In the closing stages of the war, they were lying outside Copenhagen – cold meat to the big bomb that Willy Tait & Co were putting on their machines and I happened to be out of my office for five minutes – occasionally I had to leave my office for five minutes – my Deputy Commander had taken the half day off (one of the six half days he took off during the entire war) either to attend to his own business or have his business attend to him and my naval liaison officer was an absolutely first class fellow and of the most assistance to us with the mining. When I got back to my office, there he was, all in a tremble and he said "I've had to counter-command the attack on the EUGEN and the NUREMBERG." I said, "Why?" He said, "Orders from the Admiralty." Well of course you could not blame the lad, to a naval officer an order from the Admiralty is one above a direct command by the Almighty, so he done it and there he was all of a tremble. It was too late to turn the bombers back again. But those two ships were cold meat and the fact that they escaped enabled them rather **spitefully to expend most of their ammunition on bombarding around Copenhagen**, doing quite a lot of damage and killing quite a lot of Danish friends and would be allies.

When the destruction in the ports became absolutely intolerable, the Germans had a bright idea to prefabricate their submarines inland, send the huge sections down to the ports so they'd only be a few days or weeks being buttoned together rather than months being built from the keel upwards and destroyed in the process by bombers but that didn't work either because the prefabricated sections were too big to go by rail or road. They could only go by canal which was exactly why **the Strategic Bombers, the Americans and the British, kept on busting up the two canals concerned**, the Middle land Canal and the Dortmund Emms, with the result that those prefabricated sections – the deliveries of them to the port – quickly sank from a maximum of 120 sections in one month to a few handfuls and to zero.

Well I hope I have told you enough about your share in the Air War, the Naval War and the Land War and nobody can take that away from you because I say it's all from the horse's mouth. From the leading Germans to the leading Americans and the leading British, even Lord Alanbrook, the head of the army, who was no friend of the Airforce, always making inordinate demands on what we should do for them, he admitted in his private diaries which were published after the war by Sir Arthur Brown, **he referred to the brilliant skill of the bombers and the outstanding assistance they gave to the army during the invasion.**

Well when you consider that our invasion of France consisted of 37 divisions with a large content of green and inexperienced troops and that joint experience in the First War – the soldiers always said that if you want any chance of success in the attack, you must be two-to-one advantage in numbers and material over the enemy – those **37 divisions chased 60 German divisions clean across Europe** from the Atlantic to the Elbe, totally destroyed the German army of half a million men – the 7th Army, captured tens of thousands of prisoners, all their equipment and beat them down to unconditional surrender at Luneburg Heath and that was largely due to two things – the Germans lack of anti-tank defences and **the complete, not air superiority, but absolute air supremacy of our fellows** over on the Continent – thanks to the fact that the bombers had forced the German air force to spread nearly all its efforts on a failed attempt to defend their own country, Thank you for listening to me.