A German catastrophe? German historians and the Allied bombings, 1945-2010
von Benda-Beckmann, B.R.

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Putting the Allies on trial

Historical accounts of the Allied air war in the early Federal Republic, 1945-1970

Introduction

Contrary to the oft-suggested absence of German historiography on the air war, several historical accounts appeared in West Germany in the 1950s and '60s. While it is hard to determine the extent to which these works were read and influenced popular memory of the Second World War, clues can be found by looking at reprints and editions of works and by looking at the reception of these accounts in national newspapers and popular magazines. Another indication is the political call for historical documentation of the air war not only by political pressure groups, but also by the German government. As Robert Moeller and Norbert Frei have pointed out, in the West Germany of the 1950s there existed a broad consensus that German civilians had been among the main suffering parties of the war and could be seen as a community of victims. While this argument has been made mainly with regard to the expulsions, this chapter will explore the extent to which the Allied bombings also became a central issue for official memory politics and public debate in the Federal Republic during the 1950s and '60s.

31 A good example is the serialization of David Irving's accounts of the Allied bombings in German magazines. Before they were published as und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht, different chapters appeared in the Neue Illustrierte in 1961. David Irving, Und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht. Ein Dokumentarbericht (Zürich: 1963).

32 Frei, Vergangenheitspolitik; Moeller, War stories.
The main part of this chapter will deal with an analysis of the historical accounts produced during the 1950’s and ’60’s. The chapter will focus on the Allied bombing war in general as well as on West German accounts of the bombing of Dresden, which came to function –unlike West German cities such as Hamburg and Kassel- as the central historical symbol and lieu de memoire for the air war. The authors of books on the Luftkrieg were almost exclusively laymen historians, specialists in military practice and theory, former members of the German civil defense fire brigade or experts in international law. While professional academic historians largely ignored the subject, it was the work of these “specialists” that formed the basis of a later West German academic historiography of the air war. While the personal and political backgrounds of the authors can be helpful in understanding their position, in this chapter I primarily want to pose the question: what kind of narrative do these accounts tell? These works commonly claimed to tell what had happened, to show what the Bombenkrieg “had really been like”. However, the question at hand here is to what extent these historical accounts share more than this basic starting point. This chapter will examine the extent to which these works together form a coherent historical narrative about the Allied bombings. Were there common patterns of interpretation, and if so, what were their basic characteristics? Did these accounts question the Allied bombings from a moral point of view? To what degree were Allied leaders charged on moral grounds and did the accounts also make moral distinctions between the British and American bombings, on the one hand, and the German air raids, on the other?

33 This is, for example, suggested by Hans Rumpf in his book title: Hans Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg. Deutsche Städte im Feuersturm: ein Dokumentarbericht (Oldenburg: 1961).
In the second place I will look at the interplay between different texts and interpretations of the Allied bombings. For this, it is important to see them in relationship with each other and other historical texts and interpretations. From where did these authors draw their information and arguments? First, I will look at the origins of some of the dominant interpretations in postwar historiography and discuss whether continuities and parallels with pre-war German military writings and Nazi wartime propaganda can be found. Second, I will analyze the reception and interplay between these West German texts and British literature. What elements of these English texts were considered to be valid and useful for West German historians?

Finally, I will discuss the West German historical accounts of the Allied bombing in relationship to the general discussions on the Second World War in the early Federal Republic. Is it possible to find overarching argumentative and narrative structures in these historical accounts and how can these be related to more general debates on German guilt and German suffering? How did these works deal with the tension between Germans as perpetrators and Germans as victims, and in what ways did these accounts reflect shifts and developments during the 1950s and ’60’s on German responsibility for war crimes?

1.1 West German historical culture and the Allied bombings in the early Federal Republic

The German catastrophe and the return to the national master narrative

Different studies of the historiography and official memory politics have pointed out that during the 1950s West German historiography was still marked by a tra-
ditional craft of political historians. In the early Federal Republic the historical institutes were dominated by conservatively oriented historians such as Friedrich Meinecke, Gerhard Ritter, Theodor Schieder and Hans Rothfels. These historians were strongly influenced by a historicist view of history. After 1945 nationalist-oriented historians were confronted with the need to acknowledge the responsibility for Hitler’s Third Reich. While this confrontation provoked some discussions on the validity of German nationalism and led to a more critical view of German history, German historians also defended national German traditions and German identity.34

In their attempt to locate and deconstruct different master- and counter-narratives on German history Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer have argued in Shattered Past that during the 1950s and ’60s a moderate version of the “national master narrative” remained dominant. While before 1945 the national historical narrative had primarily functioned to legitimize the national state, after 1945 conservative historians tried to rescue the national heritage from the association with Hitler, populist nationalism and militarism. In this version of the past, the German national state was still the predominant actor of history. At the same time, Nazism as a phenomenon was to a great degree externalized as something whose roots were to be found largely outside of German national history.35 Historians such as Theodor Schieder and Gerhard Richter while dissociating themselves from the extreme nationalism of the Third Reich, regarded the “Hitler-era” as a cata-

35 Jarausch and Geyer, Shattered past 37-47.
strophic “downfall” of the German nation, the causes of which were to be sought outside of German history as a specific historical phenomenon which could only be explained with universal concepts like the rise of mass politics and modernity, and not by looking at German history.\textsuperscript{36} As far as explanations were sought in Germany and German history, as in \textit{Die deutsche Katastrophe} by historian Friedrich Meinecke, a clear distinction between positive and negative traditions was made. While Meinecke criticized Prussian militaristic traditions, his book at the same time was a passionate plea for the rescuing of the German \textit{Geist} and the “civil culture of the Christian Abendland” in which it was rooted, and for fundamentally distinguishing this \textit{Geist} from the “Nazi Un-culture”.\textsuperscript{37} Nazism and the war were seen as a catastrophe for Germany, rather than as a catastrophe for its victims.

Though the Nazi crimes were acknowledged and condemned in official memory politics as well as in the first historical accounts of the war, the Second World War and the Nazi regime were generally regarded from the perspective of their catastrophic consequences for Germany, leaving very little room for the perspective of the groups which had been persecuted and murdered \textit{en masse} under the Nazi rule. The early West German historical works on Nazism and the Second World War often referred to the Nazi crimes in universalizing and metaphoric ways, such as “the catastrophe”, “the terrible fate” or “the unspeakable crimes”, which reflected a general incapability to approach them as a subject of historical research.\textsuperscript{38}

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36 Berg, \textit{Der Holocaust} 52-59. Also see: Grosse Kracht, \textit{Zankende Zunft} 24-29.
38 Lorenz, “Twee soorten catastrofe”. As Robert Moeller and Norbert Frei have pointed out this \textit{master narrative} corresponded with a general trend in official politics of the past to concentrate on the suffering and hardships the Germans had endured during the war, instead of on that of its victims. Moeller, \textit{War stories}; Frei, \textit{Vergangenheitspolitik}.
In the West German memory politics of the 1950s, this perspective on the recent Nazi past led to two closely related arguments, which dominated public and political debates and also strongly influenced the early historiography of the Federal Republic. First, the conviction that Germans had been misled by Hitler and “the Nazi’s”, and thus had become the primary victims of the war prevailed. Secondly, there was a broad consensus over the idea that the Allies had treated the Germans with great injustice after the war, by regarding them as “collectively guilty” for the crimes that were “committed in their name”.39

This led to a perspective on recent history that emphasized German suffering, first under Nazism as well as under the different atrocities of the war: the Allied bombings, imprisonment and the massive expulsions of Germans from Eastern Europe.40 While, on the one hand, on an abstract and symbolic level German responsibility for the Second World War was acknowledged, on the other, politics of the past were dominated by strategies of externalization of Nazism. This became apparent in the massive public defense against the idea of German collective guilt that dominated the 1950s. In parliamentary debates as well as in the press, German politicians and public intellectuals repeatedly argued against the idea that Germans could be held collectively responsible for the Nazi crimes. As Norbert Frei and Helmut Dubiel have pointed out, this was in essence a defense against a position held by nobody. It wrongly suggested that in the Allied policies of “Denazification” and during the Nuremberg trials such a notion of German collective guilt had been the starting point. This “phantom” discussion, however, led to a general national solidarity around the idea of the Germans as a collective of

39 Dubiel, Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte 70-77.
40 Jarausch and Geyer, Shattered past 7-8.
victims and formed the basis of a political attitude that pursued the amnesty and reintegation of former Nazi’s.\textsuperscript{41}

Moreover, the historical culture of the early Federal Republic was characterized by a strong emphasis on the suffering of Germans. While as a symbolic reference point the Nazi crimes were discussed and became part of the historical discourse in the Federal Republic, the victims of Nazi persecution were largely absent from the German political debates on the past, as well as from historical research. In contrast, it was the expulsion of the Germans from the East that gave rise to a powerful interest group, the \textit{Bund der Vertriebenen}, formed in 1951. The efforts of this group and the German “ministry for Expellees and war damaged” led to a large-scale historical documentation project.

The \textit{Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa} (1954-1961) became a crucial project supporting and underlining the politics of the Ministry of Expellees and the League of Expellees, as well as the more general lobby against the division of Germany and the lost Eastern territories.\textsuperscript{42} The project formed the first West German large-scale historical research project on the recent past and was led by a prominent commission of historians, including Hans Rothfels and Theodor Schieder and promising junior researchers like Martin Broszat and Hans-Ulrich Wehler. This major historical documentation project, which recorded the damage and horror suffered by German civilians as well as the problems they faced in the aftermath of the war, was an important element in the support for

\textsuperscript{41} Dubiel, \textit{Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte} 71; Frei, \textit{Vergangenheitspolitik} 54-69, 397-406.
and representation of the interests of these German victims.

*The “Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden” and the politics of air war history*

While the strong West German emphasis on the expulsions during the 1950s is undisputed, it is less clear to what degree the Allied bombings also became part of West German memory politics. In his 1998 article on Sebald’s essay and the role of the air war in German memory Klaus Naumann has argued that there was a strong discrepancy between the political usability of the expulsions and the Allied bombings. Naumann concluded that especially during the Cold War expulsions and the air war were subject to “symbolic strategies” and were divided between the two German states, each claiming the subject that best suited its postwar victim-identity. While the GDR could use the air war as a starting point for a victim-identity which could relate to anti-American sentiments, the expulsions served this purpose in the West.43

However, Arnold and Thiessen have criticized Naumann’s interpretation by pointing out the strong presence of the bombing in local memory cultures. By pointing out that on a local level the Allied bombings became central points of ref-

43 Klaus Naumann, “Leerstelle Luftkrieg. Einwurf zu einer verqueren Debatte,” *Mittelweg* 36, no. 2 (1998) 12-15. In the political climate of the Cold War the Expulsions could handily serve an anticommunist perspective. Here, Germans appeared as victims of communist aggression in a way that could be easily integrated into the Cold War rhetoric of the 1950s. The expellees symbolized the horrors of the inhuman Soviet regime. The question of “Flight and Expulsion” was directly related to the “German question”, and the claim for eventually regaining the lost German territories in the East and the division of Germany formed a central theme in the political discussions of the 1950s. A broad spectrum of political parties, including the SPD, expected not only an eventual reunification of the Federal Republic and the GDR, but also a return of the Eastern territories such as Silesia and Eastern Prussia. Moreover the problem of integrating the millions of refugees and expellees formed a larger social-political question. The expellees, who had organized themselves under local *Landmannschaften* and more centrally under the *Zentralverband vertriebener Deutschen* and since 1951 the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (League of Expellees), formed an important political force and electoral factor, which had to be reckoned with. E.g. Matthias Stickler, “Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdutsch”. *Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1972*, Forschungen und Quellen zur Zeitgeschichte 46 (Düsseldorf: 2004); Moeller, *War stories*. 
ference for official memory politics, they argue that the bombings were far more “usable” than Naumann suggests. Like the expulsions, the financial and legal problems of the large parts of the urban population that had lost their homes and goods, as well as rebuilding the German cities, were acute political issues. Nevertheless, it remains a question whether in national memory politics the Allied bombings were regarded to be as important as Thiessen and Arnold imply.

A better idea on the political relevance of the Allied bombings in comparison to that of the expulsions can be accomplished by looking more closely at the position of the “bomb damaged” and their attempt to gain recognition for their problems through historical documentation. The Federal government between 1949 and 1969 included a ministry for expellees, refugees and victims of war damage, which became a stronghold for the recognition of and legal and financial support for “German” victim groups within the government. Though the ministry was primarily concerned with the integration and interests of the 11 million German expellees it also communicated and cooperated extensively with representatives of the “bomb damaged”.

The “League of Air Raid Victims” – the Zentralverband der Fliegergeschädigten, Evakuierten und Währungsgeschädigten (ZVF), founded 1947 – became their most important organ. The ZVF became a national platform for local interest groups

44 Thiessen, Eingebrannt ins Gedächtnis 401-402. Jörg Arnold stated that, considering the local memory cultures of Kassel and Magdenburg, Naumann’s conclusions do not “hold up to empirical scrutiny”, for he clearly overstated the supposed neglect of the air-war issue in the Federal Republic. Arnold, “In Quiet Remembrance”? 22-23.
45 For the political influence of the ZVF with regard to social policies and material compensation see: Michael L. Hughes, Shouldering the burdens of defeat. West Germany and the reconstruction of social justice (Chapel Hill: 1999).
46 Michael Krause, Flucht vor dem Bombenkrieg: “Umquartierungen” im Zweiten Weltkrieg und die Wiedereingliederung der Evakuierten in Deutschland 1943-1963 (Düsseldorf: 1997) 234-240. Hughes, Shouldering the burdens 133. In 1951 the ZVF had 250,000 members. Hughes points out that the ZVF had little competition as the main representative of the bomb-damaged and organized nearly 5 percent of those who had suffered material losses, due
pursuing political recognition and material compensation. The interest group used its weekly newspaper “Selbsthilfe” to bring its political aims to the public’s attention.\textsuperscript{47} Thiessen and Arnold have pointed out that the ZVF had considerable influence on local memory politics in Hamburg and Kassel, but also on a national level the League represented the interests of air raid victims with some success.\textsuperscript{48}

Like the expellees, the “bomb damaged” attempted to gain political recognition for their problems by persuading the ministry to fund a historical documentation project similar to the \textit{Dokumentation der Vertreibung}. Between 1958 and 1964 a five-volume series on “German war damage”, the \textit{Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden} was published, which documented the conduct and consequences of the air war extensively. The project followed a concept similar to the one that had guided the multi-volume series on the German expulsions, which had been published between 1954 and 1961.\textsuperscript{49}

Lacking an editing commission of academic historians, the \textit{Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden} primarily reflected the historical interpretation of the ZVF. ZVF representative Karlheinz Kugler became its most important editor and though Minister Theodor Oberländer introduced the series and secretary of state Peter Paul Nahm officially became its general editor, the \textit{Zentralverband} had a crucial influence in the initiation as well as in the editing and writing process of the

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\textsuperscript{48} Arnold, “\textit{In Quiet Remembrance}”? 96, 111-112; Thiessen, \textit{Eingebrannt ins Gedächtnis} 138-139.

