

of 1941 that Bomber Command lacked the technology to conduct precision bombing at night (day bombing had been tried, but losses were too heavy). Indeed, most bombers were missing their targets, especially in the Ruhr Valley, by miles. Faced, therefore, with what it perceived to be the choice of abandoning the strategic bomber offensive altogether or aiming for the built-up areas of industrial cities in an attempt to break civilian morale and destroy German industrial capacity, the War Cabinet chose the latter and Bomber Command accepted the task.

Seen in the context of the war, it was not an unreasonable decision. In 1942, Britain's strategic position was still weak: the United States had not yet mobilized its resources and the Soviets seemed on the brink of defeat. The Allies were under intense pressure from the Soviet Union to open a second front, but the British and Americans would be in no position to invade the continent until 1944. The only major strategic offensive the Allies could launch against the German heartland was the bombing offensive. In addition to aiding the Soviets, such a campaign would help maintain the morale of the British people. In such desperate straits, Bomber Command "kept the balance of power from tipping to disaster."⁽¹⁵⁾ Walter Thompson, DFC and Bar, who completed two tours with 83 (Pathfinder) Squadron, pointed out that the film-makers made no attempt to provide this context, or to understand the fears and anxieties of the Allies. Instead, they criticised a strangulation victim "for reaching for and using a club rather than a rapier."⁽¹⁶⁾

In retrospect, there may have been other alternatives to area bombing - diverting more of Bomber Command's resources to the Battle of the Atlantic or the Middle East, expending greater energy on perfecting navigational aids and developing an escort fighter - but as Max Hastings, a strong critic of the bomber offensive, points out, "the directors of the Allied war effort could scarcely be expected to perceive all these issues quite as clearly as they appeared to a generation of liberals thirty years later."⁽¹⁷⁾ There is little evidence to support the argument in *Death by Moonlight* that precision bombing was a viable alternative in 1942 or 1943 if only Bomber Command had made the effort. Several witnesses pointed to American daylight precision bombing before 1944, which was far from accurate and resulted in heavy losses. Bomber Command was always trying to improve its precision strike capability - witness the development of navigational and bombing aids such as Oboe, H2S and Gee, as well as the

(15) Ray Silver, Proceedings, 7:9.

(16) Proceedings, 7:87. It is interesting that Brian McKenna, the director of the film, admitted before the Committee that the bomber offensive began "when England desperately had its back against the wall and had nothing else to hit Nazi Germany with." Proceedings, 9:78.

(17) Quoted by Professor Terry Copp, Proceedings, 3A:10.