

The “Whirlwind” of Bomber Harris

Arthur Travers Harris, known as “Bomber” Harris, became commander of RAF Bomber Command in early 1942. Until then, Bomber Command hadn’t done much, but the energetic and controversial Harris soon changed all that. He became the architect and chief proponent of nighttime “area bombing” of major German cities. He developed tactics, techniques, and training for the task.

In March, he struck Lubeck. In April, he bombed Rostock. Then, on the night of May 30-31, 1942, he launched a devastating, 1,000-bomber attack on Cologne. A few days later, Harris went before RAF film cameras and delivered a chilling, two-minute message, shown on newsreels nationwide. He was unleashing a whirlwind on Germany, he said. “They sowed the wind,” he warned, “and now they are going to reap the whirlwind.” They did. The film has been preserved in the Imperial War Museum.

The Nazis entered this war under the rather childish delusion that they were going to bomb everybody else and nobody was going to bomb them.

At Rotterdam, London, Warsaw, and half a hundred other places, they put that rather naive theory into operation.

They sowed the wind and now they are going to reap the whirlwind.

Cologne, Lubeck, Rostock—Those are only just the beginning. We cannot send a thousand bombers a time over Germany every time, as yet.

But the time will come when we can do so.

Let the Nazis take good note of the western horizon.

There they will see a cloud as yet no bigger than a man’s hand.

But behind that cloud lies the whole massive power of the United States of America.

When the storm bursts over Germany, they will look back to the days of Lubeck and Rostock and Cologne as a man

“Strategic Offensive Against Germany”

Air Marshal Arthur T. Harris
Commander in Chief, RAF Bomber Command
Remarks for Royal Air Force Films
London
June 3, 1942

Find the text on the
Air Force Magazine’s Web site
www.airforce-magazine.com
“Keeper File”

caught in the blasts of a hurricane will look back to the gentle zephyrs of last summer.

It may take a year. It may take two.

But for the Nazis, the writing is on the wall.

Let them look out for themselves. The cure is in their own hands.

There are a lot of people who say that bombing can never win a war.

Well, my answer to that is that it has never been tried yet, and we shall see.

Germany, clinging more and more desperately to her widespread conquests and even seeking foolishly for more, will make a most interesting initial experiment.

Japan will provide the confirmation.

But the time is not yet. There is a great deal of work to be done first, and let us all get down to it. ■



Dresden in 1945, viewed from City Hall.