Apart from giving the historical backgrounds of the bombings and documenting press coverage and eyewitness reports, a large part of the series was concerned with the legal and material problems faced by Germans “damaged” in the war and its aftermath as well as the “successful” efforts made by the government to support them. In particular, the material compensation which was provided under the *Lastenausgleich* laws, was extensively documented.\(^{51}\)

This combination of history, documentation and the strong emphasis on the postwar problems faced by the Germans illustrates the direct political significance of the series. The horrific experience of the air war appeared as a prehistory to the acute problems in the present. The losses and sufferings were presented as an argument for direct political action to support those who were still homeless and faced financial and material problems due to the air war. And the documentation was initiated to acknowledge the “bomb-damaged” represented by the ZVF as a distinct interest group and to provide for further arguments for their political struggle as well as to celebrate the efforts that already had been made.\(^{52}\)

Compared to the volumes on the expulsion, the *Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden* was a relatively marginal project and there are many clues that suggest

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\(^{51}\) On the history of the *Lastenausgleich* in public debate and legal development see: Hughes, *Shouldering the burdens. Lastenausgleich* was the heavily debated and only partly implemented policy of redistributing surviving property among individuals who had suffered material losses during the war.

\(^{52}\) In his introduction to the documentation Nahm emphasized the interests of the damaged German middle classes and the need to integrate the groups that had been damaged, whether by bombings or by expulsion, into the Federal Republic. His orientation was restricted to the present. The historical backgrounds of Second World War and the reason why so many Germans faced these problems were mentioned only indirectly. Nahm focused entirely on the “catastrophic” nature of the present problems. Peter Paul Nahm et al., eds., *Dokumente Deutscher Kriegsschäden. Evakuierte, Kriegssachgeschädigte, Währungsgeschädigte. Die geschichtliche und rechtliche Entwicklung* Vol 1 (Bonn: 1958 ) Also see the interview “Der gemeinsame Weg” with Nahm by *Selbsthilfe*. Barch B 105/5648 folder 266-271.
that the issue was considered to be of less importance than the documentation of the expulsions. It did not include an extensive commission of renowned historians and had a relatively low budget. The volumes were sent to academic libraries and institutions, historians like Gerhard Ritter and to important politicians, such as the members of the Bundestag, the governments of the Bundesländer and the mayor of Berlin. Funding for printing and circulating the voluminous works was limited as the series was not sold to the public and could only to a minor extent be provided for press reviews and libraries.\footnote{See the decline in the number of copies provided by the ministry in Barch B 106/027753, e.g. folder 227 ff.} The project reflected the ministry’s affiliation with the interests of the ZVF and their shared interest in providing documentation, “to provide future generations with historical sources”.\footnote{See Kugler’s remarks on the Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden in: “Ausschnitt aus dem Fachberater für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge, Kriegsgeschädigte.” November 1959, Barch B 105/5648 folder 281-282.}

But the differences with the expulsion project also suggest that the documentation was a half-hearted gesture towards the “bomb damaged”, who increasingly felt neglected by the German government in comparison with the expellees. The desire to copy the expulsion project and the limited success the ZVF experienced reflected the increasing competition between these two different interest groups. While the air-raid victims represented by the ZVF had initially tried to cooperate with the leaders of the expellees, it became increasingly clear that the different groups competed over the limited funding that the German government was prepared make available for the German “war damaged”. In this process, the expellees successfully gained a dominant political position over the air-raid victims.\footnote{Hughes, Shouldering the burdens 165-189.} Though the air war was not as absent from West German memory politics as Nau-
mann has suggested, the differences in status between the two organizations and their research projects at least indicates that during the 1950s the *Vertreibung* was considered a much more important political issue than the consequences of the Allied bombings.

*Dresden in West German public discourse: Axel Rodenberger, David Irving and Rolf Hochhuth*

However, the presence of the air war in the memory politics and public discourse of the Federal Republic should not be underestimated. While the official volumes of the *Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden* did not reach a large audience, several other works on the air war were widely read in the Federal Republic. The most successful of these early West German accounts was Axel Rodenberger’s *Der Tod von Dresden*, published in 1951. Rodenberger’s book was circulated widely, selling more than 250,000 copies, and had considerable impact. It was a highly subjective account, largely based on Rodenberger’s personal experiences and a collection of eyewitness accounts. Presented as a documentation of the actual event, the book consists at least partly of purely fictional characters. Rodenberger’s vague and clearly dramatized work remained a central point of reference in the Federal Republic up until the mid-1960s, and was followed by several other accounts: *Der Hochrote Hahn* (1952) by Hans Rumpf and *...zum Beispiel Dresden* (1964) by Wolfgang Paul. These also offered a similar blend of autobiographic “documentation” of events the authors had witnessed with historical backgrounds and sometimes fictional elements.

56 Axel Rodenberger, *Der Tod von Dresden* (Dortmund 1952).
57 Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 146.
58 Wolfgang Paul, *...zum Beispiel Dresden. Schicksal einer Stadt* (Frankfurt am Main: 1964);
Moreover, during the 1960’s public interest in the Allied bombings began to increase. While most works on the air war had received little attention in Germany, with only Rodenberger’s work achieving considerable circulation, this situation changed in the early 1960s. In 1961, Hans Rumpf published his second account Das war der Bombenkrieg, which had considerably larger impact, was translated into English and received attention from popular media like Der Spiegel and Time Magazine. But it was the work of a previously unknown young British author, David Irving, which generated a wide interest among German readers and led to major press coverage and public debate.59

Irving, born in 1938, was a former history student at London University, who became interested in the Allied bombings during his studies and after a short period of working in the steel industry in the German Ruhr in 1959.60 In the early 1960s Irving started as a freelance historian researching the Allied bombings and specifically the bombing of Dresden. Though David Irving’s work cannot be seen directly as “German” historiography, it is important to include his work in an analysis of German historiography on the air war. The broad reception and impact of his work in Germany show how widely the air war, especially the bombing of Dresden, was discussed in the Federal Republic. In 1963 Irving, in cooperation with German journalists, published a documentary account Und Deutschland Städte

Hans Rumpf, Der hochrote Hahn (Darmstadt: 1952).

60  David Irving later became notorious for his apologies for Hitler, his denying of the existence of gas chambers in Auschwitz and his claim that Nazi Germany had not attempted to commit genocide against the Jews. For this he was persecuted and tried on different occasions, most notably in Austria in 2005-2006, where he was sentenced to several months in prison. On Irving: e.g.: Richard J. Evans, Lying about Hitler. History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial (New York: 2001); Deborah E. Lipstadt, Denying the Holocaust: the growing assault on truth and memory (London: 1994); Deborah E. Lipstadt, History on trial: my day in court with David Irving (New York: 2005).
starben nicht, a collection of short accounts on different German cities, which had partly been circulated in different issues of the popular German magazine *Neue Illustrierte* in 1961-1962. The *Destruction of Dresden* was immediately regarded as the first thoroughly researched work on the bombing of Dresden. Like the original in Great Britain, the German translation *Die Untergang Dresdens*, released in 1964, became a bestseller and was received with great enthusiasm by the German press. Better documented than previous German works, Irving’s book was also written in a relatively detached style from the perspective of a distanced academic. This aura of neutrality and objectivity was further emphasized by the apparent absence of a clear moral denunciation. Irving included a preface by Sir Robert Saundby who avoided assigning responsibility and answered the moral question in general terms: “It is not so much this or the other means of making war that is immoral or inhumane. What is immoral is war itself. Once full-scale war has broken out it can never be humanized or civilized, and if one side would do so it would be most likely to be defeated.” On the other hand, however, the book itself clearly criticized the air war as a largely ineffective and inhumane strategy.

In spite of the book’s academic tone, Irving focused strongly on moral matters and explicit details. More than previous German works had done, Irving integrated eyewitness accounts into a historical narrative that resulted in an often

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61  Irving, *Und Deutschlands Städte* 385. A final note characterizes this work, which was published under Irving’s name, as a cooperative enterprise, which leaned heavily on Irving’s research but was largely written and reworked by its editor Günter Karweina.

62  Examples of this positive reception will be discussed further in this chapter.

63  With several editions of both the English and the German translation David Irving’s *The destruction of Dresden* was at least until Frederick Taylor’s recent *Dresden* probably the best-known and bestselling account of the bombing of Dresden and the air war in general. Different German editions appeared in 1964; 1965; 1967; 1977; 1978; 1981; 1983; 1985; 1990; 1994; 2006.

compelling story of innocent German civilians who became victims of the war. Dresden was described as a “virgin target” and a peaceful city, suddenly exposed to the horrors of war.65 British figures like Harris and Churchill, though not explicitly accused of war crimes, still appeared as cynical murderers of innocent civilians. Irving portrayed Churchill as a politician, who forced the strategy of city bombing on his military, even at a time, when almost no military experts still believed that such bombings were effective. Apart from ascribing responsibility to Churchill, the book also claimed to have proof that at least 135,000 people died in Dresden and with this established the idea that Dresden had been a unique example of the destructiveness of the Allied bombings.66

This critical account by a young British researcher sparked a nationwide debate on the background and legitimacy of the bombing and on the motives of its instigators. Irving was quickly invited by leading liberal West German magazines like Die Zeit and Der Spiegel to write a series of articles on the German V1 and V2 projects.67 In subsequent years Irving’s work would repeatedly draw public interest, especially during the 20th anniversary of the attack in February 1965 and after the publication of Rolf Hochhuth’s play Soldaten which received its premiere in 1967.

Rolf Hochhuth had become friends with the young historian and used Irving’s historical account as the foundation for his critical play. Soldaten followed Hochhuth’s debut Der Stellvertreter, with which he had gained international acclaim in

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65 Ibid. 69-70.
66 Also see chapter 2.
67 In 1965 Irving published a major Spiegel-Series on the German V1 and V2 “retaliation-weapons”. In an editorial in Der Spiegel of 27 October 1965, in which Irving published the first part of his series, he was presented as Der Spiegel’s “new author”, on whom it promised “to keep an eye”. “Hausmitteilung. Betr. Neue Spiegel Serie,” Der Spiegel, 27-10 1965.
1963. This play was one of the first German works to directly address the moral issue of the Holocaust, even though it focused primarily on the moral position of Pope Pius XII, and not so much on the involvement of the German population. Nevertheless, Hochhuth was widely known as a controversial young intellectual and acknowledged as an important critic who managed to provoke a public discussion of the role of the Catholic Church in the history of Auschwitz. Now, in his play and in articles and interviews, Hochhuth felt that it had become time to discuss the moral issues behind the Allied bombing of Germany. Though Hochhuth was not a historian and expressed his views in his dramas as well as in journalist writings, his work nevertheless had a very “historical” character.68 His play Soldaten addressed the central historical arguments, largely following Irving’s The Destruction of Dresden.69

68 Journalist of Die Zeit, Karl-Heinz Janßen, for example, discussed Hochhuth’s role as an historian, showing that it was exactly this position Hochhuth was claiming for himself. Karl-Heinz Janßen, “Hochhuth als Historiker,” Die Zeit, 27-10 1967.

69 Rolf Hochhuth, Soldaten. Nekrolog auf Genf (Reinbek 1967). Irving’s conclusions on the death rate in Dresden were repeated by Hochhuth. It is striking that still in 2000, when such numbers had decades ago been proven to be products of falsification and propagan-
This led him to emphasize the immorality of the Allied leaders. Though Hochhuth also stressed that the British Prime Minister had become a criminal against his will and saw him as a “tragic hero”, he nevertheless raised the question of the “criminality” of the Allied bombings into the public debate in Germany and beyond. In Britain this led to fierce reactions, censorship and even a law suit.\textsuperscript{70} British and American critics accused Hochhuth of trying to exonerate the Germans of their historical guilt, focusing on Pope Pius II in \textit{der Stellvertreter} and on Churchill in \textit{Soldaten} instead of on Germans. In an interview by TV-host David Frost Hochhuth and Irving were confronted with heavy attacks.\textsuperscript{71}

In Germany Hochhuth’s play initiated a public debate among Germany’s leading journalists and opinion makers, such as Karl Jaspers, \textit{Spiegel} editor-in-chief Rudolf Augstein, \textit{Die Zeit} editor Karl-Heinz Janßen, and Sebastian Haffner. More than Irving’s work Hochhuth’s play was received with mixed feelings. German critics refrained from accusing Hochhuth and Irving of an apologetic perspective, as Frost had done, and generally accepted Hochhuth’s defense that he had been a
pioneer in introducing painful questions on the Holocaust into the public debate. Also, most German critics shared Hochhuth’s enthusiasm for Irving’s accounts. While journalists like Augstein and Janßen criticized Hochhuth’s historical arguments and his strong moral accusations as being too thin and ill-argued, in general his play was received as an interesting provocation for discussing the moral position of Churchill and the justifiability of the Allied air war.

The popularity and wide public coverage of both *The Destruction of Dresden* and *Soldaten* illustrate that there was, especially between 1963 and 1967, a considerable public debate on the morality of the air war. It shows that in this period, the air war was not quite so overshadowed by the Expulsion issue, which had dominated the German debate during the high tide of the Cold War. After the publication of the popular accounts by David Irving, the air war became present not only in local public discussions on the past, but became part of a nationwide debate.

1.2. West German historiography and the air war in the 1950s and ’60s

*The lost war: Ex-servicemen and the history of the air war*

In spite of this, German academic historians still largely avoided writing about the Allied bombings. While several prominent German historians researched the expulsions, professional historiography largely ignored the air war until the 1970s. Although German bombings of Freiburg and Rotterdam became the subjects of professional historical research, the first West German historical accounts of the

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Allied bombings were the work of non-academic military specialists. The reluctance of German historians to deal with the air war raises questions. The major involvement of leading historians in the research on the expulsions shows that German professional historians did not avoid the topic of German victims. Moreover, during the 1950s and ’60’s the Allied bombings were by no means lacking public interest, nor as would be the case in a later period, were they automatically associated with extreme rightwing revisionism. However, part of this neglect might be explained by a general trend to avoid military history. Wolfram Wette has pointed out that after the war German historians developed an “aversion” to military history, mainly because *Wehrgeschichte* and *Wehrkunde* before 1945 had largely been instrumentalized and exploited for nationalist politics and the defense of German territorial and military claims. Because it was avoided by most academic historians, with few exceptions like Gerhard Ritter or Andreas Hillgruber, military history until the late 1960s was largely left in the hands of laymen and (former) members of the German military, who, as Wolfram Wette has put it, wrote “in the spirit of the *Wehrmacht*” and along the old lines of nationalist history.

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A similar trend can be seen in the historiography of the Allied bombings. Most of the authors had military backgrounds or were somehow related to the practice of civil defense or fire brigades and most of them were not connected to the universities or academic institutions. Their work not only focused primarily on military aspects, but was also in many respects a continuation of a theoretical and technical discourse on the military use of air power that had started before the Second World War. One of the first German historical accounts of the air war was written by Georg Feuchter, a former officer and air force veteran from World War I, who devoted himself to non-fiction writing on military aviation in the 1930s. He wrote for military professional journals and published several popular military accounts of the air war, most notably Probleme des Luftkrieges (1936 and reedited in 1939) and wrote one of the first German historical accounts of the air war, Geschichte des Luftkrieges (1954). In his accounts of the Allied bombings, Feuchter remained almost strictly on the level of technical descriptions and strategic analyses. Feuchter’s distanced and dispassionate style underlined his claim to a fair and balanced analysis. Under the surface, however, a strong identification with the German forces and civilians became clear, especially on the few occasions when Feuchter discussed the defeated Luftwaffe and the moral aspects of Allied air war.

The bitter remarks on the failure of the German air forces to live up to their initial promises are contrasted with an emphasis on their former “heights of glory”; a glory that in Feuchter’s view significantly included the “clearly tactical”

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76 Georg W. Feuchter, Geschichte des Luftkrieges. Entwicklung und Zukunft (Bonn: 1954); Georg W. Feuchter, Probleme des Luftkrieges, 2 ed. (Potsdam: 1939). During the war he was editor of the front news-journal of the German air force and from 1944 he became press- and censorship-officer with the executive staff of the Luftwaffe. After the war he continued working for the (West-)German air force and remained active as a publicist, writing and editing for specialist journals. “Georg W. Feuchter 60 Jahre,” Flugwelt, no. 5 (1956) 317-318.
German bombings of Rotterdam and Warsaw. Feuchter’s bitterness about the miscalculation of the Luftwaffe’s choice for tactical air war over strategic bombing suggest the author’s disappointment that the German army had been defeated. For this he blamed the “high command” and the Nazi leaders.

What is interesting here is that Feuchter wrote from a perspective that was very common among former Wehrmacht officers, who in the early postwar decades produced a series of memoirs. The underlying question in Feuchter’s book was why Germany had lost the war, and he concluded that the German decision not to develop a policy of “strategic bombing” had been a crucial factor in the German defeat. Feuchter distinguished clearly between the “honorable” army and its incompetent (Nazi) leaders. He contrasted the “honorable” German troops with their incompetent high command (by which he meant although he did not mention by name such “Nazi bonzes” as Goering). His disappointment in the German defeat can be sensed in phrases that refer to the Wehrmacht’s initial “glory” and ultimate “failure” (Versagen). His account reflected a strong commitment to the “honor” of the Luftwaffe, which had been damaged by the mistakes made by the high commanders and the Nazi leaders. “The troops, their manpower in the air and on the ground and the leaders of the battle units are not guilty of this failure. The honor of the troops has to be consistently accentuated”.

Feuchter’s point of view, in addition to its disappointment in the “lost war”, had, like many other accounts, a very defensive character. Many of the books written by ex-servicemen had in common that they wrote defensively about their

77  Feuchter, Geschichte des Luftkriegs 139-142.
78  Ibid. 105-106, 142.
79  Ibid. 105-106. Italics in the original. Similarly: Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 134-135. Rumpf defends the courage and willpower of “our airmen”. 
personal roles in the *Luftwaffe* or the German air defense organizations. During the war, the German population had eventually lost faith in both the *Luftwaffe* and the air defense organizations and had increasingly expressed their bitterness towards them. As the reports made by the German *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) illustrate, these organizations were held at least partly responsible for the suffering of the Germans civilians, whom they had failed to protect. This stigma of mistakes and failure was something many ex-servicemen tried to contest.

This defensive position was clearly present in the memoirs of former German *Luftwaffe* generals like Adolf Galland or Albert Kesselring, who both defended their position as “soldiers” and dissociated themselves from Hitler, while expressing a strong disappointment in the lost war.80 Another good example is former Major General Hans Rumpf, who became one of the most active publicists on the Allied bombing war. Like Feuchter, Rumpf had begun writing on military problems before the war and had made a career within the National Socialist civil defense organization during the 1930s.81 Rumpf became *General Inspector of Fire Prevention* within the *Ordnungspolizei* in 1943. Here he was the main officer responsible for the national fire-fighting units of the German civil defense.82 His writings consisted of articles for professional journals and extreme rightwing periodicals as well as popular histories of the bombings.83 In his historical accounts of the air

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83 After the war and also in association with Hampe, Rumpf was actively involved in the public promotion of civil defense measures in the Federal Republic. For examples of
war Rumpf, like Feuchter, naturally approached the subject from a German perspective, often referring to the German military position with the terms “us” and “we Germans”. With frequent references to his personal role in the German civil defense apparatus Rumpf emphasized his strong identification with the German military side. Like Feuchter, Rumpf showed a certain disappointment in the lost war, which had largely been the consequence of the lack of a clear strategy within the Luftwaffe. Rumpf contemplated the failed opportunities of a German “retaliation” bombing force, which might had been able to force the Allies to moderate their attacks.

In his works Rumpf also sought personal rehabilitation both in his role as the head of fire fighting as well as with regard to his high position within the National Socialist Ordnungspolizei. Rumpf dissociated himself from the organization in which had held a high position and which was a central organ of power for the NSDAP-state by claiming he had heroically saved a Leipzig synagogue from burning down during Kristallnacht in November 1938. He also expressed his admiration for Resistance hero Carl von Goerdeler. But Rumpf spoke euphemistically about the German civil defense organization. He remarked that German civil defense was “well organized” and had made sure that German civilians could face the bombings “well prepared”, which can be seen as a rather blunt euphemism

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84 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 9, 21, 41, 122.
85 Ibid. 32-33.
considering the effects of the Allied bombings on German society. Rumpf also conveniently ignored the common practice of the Nazi regime to actively withhold information about the bombings from the civilians for propaganda reasons.  

A similar example of an early account of the Allied bombings, written from the perspective of a “military specialist” was Der Zivile Luftschutz im Zweiten Weltkrieg (1963) by former General Erich Hampe, a personal friend of Rumpf, who been responsible for technical help for the armed forces and was one of the first “experts” to evaluate the bombing of Dresden for the Nazi authorities. After the war Hampe had continued his career in the Federal Republic as the main initiator, and in 1954 first president, of the Bundesanstalt für Ziviler Luftschutz. Hampe’s work is a detailed description and (not surprisingly) a very positive evaluation of German civil defense during the Second World War. But more than that, it also is a historical account of the Allied bombings of Germany. Like Feuchter, Hampe focused on the technical and organizational details and wrote in a distanced and unemotional style. However, where Feuchter almost completely restricted his work

86  Rumpf, Der hochrote Hahn 18-26; Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 126. Whether his story on the Leipzig Kristallnacht is true is possible but may very well be part of a narrative form in which former collaborators, party members or other opportunist euphemistically tended to describe their personal role as “resistance heroes”. See: Harald Welzer et al., “Opa war kein Nazi”. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis (Frankfurt am Main: 2002). At least it can be concluded that Rumpf’s supposed dissident actions as a fireman did not stand in the way of his very successful career within the Ordnungspolizei during the war. Rumpf’s apologetic euphemisms on the Nazi civil defense have also been remarked on by Ralf Blank: Ralf Blank, “Die Nacht vom 16. auf den 17. Mai 1943 - “Operation Züchtigung”: die Zerstörung der Möhne-Talsperre”, 2006: http://www.lwl.org/westfaelische-geschichte/portal/Internet/input_felder/langDatensatz_ebene4.php?urlID=493&url_tabelle=tab_websegmente.


to the level of strategies and military operations, Hampe’s work was an attempt to write a more comprehensive account. Hampe wrote extensively about the organization of German civil defense and about the social reactions of the German population to the human and material losses.\textsuperscript{89}

\textit{The “clean Luftwaffe”}

While these authors shared an identification with the German \textit{Luftwaffe} and military defense against the Allied bombings, they did not all share the same opinion about the military effects of the Allied attacks. In his analysis of the German and Anglo-American strategies Feuchter had concluded that they had been very successful. According to Feuchter, who had been a supporter of the main theorist of strategic bombing, the Italian Gulio Douhet, the Second World War had proven Douhet’s “moderate” followers right. Strategic bombing of Germany’s industrial resources and infrastructure not won the war by itself, as Douhet had claimed, but it had nevertheless been a vital element in the Allied victory. It had been Germany’s strategic failure that it had refrained from using strategic bombing. Germany and especially Hitler had failed to build a strong bombing force capable of inflicting serious damage on the Allied industrial capacity.

For a long time, Feuchter would stand more or less alone in this evaluation in Germany. Though many other German authors who published on the Allied bombings shared Feuchter’s defensive position towards the role of the \textit{Luftwaffe}, most felt very differently about the military effects of strategic bombing. They stressed

\textsuperscript{89} Like Feuchter’s, Hampe’s style was distanced. The issue of the human losses caused by the bombings was treated mainly as a statistical and demographical problem, not as an example of immense human suffering. Hampe analyzed the factors of both the different forms of Allied attacks and various reactions of German municipal authorities to these attacks to analyze differences in the death rate figures. Hampe, \textit{Der zivile Luftschutz} 138-183.
that the bombings had failed to achieve their military goals and, more importantly, had deliberately targeted civilians in an equally futile attempt to break German morale. Perhaps the most elaborate attempt to make this point was *Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit*, written by international law specialist and former *Luftwaffe* officer Eberhard Spetzler in 1956. Spetzler portrayed the Allied strategic bombing as a complete failure and a violation of international law.90 Other German authors like Hans Rumpf or Erich Hampe shared Spetzler’s interpretation. While Feuchter had concluded that strategic bombing had been a military success, these historians refuted this position and expressed moral and legal objections against the British and American bombings.91

This perspective was particularly represented in the work of Hans Rumpf. The Allied bombings had not only been senseless acts of terror, but could be seen as deliberate attempts to break the will of the Germans and even – at their peak – as an effort to annihilate the German people. The British bombings had been senseless, not only in their brutality but also in their aim to undermine German war morale. In this the bombings had been totally counterproductive. They had not only strengthened the will of the brave German civilians to endure and resist. But the “night of the murder of Dresden,” in particular, by demonstrating the Allied aim to “exterminate” the Germans as a whole, had forced the German pop-

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91 An important basis for their conclusion that the Allied bombings had been wholly ineffective on the German war industry and on the morale of the German population was a selective reading of the official *United States Strategic Bombing Survey*, issued in 1945. Though the report indeed indicated that the effects in relation to the huge costs and resources had been disappointing, especially before 1943, German authors ignored or rejected the final conclusions of this report that strategic bombing had had considerable impact on German industry and morale. E.g. David MacIsaac, “General introduction,” in *The United States strategic bombing survey Vol. 1*, ed. David MacIsaac (New York: 1978). The selective reading of other British and American accounts will be discussed later in this chapter.
ulation to collaborate with a regime, in which they had long ago lost faith. “One more time Dresden assembled the Germans under the swastika-flag and drove them into the arms of the propaganda, which now more believably than before accentuated the fear –fear of the mercilessness of the terror-attacks, fear of the ratified Morgenthau-plan, fear of the expulsions, fear of the unconditional surrender, fear of obliteration”. Therefore, the “air-terror had not shortened the war but had extended it”.92

Though Rumpf, seemingly willing to differentiate, stated that “both opponents started the bombing-war against each other” before either of them could anticipate the consequences, he left no doubt that the British forces bore the main responsibility for the atrocities of modern air war, and that it had been the German civilians who had primarily suffered.93 And most importantly, the British had started bombing Germany before the Luftwaffe had attacked British cities, a causal relationship that accentuated the fundamental difference between British and German bombings. This perspective is illustrated in Rumpf’s answer to the question who had started the air war: “Only five months later– on 7 September–, after German cities (…) had been attacked again and again and warnings had led to nothing, a German counter strike followed with a heavy targeted daytime attack on the market and storage depots, yards and docks – the ‘belly of London’”.94 Likewise, all other German bombings were described in a similarly euphemistic and apologetic manner. The attacks on Warsaw and Rotterdam were even explicitly

93 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 13.
94 Ibid. 21.
excluded from the book, since they fell outside of the author’s aim to describe the bombing war against Germany. Coventry was only mentioned briefly to state that the attack had been grossly overestimated in its importance by the British as well as by German wartime propaganda. The attack on London, like all other German bombardments, was regarded as a “justified” reaction to British terror.95

By stressing this causal relationship between the British initiative and German reaction, these German accounts created a dichotomy between an offensive and aggressive RAF and a reacting Luftwaffe. The “British initiative” could only be argued in a very selective interpretation of what defined the bombing of civilians. Only by excluding from this discussion the German attacks on cities like Rotterdam and Warsaw, which had caused considerable damage in residential areas and killed many civilians, could the point be made that the “British” had started the “bombing war”. This image was supported by the choice of specific and distinct terminology for the British and for German attacks. The term “terror-bombing” remained strictly reserved to describe British and later American bombings. Even the infamous “Baedeker attacks” on small and undefended British cities without military importance in 1942 were consistently framed as “Baedeker-” or “retaliation attacks”, again stressing that this action had not been intentional “terror” but only an unsuccessful attempt to stop the British from pursuing their dreadful terror against German cities.96 Rumpf against stated that these “retaliatory mea-

95  Ibid. 14, 21. Also see: Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 265-266 and the even more apologetic remarks by Albert Kesselring playing the role of a dispassionate historian: Kesselring, “Bilanz des zweiten Weltkrieges” 150.

96  The term “Baedeker attacks” refers to the German attacks on British towns such as Bath, Exeter and Canterbury in April and May 1942. The term Baedeker refers to a German travel guide, to indicate that these British cities were selected for German “retaliation” because they were considered to be tourist highlights and not important strategic targets. On the “Baedeker attacks” also see chapter 3.
sures” had been “hugely exaggerated” by war propaganda.97

In terms of spatial structure it is interesting to see, that the distinction between the “humane” German attacks and the “terrorist” nature of the British bombings was explained by situating these strategic differences into two fundamentally different military traditions. Instead of starting the history of the strategic bombing with the outbreak of the Second World War, these accounts most commonly began with the origins of British military theory. While German military theory was rooted in a “continental European tradition” that relied primarily on ground troops and on direct warfare against the military forces of its opponent, the British and the Americans had a different military tradition. The British, in particular, had relied heavily on naval warfare and on indirect force, like the naval blockade during WWI. “Anglo-Saxon” warfare was also heavily influenced by their colonial experiences, in which numerical disadvantage had to be compensated for by superior destructive techniques. This kind of warfare, even before the more inhumane method of strategic bombing had become technically possible, had led to an acceptance of a more ‘total’ warfare that included pressure on enemy civilians as a militarily relevant objective. This had led to the popularity of the concept of strategic bombing in the works of important military thinkers such as Hugh Trenchard and Basil Lidell Hart, and finally to the acceptance of strategic bombing as one of the main strategic pillars of “Anglo-American” warfare during the WWII.98

97 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 39; similarly: Franz Kurowski, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland (Düsseldorf: 1977) 176; referring to Rumpf: Klöss, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 19.
Stressing this continuity of military thinking led to the almost total ignoring of the broader history of the Second World War. Not only were the objectives of the Allied bombings simplified as attempts to demoralize and exterminate the Germans, thus denying that the bombings had had important military strategic effects. But the “total war” carried out by Nazi Germany that was in its very essence characterized by genocide against civilians was almost completely ignored. Due to the almost complete lack of historical references to the broader context of the war and the “total” aspects of the land war in these works the Allied bombings were presented as something that had a dimension of its own. Since it was concluded that the bombings had been senseless and counterproductive there was no need to integrate the bombings into the Allied pursuit of the victory. They were actions that stood apart from the war and even had very little connection to the German bombings that had either tactically supported “conventional warfare” over land or in a few cases had been a half-hearted attempt to retaliate and stop the Allied city bombing. Thus the temporal structure of this narrative of the air war greatly influenced the moral conclusions that could be drawn. The “longer” history of British military thinking suppressed the “shorter” history of the German war aggression and made it possible to make moral judgments about Allied military actions without having to discuss the German war crimes.

The “court case” against the Allies

Consequently, the West German historical accounts of the bombing war showed little reluctance to answer the question of responsibility with regard to the Allied

99 Also see the remarks on this typical “forgetting” of the broader context of the war started by Nazi Germany by Dietmar Süß: Süß, “Erinnerungen an den Luftkrieg” 21.
bombings. Even though almost all authors were reluctant to use the word “crime” directly and also blamed Hitler and the German leaders for causing the Second World War, the “criminality” of the Allied air war nevertheless became a strong theme in German historiography. A central recurring element was the deeply personalized perspective on the process of decision-making during the Allied bombing offensive. This standpoint reflects an emphasis on the personal roles of figures like Churchill and Arthur Harris.100

German historians Rumpf, Spetzler and Hampe stressed the role of Churchill and Harris as leading military figures, for whom the bombing war represented “something personal”. Rumpf accused Churchill of having been led by a “destructive delusion” and of fighting a “private war” against the Germans. Rumpf concluded: “The decisive historical significance for the emergence, course and outcome of the unrestricted city-bombing politics through air-terror against an enemy non-combatant and unarmed civilian population, which until then had been protected by conventions, is taken on May 11, (1940), when the new British wartime prime minister with clear deliberate action and enormous force set loose the hunt for the German civilian population”.101 Most other accounts painted a similar picture, seeing Churchill’s premiership as a decisive factor in the emergence of city bombing as a central British strategy.102

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100 Similarly Andrew Spencer has noted that discussions on Dresden, in public discourse as well as in historiography have been strongly characterized by a “biographic” focus and centered on the role of the decision-making and responsibility of Arthur Harris and Winston Churchill. Andrew John Spencer, “Publizistik und Historiographie über die Zerstörung Dresdens,” in Die Zerstörung Dresdens. Antworten der Künste, ed. Walter Schmitz (Dresden: 2005) 27-41, here: 30-32. As will be further discussed in Chapter 3, East German historian Groehler made a similar observation in 1968: Olaf Groehler, “Der “strategische” Luftkrieg gegen Hitlerdeutschland (Februar 1942-März 1944),” Zeitschrift für Militärgeschichte 7, no. 4 (1968) 439-453, here: 442-443.


102 Both Spetzler and Hampe see the appointment of Churchill as prime minister as the beginning of a new phase in the bombing war: Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 251-
Chief of Bomber Command Arthur Harris played a very similar role. Though in some accounts (such as Irving’s *Destruction of Dresden*) Harris was depicted as a character who mainly executed the ideas of his prime minister, in most historical accounts Harris is presented as the main driving force behind the British “terror bombings”. Rumpf and Hampe present him as a ruthless and barbaric officer who had ideas similar to those of Churchill and whose appointment in 1942 marked another important turning point. The British decision to make city bombing and German civilian morale their prime target in 1942 is often ascribed to Harris personally, who was appointed as Chief of Bomber Command almost simultaneously with a shift in British strategic premises. Though both Harris and Churchill indeed played significant roles in the process of decision-making during the war, German historiography often exaggerated the biographical factors to such an extent as to suggest that the strategic bombings had been the “personal” war of Harris and Churchill.  

This emphasis on Harris and Churchill also reflected a traditional approach that was still very dominant in these accounts in which history was seen primarily as a confrontation between “great men”. According to this view, which dominated German historiography in the 1950s, history was, first and foremost, “political” history. Historical events were largely determined by leaders. In this sense, a focus on Allied leaders not only reflected the moral message these works tried to transmit, but was also a natural outcome of a traditional political history.

On the other hand, these accounts did not see the air war as only a history of politics and war, but also as a problem of international law. The accusative tone

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252; Hampe, *Der zivile Luftschutz* 112.
103 Most radically: Rumpf, “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord”.

also was reflected in the way in which many of these accounts were structured. Various accounts of the air war, take the form of a legal plea or, in other words, a “court case” against the Allies. Typical of this approach is the work of legal specialist Eberhard Spetzler. With a focus on the problems of international law, Spetzler’s account was well received among historians as it underlined the central arguments that were dominant in the documentary-historical and military-technical accounts. Spetzler and, a few years later, the Austrian Maximilian Czesany in his very similar Nie Wieder Luftkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung (1961) concluded that the legal regulations and customary law of air warfare were in need of codification, mainly because these principles had been massively infringed during the Second World War.104

But by structuring these arguments as a legal brief and concentrating on conclusions about the rules of war fare during the Second World War, they turned the comparison between the actions of the German Luftwaffe and those of the British RAF into a legal question. Like most other German accounts Spetzler concluded that the German Luftwaffe had restricted itself to militarily relevant targets and had perceived the use of bombings only as a means to support conventional warfare over land and had therefore not infringed international and military law.105 The bombings of Warsaw and Rotterdam were portrayed as “sheer tactical attacks”. The actions of the Luftwaffe against Rotterdam were even enthusiastically described as an attack that “hardly could have been carried out more correctly”, suggesting explicitly that the German bombers had consciously kept article 27 of

104 Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 390-396. Similarly and almost with the same conclusions: Czesany, Nie wieder Krieg 13-29.
105 These legal arguments were present not only in the works that focused explicitly on international and military law, but also formed a recurring argumentative strategy in other West German accounts of the bombing war. E.g. Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 10, 15, 21.
The Hague Conventions in mind because the bombers had made a specific effort to drop their bombs within the ordered target area.106

That this was a residential area, and methodically attacked by area bombing is left out of the picture. Moreover, as in the works of Rumpf and others, those German attacks that were aimed specifically at the centers and residential areas of British cities were categorized as “reprisals”. Spetzler’s work shows that this term was used not only to understand the causal relationship between British and German bombings, but also to clarify a legal issue. Discussing the lawfulness of the 1942 German attacks on undefended British towns, Spetzler concluded that while principally “this kind of warfare conflicted with military law” the attacks were nevertheless justified by the fact that they were reprisals for British terror. “Such reprisal air attacks were permitted by customary military law (“nach überkommenem Kriegsrecht”) also against residential areas, the more so as they had been carried out because of similar bombings”.107

Spetzler not only attempted to rehabilitate even those bombings which were exclusively directed at British civilians, he pushed this argument even further by stating that “by claiming its right to reprisals, Germany made clear that it denounced

106 Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 235-238, 247-248. Spetzler’s revisionist standpoint becomes clear in his conclusion that the Polenfeldzug had been a “chivalric and humane” war from the German side, while from the Polish side dreadful atrocities had been committed against Volksdeutsche (Spetzler even refers to the writings of General Kesselring in a footnote). See 238 (especially note 105 and 106). E.g. Kesselring, Soldat bis zum letzten Tag 61.

107 Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 265-266. In his defense of the German bombings Spetzler makes a specific point in phrasing them as “reprisals” and not as “retaliation”. Likewise: Czesany, Nie wieder Krieg 93-97. Czesany was a little more reluctant in excusing the German “reprisal” attacks against British cities in 1940 and 1941. Czesany categorized these as “reprisal excess” and as disproportionate countermeasures. However, the point Czesany made is that the British government did not recognize the illegality of these German attacks and with this showed its indifference to the fate of not only the German but even the British civilian population. Therefore, ultimately the British war leaders and government are made primarily responsible for the Bombenkrieg even when it was directed against their own people.
the British air war over the ‘Reichsgebiet’ as being in conflict with military law”. According to Spetzler, Germany held an “unaltered commitment” to air war rules, which it had not wanted to infringe in the first place.108 Responsibility for the corruption of the air war and for the massive suffering of the Germans lay with the British and American army leaders. Long before the outbreak of the war in 1939 the British had prepared themselves for strategic bombing along the lines of Douhetianism and had willfully ignored the essence of The Hague Conventions. During the war and especially during the last phase, “when the war had ceased to be a military problem” the British had engaged in a total warfare against “all reachable civilians” even though they were well aware that this would not in any way contribute to a military victory. Dresden represented the climax of the air terror, an attack on the city of arts and of hospitals: a Lazarettstadt without any military significance.109

Spetzler’s central arguments were shared by most other accounts, even though not all these accounts were structured as a legal plea. The significance of the legal status of the bombings was commonly accepted. According to this view, in a legal sense the British bombings were a crime, and the German bombings were not. It had been the British who started the bomber war and along the way had provoked German “reprisals” which were therefore legal. In the air war the Allies had broken every rule and law in the book, while the Germans had made an effort to fight lawfully.

108 Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 266. For a different view on the legitimacy of German bombings of cities like Guernica from the perspective of international law see: Heinz Markus Hanke, Luftkrieg und Zivilbevölkerung. Der kriegsvölkerrechtliche Schutz der Zivilbevölkerung gegen Luftbombardements von den Anfängen bis zum Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkrieges (Frankfurt am Main: 1991); Klaus A. Maier, “Totaler Krieg und operativer Luftkrieg,” in Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg 2. Die Errichtung der Hegemonie auf dem Europäischen Kontinent, ed. Klaus A. Maier, et al. (Stuttgart: 1979) 43-69. For Maier’s arguments also see chapter 3.

109 Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 317-318.
The German victims

This approach also characterized the descriptions of the German victims of Allied bombing. A commonly shared idea was that the main victims of bombing during the war were the Germans. Even though German bombings were referred to in the formal arguments, their effect on civilians in British and other cities were wholly ignored. While the suffering of German civilians and the loss of cultural heritage were emphasized, descriptions of losses and suffering, resulting from Luftwaffe bombings are absent. The stress on the fundamental differences in the strategy and aims of the RAF and the Luftwaffe implicitly deprived the victims of German bombings of their historical significance. Though the term is not used, they are clearly seen as collateral damage and left anonymous. By focusing on the Allied bombings and by making a strong moral distinction between the tactical Luftwaffe bombings and the British-American terror bombings, German accounts almost exclusively saw “the Germans” as the main victims of bombing during the Second World War, bombings which were described and castigated as dreadful acts of terror against defenseless victims.

Similar to the way the Luftwaffe was presented as a “clean” air force that had no part in “Hitler’s crimes”, the role of the Germans as a people was detached from Nazism. The German historical accounts often emphasized that the Germans had “harvested the hatred, which had been sown by their leaders”. This implied a fundamental distinction between the “leaders” and the “people”, who became their primary victims.110 In spite of his technical and unemotional approach, the idea that the German population had became victims of the bombings was implicitly evoked, for example, by Hampe’s analysis of the effects the bombings had had on

110 Rumpl, Das war der Bombenkrieg 104.
German morale. He regarded the Allied expectations that the bombings would be able to turn the Germans against their regime as a psychological miscalculation. By pressurizing the Germans the Allies had increased the power of the Nazi regime over the population and had put them under “a double coercion of their own dictatorial system and the assault of the enemy”. In this line of argument, “Germans” as a collective were portrayed as victims not only of Allied attacks, but also as victims of the oppressive Nazi rule. “German people” were detached from their regime and from the responsibility for the crimes that were committed under Nazism. The Germans appeared as “double victims” of the Allies and of the oppressive Nazi authorities.

However, while this was a commonly accepted starting point, the early West German accounts show strong differences in the extent to which the German victims of the air raids and their experiences were integrated into the history of the Allied bombing. It is striking that in spite of their often moralistic, denunciatory tone and a clear identification with the German side, the West German military historians during the 1950s rarely described the human consequences of the bombings. Some accounts, particularly Axel Rodenberger’s Der Tod von Dresden, focused on German suffering, but authors like Spetzler, Hampe and Feuchter concentrated on military leaders and strategy. Here the protagonists were the Allied leaders and the attacks, which were seen from the perspective of the German Luftwaffe or the air defense, rather than from that of the civilians who endured the attacks. While, on the one hand, the Luftwaffe was seen as a heroic force which along with the entire German people had tragically become a victim of Hitler’s war, the narrative was more about military heroism and tragedy than about human suffering.

111 Hampe, Der zivile Luftschutz 183.
In this difference between a detached military history or legal pleas and accounts of suffering experienced by German civilians lies a certain tension in the early West German historiography, which became particularly visible in the *Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden*. The first volume of this series was introduced by a dry historical overview by Feuchter, who summarized his conclusions of *Geschichte des Luftkriegs*. While Feuchter’s essay had summarized the history of the Allied bombings in a seemingly neutral and distanced tone and basically described the air war as an episode of military history, other parts of the *Dokumente* focused on the morality of the Allied bombings and on the experiences of its victims. The conclusions of the first volume and an included short lecture by president of the German *Bundestag* Hermann Ehlers (CDU) depicted the bombings as an act of terror against innocent civilians.\(^{112}\)

A supplementary volume of the *Dokumente* entitled, *Aus Den Tagen Des Luftkrieges Und Des Wiederaufbaues. Erlebnis Und Erfahrungsberichte* (1960) adopted this victim perspective.\(^{113}\) This separate volume was a collection of eyewitness accounts, describing the horrors of the bombings in vivid detail. The purpose of these accounts was not primarily to provide factual information but, according to the editors, to show the subjective “experience” of those involved. The volume consisted of accounts by eyewitnesses and reports made by official functionaries as well as published material. The perspective was that of Germans who had witnessed the attacks or had been professionally involved in air defense, fire fighting

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112 Ehlers was president of the Bundestag from 1950 to 1954, the same year in which he passed away. See: [http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2009/23495763_kw06_praesidenten2/index.html](http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2009/23495763_kw06_praesidenten2/index.html). His lecture had originally been delivered to commemorate the bombing of Hamburg in 1952.

or in the registration of casualties and damage. Its main editor Karlheinz Kugler had collected photographs, local press articles and excerpts of available literature, such as Axel Rodenberger’s *Der Tod von Dresden*, Hans Rumpf’s *Der hochrote Hahn*. For eyewitness accounts he drew on contemporary reports of the Hamburg police and the vivid “pathological-anatomic research” that had been published by the physician Siegfried Gräff in 1948. Accounts such as Gräff’s medical and anatomical analysis functioned primarily to demonstrate how horrific death under the bombings had been, but added no historical background or explanation. Gräff’s research into the different direct causes of death and his explicit description of corpses painted a gruesome picture. Further, the volume contained reports that had been collected by the Hamburg police department in the months following the bombing raids of July 1943. The reports told a gruesome tale of people “burning like torches” and offered horrific scenes of children’s severed limbs. Completing the tale were stories of heroic police officers rescuing endangered civilians.

The publication of this supplement illustrates that starting in the early 1960s the perspective of the victims’ experiences came to dominate accounts of the air war at the expense of the earlier perspective of military history. For example, when the *Dokumente* were re-edited and published for a larger audience as a DTV pocketbook in 1963 it was the eyewitness accounts which were selected for inclusion. Also during the 1960s new accounts appeared in which tales of personal suffering were integrated into historical accounts of the air war. In 1961 in *Das war der*

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114 Siegfried Gräff, *Tod im Luftangriff. Ergebnisse pathologisch-anatomischer Untersuchungen anläßlich der Angriffe auf Hamburg in den Jahren 1943-45* (Hamburg: 1948) Though Nahm officially was involved in the editing, the practical selection of accounts and photographs were undertaken by Kugler. See e.g. the editors’ report of 27-7 1960 in Barch B 105/5648, folder 228-234.

115 The eyewitness accounts collected in the *Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden* later were reprinted in a collection by Erhard Klöss in 1963. Klöss, *Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland* 84, 105.
*Bombenkrieg*, more than in his earlier publication, Rumpf concentrated not only on the military strategy of the Allies or on legal arguments but accentuated the suffering of the Germans and included short descriptions of eyewitness reports.\(^{116}\) The popularity of David Irving’s works, which prominently featured eyewitness accounts of civilian suffering in Dresden, shows the increased public attention for the victims’ perspective of the Allied bombings.

The German accounts in this period reflect a certain ambivalence and a gradual shift in the way German victimhood is described. Though they increasingly focused on German suffering it is striking that these works reflected an ambivalent understanding of the German word *Opfer*, which can refer to both “sacrifice” or to “victim”. The reports by Hamburg policemen, which were included in the *Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden* in order to give a detailed view on the bombings experiences, illustrate this double meaning. They told a heroic tale of Hamburg policemen bravely risking their lives rescuing women and children. Some reports recount how in some cases the policemen became injured and had to be forced to stop their heroic work by concerned bystanders. Axel Rodenberger’s *Der Tod von Dresden* (1951) offers the tale of a similar heroic sacrifice: a German doctor (‘Professor X’) who refused to stop operating during the attack on Dresden.\(^{117}\) In these emotional and horrific accounts the witnesses involved appeared as pure victims or heroic figures, who helped or rescued the innocent.

\(^{116}\) Rumpf, *Das war der Bombenkrieg* 86ff, 104ff.  
\(^{117}\) Axel Rodenberger, *Der Tod von Dresden* (Dortmund 1951) 123-124.
1.3. Finding facts and arguments: Nazi propaganda and foreign texts
3a. Recycling Nazi propaganda in postwar historiography

_England’s Alleinschuld_

The portrayal of Hamburg police officers not as perpetrators of Nazi persecution but as heroes illustrated not only the absence of references to German responsibility for war crimes but also the continuity of a perspective on the bombings that originated in the Second World War itself. This became apparent not only in documents, which, like the reports of the Hamburg police in the _Dokumente_, were written before 1945, but also in many postwar accounts. Many interpretations, descriptions and arguments that were already present in Nazi propaganda were “recycled” after the war, especially in the work of ex-servicemen like Rumpf, Spetzler and Hampe.

Under the pressure of the Allied air raids, the Nazi rule had been increasingly inclined to react publicly and formulate official interpretations. Afraid that the Allied bombings would indeed negatively influence the morale of the Germans and provoke dissatisfaction with the German regime, the propaganda apparatus of the Third Reich considered the Allied bombings as one of its main challenges. It sought to provide the Germans with interpretations of the bombings that confirmed the Nazi ideology and would convince the Germans of the need to trust and cooperate with their regime. In these efforts, the Nazi propaganda was often hybrid and contradictory. But while not all elements were suitable for postwar interpretations, certain central arguments found their way back in German narratives after 1945.118

A good example of the postwar recycling of Nazi narratives was the way in which the Allied and German air forces were distinguished and the British were morally denounced. Though Nazi propaganda often had referred to the Jews as the ultimate instigators of the bombings, it particularly emphasized British responsibility for the injustice and horrors of the air war.119 This was especially the case in the argumentation that had led to a total moral denunciation of the Allies. In newspapers, “white books”, pamphlets and professional or military journals National Socialist Germany had made a strong effort to denounce the Allied bombings as illegitimate, criminal attacks, while simultaneously painting a heroic and chivalric picture of the German *Luftwaffe*, which had tried to fight fairly but had been forced to retaliate. A series of propaganda pamphlets was published whose arguments resembled later postwar writings of authors like Rumpf and Spetzler.

As the air war reached its radical phase in 1943, pamphlets such as *Englands Alleinschuld am Bombenterror* (1943), *Dokumente über die Alleinschuld Englands am Bombenkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung* (1943) and *Reuter fälscht die Luftkriegsschuld* (1944) were published. These works were pamphlets in which the development of bombing during the war was summarized, supplemented with collections of documents and quotes from German and British politicians and newspaper articles. The central argumentation in these works was that while Hitler had repeatedly called for a general protection of civilians against air war and had refrained from strategic bombing and from using terror against civilians, the British had willfully

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violated international law.\textsuperscript{120}

In many of these propaganda texts the fundamental strategic differences between clean continental warfare and dirty and criminal British warfare were emphasized, almost exactly along the same lines as would be argued in Rumpf’s accounts in the 1950s and ’60s. For example the linguistic distinction between Anglo-American “terror attacks” and German “retaliation” was not invented by postwar German authors but rooted in Nazi propaganda.\textsuperscript{121} The term “terror bombing”, the most common description for the Allied actions in the Nazi propaganda, also became the term used to describe the Allied bombings of German cities in the postwar literature.

Though it should be noted that the term also became popular in parts of the international, including British and American, discourse, the continuing use of this term in German historiography is illustrative.\textsuperscript{122} Another indication for the strong discursive and semantic continuity in which the air war was discussed was that both in Nazi propaganda as well as in postwar historiography the German \textit{Wehrmacht} and \textit{Luftwaffe} were categorized with the phrase “humane and chival-

\textsuperscript{120} See for example: Auswärtiges Amt, ed. \textit{Dokumente über die Alleinschuld Englands am Bombenkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung}, Auswärtiges Amt 1943 Nr. 8 (Berlin: 1943); Franz Eher, ed. \textit{Englands Alleinschuld am Bombenterror}, Volksausgabe des 8. amtlichen Deutschen Weißbuchs (Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP,1943); Dr. Ehmer, ed. \textit{Der Bombenkrieg der Briten: amtliche Feststellungen zur Schuldfrage} (1943); Gerhard Habermacher and Walther Koerbner, \textit{Reuter fälscht die Luftkriegsschuld} Schriftenreihe des Instituts zur Erforschung und Froderung des internationalen Pressewesen der Union nationaler Journalistenverbände (Nürnberg: 1944); “Planmäßiger Luftterror. Vom ungezielten Bombenwurf zum bewußten Angriff auf Wohnviertel und Kulturstätten,” \textit{Deutsche Luftwacht, Ausgabe Luftwissen: Zeitschrift für Luftfahrttechnik und -forschung mit Mitteilungen der Deutschen Akademie für Luftfahrtforschung} 10, no. 6 (1943) 161.

\textsuperscript{121} See e.g., Eher, ed. \textit{Englands Alleinschuld} 19, where Eher distinguishes “German retaliatory attacks” from “systematic appliance of air terror against the German civilian population”.

\textsuperscript{122} Hans Rumpf and Erhard Klöss explicitly stressed that in spite of its first use by Goebbels the term “terror attack” had become a “technical expression” and was most suitable to describe the Allied practice. Klöss also uses the equally charged phrase “ausradieren”: Klöss, \textit{Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland} 21-22: Rumpf, \textit{Das war der Bombenkrieg} 39.
ric”, while using the terms “terror” and “murder” to describe the Allied bombings.\textsuperscript{123} This reflects and in which the distinction between a “clean” German army and a “dirty” Anglo-American strategy was implicitly presumed and the “terrorist”

\textsuperscript{123} For the term “humane and chivalric” or in German “human und ritterlich” see: Spetzler, \textit{Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit} 238; Eher, ed. \textit{Englands Alleinschuld} 5; Kesselring, \textit{Soldat bis zum letzten Tag} 61.
intents of the Allies were taken for granted.

These similarities show how faithfully authors like Rumpf and Spetzler were literally recycling arguments and rhetoric of these Nazi pamphlets, which had been used to mobilize hatred against the enemy and to depict the British as the true aggressors of the war. Another illustration of this continuity was their wholly uncritical reading of Hitler’s repeated calls for a restriction of air bombardments. Notably, his speech of 8 November 1940 in which he legitimized his decision for retaliation was accepted by Spetzler and Rumpf as a sincere attempt to limit the dimensions of total warfare. Rumpf stated that Hitler “feared the strategic air war” and called Hitler’s appeals “certainly calculated, but nevertheless serious.”124 Rumpf even paraphrased Hitler’s speech by stating (as quoted above) that “only five months later –7 September-, after German cities, including Berlin seven times, had been bombed again and again and warnings had been of no use, did the German counter strike follow”.125 Similarly the continuous references to articles in the Hague Conventions of 1899 are a continuation of a rhetorical strategy developed by Nazi propaganda to criminalize the Allied air war.126

There is a certain tension between this picture of a clean and fair Luftwaffe and the also repeated claim by Hitler and Goebbels that with Vergeltungswaffen Germany was willing to exceed the Allied “terror” and Hitler’s famous threat that he would “eradicate” British cities out of revenge. On the other hand, they were

124  Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 27.
125  Ibid. 21. For Hitler’s speech e.g. see: “England missverstand die deutsche Geduld. Führerrede vom 8. November 1940 vor der Alten Garde zu München” (Auszug) in: Eher, ed. Englands Alleinschuld 129-130. Here Hitler stated that “I have waited more than three months, and then one day I gave out the order: now I will take on this battle with the determination with which I have taken on every battle”.
both part of National Socialist propaganda strategy and could easily be combined under the idea of a “counter terror”. Though the Luftwaffe remained unable to find an effective answer to the Allied bombings, the promise of “retaliation” by “Wunderwaffen” such as the V1 and V2 rockets remained an important element of Nazi propaganda.127

Volksgemeinschaft, heroes and victims

Another important element of the Nazi narrative that found its echo in the post-war West German accounts reflected on the German population. Concerned not only to depict the Allied air raids as immoral, Nazi propaganda also wanted to counter their negative impact on German morale, by claiming that the British and American bombings were ineffective. In many articles and pamphlets the Allied bombings were presented not only as a failure in military terms, but also as futile

127 Blank, “Kriegsalltag und Luftkrieg” 436.
attempts to break German morale. The basis for this interpretation was the image of a heroic German Volksgemeinschaft that prevailed under the increasing pressure of Allied “terror”. During the war the official reaction to the increasing Allied air attacks became an important issue for Nazi propaganda, which regarded these attacks as a major legitimacy problem.\(^{128}\) Nazi leaders were aware that the inability of the German Luftwaffe and civil defense to protect the Germans against the growing dangers of bombing or to stop them by “retaliating” with a counteroffensive on British cities had a strong negative impact on the trust of the Germans in their government. For example, the heavy raids on cities like Kassel and Hamburg in 1943 had led to a strong demoralization of the German civilians, who were increasingly losing their faith in a German victory and reacted with cynicism and apathy.\(^{129}\)

In reaction to the fear that the Germans were in danger of being negatively influenced by the Allied bombings, the propaganda fanatically emphasized the bravery, loyalty and stubbornness of the German people under the attacks but also sought to collectivize the mourning over the losses. An important reaction of the propaganda-press to this threat of demoralization was a strong emphasis on the bravery and loyalty of the Volksgemeinschaft and a campaign to treat the air war’s victims as heroes. The Nazis ritualized a myth of the German “hero-victim”, who was characterized by loyalty, obedience and the will to sacrifice. In commemora-
tion services, organized in different cities that had suffered heavy attacks, the civilian dead were presented as heroes, who had died with honor in a military battle for their fatherland. During the Third Reich the sacrificial meaning of the word *Opfer* dominated. In the Nazi propaganda the victims of the bombings were celebrated as heroes, who had sacrificed their lives for the greater good. In an article in *Das Reich* following the bombing of Cologne in 1942 the author concluded that “now West Germany demonstrates that a close community’s will to live does allow material damage but does not allow total loss of spirit and character”.

While the sacrificial meaning of *Opfer* dominated the Nazi accounts, the extent of the German suffering received increasing attention in Nazi propaganda, especially beginning in 1943, when it became harder to ignore. Now, the emphasis shifted to the idea that the stubborn *Volksgemeinschaft* was able to face the hardships of the bombing war and move on despite the heavy strains. Also, especially after the raid on Dresden in February 1945, the Nazi press started to explicitly describe the horrific details of the bombings, something they had avoided up till then. Now the supposed Allied objective to erase the Germans as a whole was instrumentalized to extort the Germans to support the Nazi regime at a time when belief in the *Endsieg* was fading drastically. The message presented by the Nazi propaganda was that the Germans had no choice but to keep up their resistance against the enemy, since they could expect no mercy or comfortable peace

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132 Thiessen, *Eingebrannt ins Gedächtnis* 44.

133 See e.g. Neutzner, “Vom Alltäglichen zum Exemplarischem” 110-127.
but were facing annihilation and slavery. In a lengthy and relatively detailed article in *Das Reich*, Rudolph Sparing stated that the Allies through the “murder of Dresden” wanted to enforce the capitulation of Germany in order to subsequently be able to “execute the death penalty to the remaining part of the population”. He concluded with a warning: “Against this threat there is no other solution than that of the fighting resistance”.134

While the willingness of the Germans to sacrifice themselves for the Third Reich drastically decreased in the last phase of the Second World War, a part of the National Socialist ideal of the hero-victim survived. 135 This blurred image of Germans as a heroic *Volksgemeinschaft* and a community of suffering and endurance was also echoed in various postwar West German accounts. Some authors praised the “will to resist” of the German people in a way that resembled the general themes of Nazi propaganda. While General Hampe, in an article for *Ziviler Luftschutz*, gave a very euphemistic view of the “men and women” who had to face the attacks and of the “misled and deluded” German people who “fought an unparalleled battle for their existence”,136 it was especially in the work of Hans Rumpf that the German civilians under Allied attack appear as heroes. Heavily charged with pathos, Rumpf’s books romanticized the “phenomena of *Leidenschaft* (ability to endure duress/hardship) and *Widerstandskraft* (the power of resistance) of a people confronted with an ultimate exertion in a bombing war of

134 Sparing, “Der Tod von Dresden”.
135 Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden* 600ff.
which it was the target”.\footnote{Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 125.} Rumpf continued to praise the “brave steadfastness” of the Germans who were “constantly in a condition ready for air defense” and emphasized that this steadfastness was rooted in the “virtues” of a specific “German \textit{Volkscharakter}”. In a clearly racially based argumentation that echoed all the central aspects of Nazi propaganda Rumpf suggested that Germans’ “great sense of duty” as well as their “distinct sense for natural resistance against destruction” were the most probable reasons why the Germans had endured the bombings so much more bravely than had other people.\footnote{Ibid. 127-129. Though not emphasizing the German “\textit{Volkscharakter}” explicitly, many other writers similarly described the position of the German people as a mixture of suffering and brave endurance. See e.g. Klöss, \textit{Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland} 21. Also see the police report written in Hamburg 25-8-1943, in which the reporting officer makes a similar remark when he described the different reactions of Germans and foreign forced labourers to the bombing of Hamburg. He describes the reaction of the German \textit{Volksgenossen} as “calm”, “brave” and “confident” especially in contrast to the French workers who were “extremely anxious”. See: Klöss, \textit{Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland} 61.}

The ideal of the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} was particularly present in eyewitness accounts of the bombings, in which the heroic sacrifice and terrible suffering described often directly reflected the language of Nazi-propaganda-discourse. Reports of officials not only reflected the official language of the National Socialist regime, but in many aspects, such as their portrayal of individual heroism, these stories internalized a narrative of courage and cohesion that was strongly affected by the ideology of the taunted and brave German \textit{Volksgemeinschaft}. As the work of Hampe and Rumpf demonstrates, many functionaries who had been involved in air protection or fire fighting tended to portray their own roles in a heroic manner, and while often downplaying their relationship to the regime, they made use of a heroic language to describe their actions, which was very similar to the language of Nazi propaganda.
But by only selectively adopting the National Socialist ideal of the hero victim, the postwar accounts, particularly since the 1960s, depicted Germans as “victims”. Where the Nazi propaganda had portrayed the Germans as a community that supported Hitler and the Nazi state, the postwar accounts often detached the Germans from their regime, by seeing them as victims of both Nazism and the Allied bombings.\textsuperscript{139} The air war had created a “community of suffering” amongst the Germans that reflected an “open-hearted humaneness” and made the community feel secure. These proud and brave Germans endured all the hardship and were eventually driven into the arms of Nazi propaganda, since the Allies had made clear that they were aiming to erase the Germans as a whole. Thereby, the Allies had not only misjudged the German people (by expecting that they would react just like the weaker “Roman” people of France or Italy) they had also prolonged the war. It had been the Allies with their brutal and immoral plans and practices who had provided the “main arguments” for the Germans to continue to support the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{140}

\textit{Occident and the destruction of Europe}

The idea of a bravely resisting ethnic community driven into the arms of its oppressive regime because it had no choice was connected to another central argument in the National Socialist interpretation of the bombings. This was the interpretation in which the Allied bombings were regarded as an attempt to erase the German people and its culture. Thus, they were an attack on the very essence of the Occident and the European “\textit{Kernraum}”. Though the threat of total annihilation

\textsuperscript{139} Behrenbeck, \textit{Der Kult um die toten Helden} 600.
\textsuperscript{140} Rumpf, \textit{Das war der Bombenkrieg} 136.
of the German people was more explicitly stated in the final phase of the war, the idea that the British were trying to destroy not only Germany but Europe and its abendländische (Occidental) culture had formed a central element in Nazi propaganda since the beginning of the air war. The idea that the Anglo-Americans were deliberately erasing the cultural highlights of the European mainland was emphasized to illustrate that the British and Americans were disgracefully failing in their attempts to attack German military targets. And especially from 1942 onwards, Nazi propaganda increasingly labeled the Allied bombings as cultural barbarism. Dwelling strongly on propaganda battles of the First World War, the Allied bombings were now taken as evidence that the air war represented an assault by un-European barbarians on continental European culture.141 With their bombing campaign the Allies were not fighting a military battle but were pursuing “their detailed plan of the obliteration of Europe”.142

Here again, the Nazi propaganda treated the destruction of old cultural values with ambivalence. On the one hand, Hitler repeatedly denounced Churchill as a cultural barbarian, who did not care about “European cultural values”.143 On the
other hand, more than once, Hitler and other Nazi leaders celebrated this destruction as a catharsis, which allowed the regime to rebuild Germany according to National Socialist principles. After the large-scale destruction of Cologne in 1942, Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary that Hitler had pointed out that the attack had a positive side. Hitler cynically stated that the bombings had cleared the city’s structure, which he had planned to destroy himself in order to rebuild the city according to National Socialist ideals. 144 Similarly, after the large-scale attack on Dresden in 1945, Robert Ley, the leader of the German Labor Front, celebrated the destruction of the “old civil heritage” of the city’s cultural values. “This way we march into the German victory, without all superfluous dead weight and without the heavy ideal and material baggage of bourgeois culture”. 145

However, the German propaganda ministry of Joseph Goebbels was aware that this interpretation was not very popular and preferred an explanation in which anger was expressed over the cultural barbarism of the Allies. Goebbels considered Ley’s article a gross miscalculation and a counterproductive way of handling the Allied bombing war. One day later an article by Rudolf Sparing in Das Reich gave an alternative interpretation of the bombing of Dresden, which replaced Ley’s cynicism with grief and anger over the loss of Dresden’s cultural values. From now on, German propaganda focused on the destruction of Dresden and emphasized the city’s culture and beauty, making it a symbol of the Europeanness of German culture. References to the Europeanness of the German cities under attack and the depiction of Dresden as the epitome of the European and Occiden-

145 Robert Ley in Der Angriff 3-3 1945, quoted in: Neutzner, “Vom Alltäglichen zum Exemplarischen” 121.
tal spirit were explicitly emphasized in the press reactions to the massive bomb-
ings on 13 and 14 February. Rudolf Sparing stressed the uniqueness of Dresden’s
cultural values by portraying the air war as a threat to the “abendländische Kultur”
and claimed that in Dresden “a city of complete harmony” had been “erased from
the European sky”. 146 Another article summarized the European dimension by
stating: “Dresden was not just another German city, it was a European city, and it
was common property of the ‘abendländische Menschheit’ (Occidental humanity)”. 147

The underlying idea was that the Allies had attacked not only the German air
forces and German civilians, but that the ultimate target of the “Anglo-American”
attacks had been German culture, which meant “European” culture and civiliza-
tion. 148 This perspective, describing the bombings as an attack on European cul-
ture reappeared in postwar historiography, especially in those accounts dealing
with the bombing of Dresden. Axel Rodenberger’s and Wolfgang Paul’s accounts
of the bombing of Dresden explicitly paint that city as the geographic and sym-
bolic centre of the Abendland. Rodenberger, for example, stressed the universal
and Occidental value of Dresden “one of the most beautiful cities in the world” by
claiming that “it was a trusteeship that Dresden exercised, a common property of
the Abendland, treasured by this city”. 149 The idea that the bombing of Dresden
was particularly dreadful because that city represented crucial and unique Euro-
pean cultural treasures was also present in most of the more general works on
the Allied bombings. 150 The Allied bombings and specifically the damage done to

146 Sparing, “Der Tod von Dresden”.
147 Newspaper article included in one of the copies of Habermacher and Koerbner,
Reuter fälscht die Luftkriegsschuld that is preserved in the Rara-Leesesaal of the Staatsbibliothek
zu Berlin. Here only the date is mentioned, not the original newspaper.
148 Lambourne, War damage 106.
149 Rodenberger, Der Tod von Dresden 185.
150 Czesany and Spetzler stress the “Europeanness” of Dresden explicitly. Spetzler
architecture and art collections were often presented as a “loss” not only for Germany but for European culture in general. By bombing Germany, according to Hans Rumpf, the Anglo-Americans had brought catastrophe to the “Ancient European family of states”, the European “Kernraum” or “Kernbild” (Core space or core image of Europe). By attacking Dresden the Allies had destroyed many “singular creations of the European spirit”.151

This idea of Germany and especially Dresden as the representatives of old European and Occidental cultural values further stressed the distinction between “humane and civilized” Germans and “barbaric” Anglo-Americans in a way that sometimes closely resembled the picture painted by Goebbels’s propaganda ministry. In addition to portraying Germany as a symbol for the “old Europe,” the propaganda sometimes explicitly depicted the Anglo-Americans as “non-European” barbarians. The comparison between the Allied bombings and the Mongol invasion of Europe during the Early Middle Ages served to confirm this “Asian” image of the bombings.152 Also in some West German accounts of Dresden, as in the work of Wolfgang Paul and Axel Rodenberger, the postwar city represented the “lost” part of Europe, because, where once it had been the geographic and cultural centre of Europe – in Mitteleuropa, it now lay in the Soviet Zone and painfully represented the division of Germany and of Europe.153

reminded the reader that Dresden until then had been “one of the most famous sights of the abendländische Kultur”. Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 317. Also see: Czesany, Nie wieder Krieg 134; Kurowski, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 349.

151 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 33; Rumpf, “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord”; Rumpf, “Bomber-Harris” 23. A similar stressing of the Europeanness of the destroyed cultural treasures in Germany in: Hampe, Der zivile Luftschutz 199.

152 Rumpf, “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord”. Interestingly this comparison was originally used by British Major General Fuller, whom Rumpf cites here. See the paragraph below and: J.F.C Fuller, The Second World War 1939-45. A Strategical and Tactical History (London: 1948) 222-228.

153 For an analysis of the anti-Communist rhetoric in the works of Paul and Rodenberger, see chapter 2.
3b Finding crown witnesses: The reading of British historiography in West Germany

Major JFC Fuller

In addition to “recycling” German wartime interpretations the West German historians relied heavily on British-American literature and sources. While the German historians were not part of historical institutions, they nevertheless made an effort to create a historical overview of the bombing war. With many important archives still closed and only very limited access to relevant data, German accounts of the 1950s and '60's relied strongly- or even primarily- on British and American literature. This initially consisted primarily of memoirs published by British and American military leaders and publicists. In these works important figures like James Molony Spaight, Arthur Harris and Lord Tedder, or relative outsiders and opponents of the strategic bombings like John F.C. Fuller or law-specialist F.J.P. Veale reflected on the bombing war as well as on their personal roles in it.\(^{154}\) Also, in 1945 the Americans published an official report, the *US Strategic Bombing Survey*, on the chronology and impact of the Allied bombing offensive against Germany. In 1961 British historians Charles Webster and Noble Frankland published a vast multivolume ‘official’ British history of the bombing war.\(^{155}\) In 1963 the now notorious David Irving published his bestseller *The Destruction of Dresden*, in


\(^{155}\) David MacIsaac, ed. *The United States strategic bombing survey*, 10 vols. (New York: 1978). German scholars’ access to this document, however, was initially limited. Hans Rumpf complained in *Der Hochrote Hahn* (1952 ) that he had not been granted access to it. In preparing his second work *Das war der Bombenkrieg*, however, he had been able to study it and included parts in his appendix. (See Rumpf, *Das war der Bombenkrieg* 173-201). Also: Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The strategic air offensive against Germany, 1939-1945* 4vols. (London: 1961).
which many new documents and photographs were presented for the first time. These mainly British military leaders and historians provided the German authors with valuable information. “Citing the British”, however, also had a clear rhetorical purpose, and in this sense functioned as a strategy that had already been practiced during the war. The Nazi pamphlets which had collected documents on the air war had often included quotes from British critics or neutral press which denounced the Allied air war. Several propaganda pamphlets consisted of a collage of quotes which either illustrated British brutality or protested against it.

Very similarly, after the war, a selective reading of British sources and historiography became a popular rhetorical strategy to underline the conclusions of the German authors. The British works were often portrayed as cynical and propagandistic standpoints that were meant to defend an immoral strategy. Those who defended the British strategy, such as James M. Spaight and Arthur Harris, were quoted to illustrate the cynicism of the British, who even after the war defended the mass murder of German civilians. Sometimes a specific single and isolated argument or statement was repeatedly quoted to underline a certain argument. The most common example is the frequent citing of a comment by J. M. Spaight, a British civil servant in the Air Ministry, who wrote several influential books on legal and military aspects of the air war, that “We (the British BvBB) have started, before the Germans, bombing targets on the German mainland. That is a historical fact”. Spaight’s claim served not only as an argument that even British mili-

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157  For example see: *Der Anglo-Amerikanische Bombenkrieg* 12 ff; Also see: *Dokumente über die Alleinschuld Englands am Bombenkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung.* Auswärtiges Amt 1943 Nr. 8 (Berlin: 1943); Habermacher and Koerbner, *Reuter fälscht die Luftkriegsschuld.*
158  J.M. Spaight was secretary of state in the British ministry of air force/aviation and reflected on the Allied bombings during the war with his often cited: Spaight, *Bombing vindicated* 68; Also see: Spaight, *Air Power.* For examples of quotes see: Spetzler, *Luftkrieg*
tary officials accepted responsibility for the air war retrospectively, but also demonstrated the cold arrogance with which the responsible military officials still regarded this initiative as a justifiable act of warfare.

But more important than these defenders of the British bombings were those English writers who criticized ‘their own’ military and political leaders for bombing Germany or provided the German authors with arguments to support ‘their cause’. The occasional protests that were voiced in the British public debate during the war – for instance by the Bishop of Chicester George Bell or by pacifist writer Vera Britain – were often quoted to illustrate that ‘even in Britain’ the strategic bombings were a contested and controversial subject.159

A similar strategy was pursued in the second supplement to the Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden, in which press responses from neutral countries had been collected. These articles mostly criticized the Allied bombings as an immoral strategy, especially after the bombing of Dresden in February 1945.160 Though the editors of the Dokumente presented these articles as “objective” moral criticisms from a neutral perspective, some of the foreign press, especially the oft-quoted Svenska Morgenbladet and other Swedish newspapers, were heavily influenced and success-

159 “Quoting the British” was a rhetorical strategy that had been introduced by Nazi propaganda and was continued after the war, when the number of critical British voices increased. See for example: Der Anglo-Amerikanische Bombenkrieg, 12. In addition to British dissident voices, criticism by the press in neutral countries was often quoted as an “objective” opinion. Again, this was a practice started under Nazi propaganda and continued in the Federal Republic. See especially: Peter Paul Nahm and Karlheinz Kugler, eds., Dokumente Deutscher Kriegsschäden. Evakuierte, Kriegssachgeschädigte, Währungsgeschädigte. Die geschichtliche und rechtliche Entwicklung. 2. Beihft: Der Luftkrieg im Spiegel der neutralen Presse (Bonn: 1962) and Klöss, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 173-268. Bishop Bell also became a central figure in Rolf Hochhuth’s play: Hochhuth, Soldaten 133-180.
fully manipulated by the German propaganda ministry.\textsuperscript{161}

Even more popular were British accounts, which demonstrated an implicit identification with the German military position. The accounts of international law expert Frederick J.P. Veale and Major General John F.C. Fuller’s, both former supporters of the Sir Oswald Mosley’s British Fascist movement, were particularly popular.\textsuperscript{162} Major General Fuller had been one of the most important British military theorists and one of the founders of the \textit{Blitzkrieg}-theory. He became known as a great British military theorist, who even before the war had always been skeptical of strategic bombings, but he also had become controversial in Britain for his open admiration of Adolf Hitler.\textsuperscript{163}

After the war Fuller wrote \textit{The Second World War 1939-45. A Strategical and Tactical History} (1947) which heavily criticized the Allied bombings. Fuller’s account, like the German works discussed above, relied heavily on the phrases and arguments of Nazi propaganda. It was a vehement moralistic attack on the Western Allies, combined with an apologetic categorization of the Axis powers, whose role he considered to be no more “monstrously unjust” than that of “other heads of state and of other nations in the past”. In Fuller’s view, the war aims of the Western allies were even worse, since the war aims of the Germans at least had been “sane and possible” unlike the British aim of winning the war by undermining German morale and later enforcing political dominance in postwar Europe.\textsuperscript{164} Like Rumpf and others, Fuller

\textsuperscript{161} Neutzner, "Vom Alltäglichen zum Exemplarischen" 115-117; Nahm and Kugler, eds., \textit{Dokumente Kriegsschäden 2. Beilfeft}.
\textsuperscript{164} Fuller, \textit{The Second World War 400 ff}.
stressed the British initiative in the bombing war, and uncritically quoted Hitler’s claim that he had waited patiently for the British to stop bombing before he ordered German retaliation. Fuller’s account subscribed to the dominant perspective of post-war German accounts on all fronts. Fuller saw the British bombings as nothing less than part of “a general scheme to devastate Germany and terrorize her civil population” and categorized these attacks as a “Mongolized” attack on European civilization, with “slaughterings that would have disgraced Attila”\(^\text{165}\).

Fuller’s sharply written and explicitly “pro-German” account was very well received in Germany, and not only among rightwing circles. In spite of Fuller’s fascist background, the German translation of Fuller’s book was also positively received by the German liberal press. *Der Spiegel* of 6-12-1950 for example praised Fuller’s account as a “scientifically (wissenschaftlich) precise account of all battles and combat operations of the Second World War” and especially underlined Fuller’s conclusion on the immorality and uselessness of the Allied bombings.\(^\text{166}\) Moreover, this book was extensively quoted in almost all German accounts on the Allied bombing war. In the historiography on the Allied bombings, Fuller’s work was repeatedly used to illustrate that “even British military leaders like Major Fuller” acknowledged the British atrocities against Germans. While conveniently ignoring Fuller’s affiliation with the Nazi regime and his implicit apology for and downplaying of Nazi crimes, the German accounts used Fuller as a “crown witness” for the “German case”\(^\text{167}\). Especially when German authors touched on the legal question

\(^{165}\) Fuller repeatedly draws parallels to “Asian” invasions, referring to the “invasion of the Seljuks” and Attila and repeatedly labelling the bombings as “vandalism”, “barbarism” and “Mongolized” attacks: Ibid. 223, 228, 317, 395, 408.


\(^{167}\) Fuller was quoted in almost all early non-academic German accounts. See: Feuchter, *Geschichte des Luftkriegs* 220; Kurowski, *Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland*, 52, 101; Rumpf, *Das war der Bombenkrieg* 22,143. Rumpf literally uses the term “crown witness” here; Spetzler, *Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit*, on many places e.g. 255 (note 196), 268, 272, 280 (note 349).
as to whether the bombings could be seen as “war crime” were references made to Fuller or others, who were quoted to answer the question. These selective quotations served the rhetorical purpose of countering possible allegations that Germans were subjectively arguing from a one-sided German position.\textsuperscript{168}

\textit{David Irving}

The work of David Irving was more popular and widely known than that of Fuller. In spite of his more distanced style, Irving’s conclusion lay mostly along the same lines as those of Fuller and Rumpf. Irving, for instance, drew no clear conclusion as to whether Dresden really was an “open city” and the attack could be seen as a violation of The Hague Conventions.\textsuperscript{169} Also, the strong emphasis on the exceptional nature of the destruction and the emotional descriptions of suffering in \textit{The Destruction of Dresden} added an extra dimension to the mythological status of Dresden as “unique” event in human history and as the “greatest bloodbath in European history”.\textsuperscript{170}

While Fuller was cited as a seemingly impartial military authority, Irving’s role was different. His work was well received and intensively used in West German historical accounts, partly because Irving had managed to provoke much more attention, but also because he presented new sources and documents. Irving was seen not only as a young and objective British historian, but also as a talented researcher, who had provided extra arguments and proof, which underlined the

\textsuperscript{168} See Rumpf’s remarks on this question: Rumpf, \textit{Das war der Bombenkrieg} 14.

\textsuperscript{169} Irving, \textit{The Destruction of Dresden} 74-75.

\textsuperscript{170} Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 128-164.
basic conclusions the German authors had drawn themselves. His accounts on the different German cities in *und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht* inspired a whole new generation of local lay researchers.

But Irving’s popularity can at least partly be explained by the extent to which his work confirmed the foundations of the narrative that had already become dominant in Germany. Irving’s emphasis on the senselessness of the destruction was particularly stressed in the German press reactions. The liberally oriented magazine *Der Spiegel*, for example, was very positive regarding Irving’s work and summarized his central thesis: that the destruction had been a “senseless act of terror” without military necessity. Similarly the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* underlined Irving’s central conclusions and called the attack a “gruesome killing of 135,000 men, women and children, which did not even have the slightest military effect”.

The extent to which German authors welcomed and accepted Irving’s conclusions also becomes clear from the correspondence between Irving and Hans Rumpf. Irving contacted Rumpf while he was conducting research for his book, after Erich Hampe had advised him to do so in 1961. In his first reaction Rumpf, while providing Irving with information about his personal experiences as General

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173 In a review for the *Berliner Morgenpost* in 1964, Wolfgang Paul, who had also used Irving’s work for his own account *zum Beispiel Dresden* (1964) credited Irving for pointing out that the bombing had been an attempt to destroy the city completely and was an attack without military significance. Irving, who had established the death rate at 135,000 had also succeeded in making his conclusions known in Great Britain where, according to Paul, Irving’s work had not found disagreement “Dresden: Sodom in Sachsen,” *Der Spiegel*, 19-6 1963, 37-40.

Inspector of fire prevention, also remarked that he had himself tried “to clear up some of the questions associated with the bombing of Dresden” but had “established that there is no solid material left, and apparently there never will be such material.” After Irving had published his account, however, the former General Inspector showed more interest. In a letter in 1963 Rumpf sent Irving a short updated account on the bombing of Dresden, again claiming that was his “final account”, but shortly afterwards asked Irving, as a return favor, for the opportunity to view “unpublished material” Rumpf expected Irving to have. Also Rumpf proposed that he and Irving “summarize our source material together in one combined historical publication on Dresden”, a request Irving never granted.

Apart from praising what was perceived as a neutral and balanced account German reactions recognized the impact of David Irving’s work on the international reception of the bombardment. German press articles often interpreted the positive reviews and the resulting public debate in Great Britain and United States as a sign of British self-criticism and recognition of German suffering. Like Fuller and Veale, Irving came to represent the British recognition of the German side, as the article in Die Rheinpfalz announced: “The English recognize their responsibility”. The little criticism Irving received mainly focused on the point that Irving had been relatively reluctant to answer the question of responsibility in a direct manner. In his review of Irving’s work Hans Rumpf complained that

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175  Hans Rumpf to David Irving, 10-6 1961 in Barch/MA 107/19.
176  Hans Rumpf to David Irving, 28-4 1963 in Ibid.
177  “Warum musste Dresden sterben?”
178  To make this point, different articles pointed at the criticism of David Irving and other British public figures, such as British Labour politician and Minister of Housing and Local Government Richard Crossman, who was quoted for labeling the attack as a “crime against humanity”. “Engländer erkennen ihre Verantwortlichkeit an,” Die Rheinpfalz, 13-2 1965. The same quote in “Sodom in Sachsen” 37.
179  Also see the remarks in Und Deutschlands Städte which claimed to avoid “moral” discussions and implicitly dissociated itself from authors like Hampe and Rumpf. Irving,
Irving’s “moral value judgments often were too one-sided from an insular perspective” and, though showing appreciation for his work accused Irving of a partial approval of the Allied air war. More indirectly *Der Spiegel* made a similar point, concluding that Irving, in spite his far-reaching conclusions, had failed to answer the “guilt question” in a satisfactory way. And this was exactly what the article intended to do. Taking Irving’s criticisms of Churchill as a starting point, the article voiced a moral critique of the Allied leaders, depicting the air war as a cynical and senseless act of terror against civilians.

1.4. The Allied bombing and German guilt

*Catastrophe and crime*

If we consider the overarching narrative of these West German historical accounts, two dominant themes can be traced: The Allied bombing as “catastrophe”, and the bombing war as “crime”. The term catastrophe derives from the Greek word “kata-strophe,” meaning “destruction”. Also, it was also used in Greek tragedy, where it stands for the tragic end of the hero, who is confronted with his fate. As a metaphor it often depicts an unexpected phenomenon, which renders people powerless and confronts them with an irrevocable event. Therefore the metaphor “catastrophe” emphasizes the effects, more than the causes and backgrounds. Paradoxically, the catastrophe itself serves as an explanation for its effects and therefore, if not supplemented with secondary explanations leaves the background of...
the catastrophe open.\textsuperscript{182}

Such an emphasis on the effects and lack of explanations often characterized local commemoration ceremonies. In the Federal Republic the Allied bombings were primarily interpreted as a “catastrophe” while the questions of guilt and responsibility were dealt with only implicitly. Indeed, the frequent use of the word “Katastrophe” in West German accounts to describe the effects of the air war on German cities suggests that here too the air war was seen as a “natural disaster” and an act of fate, rather than a result of deliberate human actions. By remembering the Allied bombings either as a catastrophe or a natural disaster, the air war was decontextualized and attention was directed to its effects, to silent mourning and to the admonition that this should “never happen again”. By stressing the powerlessness of Germans and by focusing on the damage, loss and suffering of German civilians the air war became a catastrophic phenomenon, brutally invading in the lives of German families.\textsuperscript{183}

The context of the war was included as only part of this catastrophe, against which the German civilians were passive victims. Only on a metaphoric level were themes like “guilt” “downfall” of relevance. In this sense the air war could be included in a broader narrative which, as is illustrated by Friedrich Meinecke’s book, perceived the Second World War as a “German catastrophe” which not only shifted attention to German suffering but also suggested a certain incapability of finding explanations.\textsuperscript{184}

However, while often referring to the bombings as a catastrophe, most


\textsuperscript{183} Arnold, “\textit{In Quiet Remembrance}”? 86-97, 120-124.

\textsuperscript{184} Lorenz, “Twee soorten catastrofe”.
accounts of the air war focused not only on the catastrophic effects of the bombings but also searched for explanations and a “guilty party”. While, on the one hand, the inherent mechanisms of “war” itself and the Hitler regime were included in the forces who were held responsible, the dominant plot was that here the Allies were to take the primary blame (the Hauptschuld). The early West German accounts of the Allied bombings thus were heavily charged with moral and legal accusations and generally lacked a real attempt to historicize the topic from a distanced and disinterested perspective. Emotionally charged and full of legal arguments and rhetoric that bore close resemblance to former Nazi propaganda, these works formed a narrative of the air war, which was heavily influenced by identity issues in the present. While ignoring the broader context of the Second World War and the crimes committed by Nazi Germany, explicit charges were formulated against the Allies in general and especially against British protagonists Churchill and Harris.

While at first glance “catastrophe” and “crime” seem to be incompatible story lines, they often went hand-in-hand. Such a combination of depicting the air war as a catastrophic event while at the same time clearly locating a guilty party lies at the heart of Rumpf’s Das der Bombenkrieg. Paradoxically Rumpf made the central argument that the German Luftwaffe had not started the air war and had been “wrongly accused” of a guilty role. On the other hand, the bombings were portrayed as a catastrophic disaster, whose consequences seemed to lie largely out of the hands of the British military leaders. In that sense Rumpf called the bombing of Dresden both a “catastrophe” as well as an “orgy of destruction”. In an attempt to solve this contradiction Rumpf pointed at the “inner dynamics” of the air war. According to Rumpf it seemed that this form of bombing war “slipped from the
hands of” the Allied “politicians and their air marshalls” and had become “some-
thing autonomous” and uncontrollably raged “like a natural catastrophe”.\textsuperscript{185}

Moreover, in spite of the clear moral denunciation and rhetorical strategy of criminalizing the Allied bombings, the same accounts that voiced these accusations often were reluctant to pass without hesitation the final judgment that these acts were “crimes” (\textit{Verbrechen}). And though many accounts, especially those of Hans Rumpf and Eberhard Spetzler, followed the line of a historical and legal “court case” against the Allies, eventually even these authors were reluctant to use the word “crime” and sometimes even returned to a moral evaluation in which authors claimed to avoid a “cheap j’accuse”.\textsuperscript{186} Hans Rumpf repeatedly claimed that he was not intending to “blame” any particular party and that it would be “wrong” to claim that only the British were guilty of the air war, a statement, which contradicted his general argument that Germany was “not guilty” in opening the “unrestricted bombing of cities”. A similar ambivalence is expressed in a review of Spetzler’s \textit{Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit} for \textit{Neue Politische Literatur} by Andreas Hillgruber in 1958. Hillgruber underlined Spetzler’s conclusion that the Allied strategic bombing campaign had been “totally unsuccessful” in destroying the German war economy and in breaking German morale, and he praised Spetzler’s work. On the other hand, Hillgruber seemed to be aware of the strong political and moral charge of Spetzler’s work. He pointed to the political sensitivity of his results, which could, Hillgruber claimed, “contrary to the intentions of the author” easily be misinterpreted, since its results were “favorable” for the “German side” while “very incriminating for the Allied air war practice”. Hillgruber added

\textsuperscript{185} Rumpf, \textit{Das war der Bombenkrieg} 10-11, 103-104.
\textsuperscript{186} Rumpf, “Die Bombenschuld” 42.
that it was important not to forget that Spetzler was focusing only on the air war and did not include “the question of correctness according to international law on other levels of warfare”.187

A counter-narrative of German guilt: Dresden vs. Auschwitz

But while Hillgruber pleaded for an integration of Spetzler’s conclusions in a “comprehensive perspective on the Second World War”, the absence of this broader historical context in Spetzler’s work was no coincidence. In spite of the reluctance to pass explicit judgment on the Allies, the decontextualization of the Allied bombings was a vital element of the narrative of authors like Spetzler and Rumpf. The question is how the apparent contradiction between the accusative tone and the eventual reluctance to label the Allied bombings as a crime is to be understood. A possible explanation can be found in the political sensitivity of the matter. For clear political reasons in the Federal Republic there was generally a far greater reluctance to formulate moral accusations against the new political partners Great Britain and the United States than against the Soviet Union, which, in the case of the expulsions, was often directly accused of criminal acts. This would explain the reluctance to use the word “crime” as a mechanism of politically motivated self-censorship.

But a closer look at these moral accusations against the British and Americans illustrates that there was another issue at stake. What is surprising is that though Nazi crimes - let alone the crimes committed by the Wehrmacht - were ignored in these works, the idea of “German guilt” is implicitly present in the subtext as a

heavy burden on German identity. It therefore seemed vital, in Hans Rumpf’s words, that “Germany does not, in addition to the otherwise justified feeling of guilt, one that weighs heavily on us, additionally have to carry the weight of unleashing the total air war”. Rumpf, though referring to an abstract notion of German guilt, effectively exonerated the Germans as a collective by focusing only on their victimhood caused by Allied destructive will and on the German struggle to cope with the double pressure of Allied attacks and Nazi oppression.

Though focusing on a clear notion of British and American guilt, the final point these works wanted to make was not so much that the British and Americans were war criminals, but that their guilt deprived them of the right to pass judgment on the Germans. Just as the politically coordinated documentary of the expulsions had been conceived as “showing the other side of the story” and dis-

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188 In a 1961 article in *Der Spiegel*, this line was quoted as one of the central points of Rumpf’s work. The idea presented by Rumpf is that however an abstract notion of “guilt” was recognized, it was also regarded as a “burden”. This very typical line of argument in which it is claimed that the burden of guilt is not increased by additional guilt for the bombing war, implicitly suggests that actually the contrary is the case. It is used to balance the question of German guilt, by offering a different perspective on criminality, victimhood, morality and law. Rumpf, *Das war der Bombenkrieg* 21: “Brand-Verächter” 38. A similar argument that suggests that reference to Anglo-American responsibility for violating international law forms some kind of counterweight to the seemingly convenient Allied denunciation of Germany is present in references to the fact that air bombardments had been excluded from the allegations formulated during the Nuremberg trials: Spetzler, *Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit* 373-375.

189 The mild comments recently made on Rumpf’s work by Thomas Neumann and Ian Roberts miss this crucial point. Both seem to fall for Rumpf’s rhetorical tricks such as his claim that he was not attempting to settle scores or to ‘heroize’ the Germans. However, Rumpf refers to “the German people” strictly in heroizing and victimizing terms. It is therefore questionable, whether Rumpf indeed differed from Friedrich’s *Der Brand* on this point as Roberts concludes. See his comments in Ian Roberts, “Perpetrators and Victims: Wolfdietrich Schnurre and the Bombenkrieg over Germany,” *Forum for modern language studies* 41, no. 2 (2005) 200-212, here: 205-206. Also see the very questionable praise of *Das war der Bombenkrieg* as some kind of pioneering work by Thomas Neumann. Neumann portrays Rumpf as “one of the few who had the perspective to include the psychological and mental consequences of the area bombings in a “documentary account”. Neumann obviously misses or ignores the victimizing rhetoric, the close proximity of Rumpf’s work to Nazi propaganda; let alone his apologetic remarks on the German Luftwaffe. See: Thomas W. Neumann, “Der Bombenkrieg. Zur ungeschriebenen Geschichte einer kollektiven Verletzung,” in *Nachkrieg in Deutschland*, ed. Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: 2001) 319-342, here: 328-329.
proving the notion that only the victims of German occupation and Nazi terror had suffered, most early historical works on the Allied bombings seem to have had a similar motivation.\textsuperscript{190}

With this, the narrative of the air war related to a broader discussion on the Second World War. The combination of moral and legal claims and sometimes explicitly voiced indignation about the “one-sidedness” of the Allied “victors’ justice” shows how this narrative on the Allied bombings has to be seen in the context of “politics of the past”, which aimed at a general amnesty and integration of former followers of the Third Reich and a general defense against a supposedly dominant idea of German collective guilt.\textsuperscript{191} Behind the legal pleas against the Allies lay criticism of the way the question of German guilt had been treated by the Western Allies and resentment that an unfair and undifferentiated concept of German collective guilt formed a burden to German identity. While Norbert Frei and Mathias Beer have demonstrated the \textit{Vertreibung} was actively used as a moral “counterweight” to balance allegations of German guilt, the accounts of the Allied bombing war have to be seen in the same light.\textsuperscript{192}

While there is certain continuity in the way the Allied bombings were interpreted in West Germany, a certain shift can be seen from the late 1950s. The popularity of David Irving’s accounts suggests a renewed interest in a moral discussion of German suffering and in a moral questioning of the Allied war meth-

\textsuperscript{190} Again see the work of Mathias Beer and Robert Moeller who argue that especially the \textit{Dokumentation der Vertreibung} reflected a political need for documenting and pleading for the German “side of the story”. Moeller, \textit{War stories} 181; Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld”.

\textsuperscript{191} Frei, \textit{Vergangenheitspolitik} 22-23, 305-305.

\textsuperscript{192} Moeller, \textit{War stories} 51-87; Beer, “Die Dokumentation der Vertreibung,” ; Beer, “Ein der wissenschaftlichen Forschung”; Beer, ‘Im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Zeitgeschichte; Beer, “Verschluesssache”.
ods. While the counter-position of accounts like Spetzler’s seemed to be primarily directed against the “victors’ justice” of the Allies, the works of the 1960s increasingly related to an internal German debate over the “guilt question”. While Hans Rumpf, for example, accused the British and Americans of not wanting to recognize their responsibility for the bombing of civilians, he also suggested that such a “taboo” prevailed in Germany, not only because of the traumatic nature of this collective experience, but as the result of a deliberate politics of “silencing”.

Moreover, it is striking that the increased interest in the Allied bombings and many of the more emotional and accusatory accounts of the Allied bombings were published parallel to the increasing debates on German responsibility. Until the late 1950s West Germans had largely ignored the details of the Holocaust and avoided specific discussions about German war crimes. But from the late 1950s, a series of legal trials against German perpetrators marked a graduate shift in this climate. The trial against members of the German Einsatzgruppen in Ulm in 1958, the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961, the Frankfurter Auschwitz trial, which took place from 1963 to 1965 and the Sobibor trials in Hagen in 1965-1966 brought the question of the Nazi crimes back into the German debate and focused attention on the Holocaust. In West German culture, new literary works by writers such as Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll and others began to address the complicity of Germans in their regime more directly.

The background of these debates on the German genocide and war of anni-

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194 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 10-13.
195 Fulbrook, German National Identity 67-75 and Dubiel, Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte 81-127.
196 E.g. Günter Grass, Die Blechtrommel (Neuwied am Rhein: 1959); Heinrich Böll, Billiard um halb zehn (Köln: 1959).
Hilation becomes clear in the presence of implicit or explicit comparisons between the Allied bombings and the Holocaust in German accounts of the air war. Immediately after the war, the comparison between the bombings and the Nazi crimes had already become a common defense strategy. For example, in a November 1945 report in which American military leaders reflected on their confrontations with Germans discussing their responsibility for the Nazi genocide, the air war was an often recurring counterargument. As a typical example the report quoted a German who had stated that “For every Jew that died in a concentration camp, several Germans had died by air raids”.\(^{197}\) A similar argument was also often used by German perpetrators. The notoriously brutal SS Oberscharführer in Sobibor, Karl Frenzel, for example, in his defense during his trial in 1965 made a direct comparison between his position and that of Allied bombing pilots to justify his actions. In contemplating his apparent contempt of having been in the “regrettable” situation of having to serve in an extermination camp, Frenzel stated that he “thought very often about the enemy bomber pilots, who surely were not asked whether they wanted to carry out their murderous flights against German people in their homes in such a manner”.\(^{198}\)

As the defensive position of Frenzel illustrates, during the new trials against Nazi perpetrators and the debates on extending the statute of limitations (Verjährungsdebatten), this strategy of “balancing” the Allied bombings became popu-
lar. It was also taken over by those who criticized the new focus on German responsibility for war crimes. It was in light of the renewed attention on the Nazi genocide that similar arguments were brought up by German historians of the air war. In his 1959 overview of the Second World War conservative German historian Karl Dietrich Erdmann stated that “next to the names of Belzec, Treblinka and Auschwitz as horrific symbols of radical Evil (...) stands the name of Dresden”. And going even further Hans Rumpf, by writing about Dresden under the caption “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord” in an article for the extreme rightwing newspaper Deutsche National und Soldatenzeitung in 1965, suggested that the Allies had acted in a “genocidal” manner. Rumpf argued that the bombing of Dresden had made clear to the Germans that the Allies were attempting the “Ausrottung” and “physical destruction” of the German people. Rumpf presented the bombings as a private war instigated by Churchill who vengefully wanted to punish the Germans for their support of Hitler.

But apart from these direct equations of the Allied bombings with genocide, which were made by a former Nazi functionary in an extreme rightwing medium, the context of a renewed interest in German responsibility for war crimes was reflected in a new attention to the bombing of Dresden. Though avoiding the direct equation implied by Rumpf’s categorization of the bombing as “Völkermord”, there was a strong tendency in press articles and reactions to the work of David Irving to emphasize the magnitude of Dresden. Calling Dresden “probably the greatest mass murder of human history” and the structural tendency to exaggerate the death figures of the Dresden raid, if not as an explicit “balanc-

200 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 141; Rumpf, “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord”.
ing” of Dresden against Auschwitz, nevertheless have to be understood in light of a public debate in which the singularity of the Nazi crimes became more and more accentuated.\textsuperscript{201} As the narrative of German guilt and the exceptional quality of the Nazi crimes became more dominant, so did the attempts to appropriate Dresden as a comparable crime, in which it had been Germans who suffered the ultimate horrors of war.

**Conclusion**

West German accounts of the air war published in the 1950s and ’60’s show not only a remarkable coherence in narrative elements and argumentation but also reflect a gradual shift in German memory culture. Most historical accounts of the Allied bombings followed a very similar argumentation and drew the same moral and historical conclusions. With the exception of Feuchter’s early account, West German historians were unanimous in their conclusion that the Allied bombings had been largely a militarily senseless act of terror against innocent German civilians. Grounded in a long tradition of Anglo-American strategic thinking, which incorporated civilians as legitimate targets, the British, led by the cynical Arthur Harris and Winston Churchill, had primarily aimed at the German city centers and civilian targets. In contrast, the “clean” German Luftwaffe had fought its fights in a “humane and chivalric” way and had done its best to defend the Germans. Almost all German accounts of the air war, maintained that unlike the Allied bombings, the German attacks on cities such as Rotterdam or Warsaw had been purely legitimate tactical attacks.

Often based on legal arguments with references to international law and

The Hague Conventions, these accounts were often structured as a “legal brief” or “court case” against the “Allies” and in favor of the “German side”. In their focus on the distinction between the British and the German air raids the historical context of the Second World War was largely lost and other forms of “total warfare” and the crimes committed by Nazism and the Wehrmacht were ignored. The bombing war was seen as the most elementary moral question of the Second World War.

In their efforts to make their “case” against the Allies more strongly, West German historians quoted British critics of the Allied war methods, like John Fuller or David Irving. As “crown witnesses” these authors, who often had a rightwing political background, were cited to show that moral denunciation of the bombing and a positive view of the Luftwaffe was also shared by non-Germans.

When looking at the backgrounds and origins of the central arguments that dominated West German accounts, the degree to which they “recycled” elements of Nazi propaganda is striking. In their effort to morally denounce the Allied bombings, these works often dwelled on earlier themes and historical strategies. In various pamphlets and documentation Nazi propaganda had argued that German bombings were legitimate while the Allies had turned to inhuman “terror attacks”, arguments which were often literally repeated after the war. Also, the idea that the Allies had not only wanted to win the war against Germany, but had attempted to wipe out German culture and the essence of the abendländische Kultur became popular in different West German works on the bombings. Moreover, there were strong continuities in the way the attitudes and position of the German civilians were described. The image of a heroic Volksgemeinschaft, a central element of the Nazi narratives on the air war, was echoed in many postwar works. These portrayed the Germans as a community, which had bravely endured the bombings,
and whose morale, against the expectations of the Allies had not been broken. Bombing had only strengthened their will to resist. The Germans were now seen not as followers of Hitler but as victims of both Nazi terror and the Allied bombings. Along with the Luftwaffe, the Germans as a collective were detached from their regime and seen as its victims. From the 1960s German accounts focused explicitly on civilian suffering under the bombs. As many of the authors of these accounts were ex-servicemen, the early West German historiography on the air war expressed a strong identification with the Luftwaffe. Their accounts not only denounced the Allies but they also clearly distinguished between the brave Luftwaffe officers and their Nazi leaders. In the West German accounts of the Allied bombings the Luftwaffe as well as local police and Nazi civil defense organizations represented the “good” part of Germany and were distinguished from the Nazi leaders who had started the war.

The “court case” against the allies can for a large part be seen as an attempt to find a “counter-narrative” against the narrative of German guilt. While the German war crimes were largely ignored, the broader debate on German guilt was often clearly sensible in the background of these works. Many of the accounts referred to the unjust and one-sided character of the Nuremberg trials and criticized the British and Americans for their biased notion of war crimes. Until the late 1950s, the Cold War and questions such as the integration of German prisoners of war and expellees dominated West German public debate. As the rivalry between the interest groups of the expellees and the bomb-victims illustrates, both the expulsions and the bombings were considered politically relevant issues, but of differing political magnitude.

Although they could not be as easily instrumentalized for anti-communist
propaganda and hence were less popular than the “expulsion-issue”, the Allied bombings nevertheless played a similar role in German memory debates. For West German postwar identity the bombings illustrated above all the one-sidedness of the Allied trials against German war crimes, and the atrocities of the bombings showed that the Germans had suffered immensely during the war. This suffering had been made worse by the lack of recognition and by the injustice of the allegation that the Germans themselves had been responsible for this destruction. This was the issue the German historical accounts discussed above primarily wanted to settle. For all the “guilt” that “weighed” so “heavily” on the Germans, they could not be blamed for the crimes of the Allied city bombings. When it came to the bombing war, the Germans were pure and innocent victims. The questions of responsibility for the “crimes committed by Hitler” were no longer relevant. Especially with the increased attention to the Nazi genocide, due to a new series of trials the subtext of this discussion on German guilt became even clearer. It was in parallel to the new interest in the Nazi genocide that a critical moral perspective on the Allied bombings became increasingly present in German discussions of the war. By explicitly labeling the attack on Dresden as “genocide” in 1965, the year of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, Hans Rumpf demonstrated how the issue of the Allied bombings had become a counterargument in a historical culture, in which the Nazi crimes were now part of the public debate.