

PRIDE AND PAIN

The story of the 50,000 Canadians who participated in the bomber offensive against Germany is one of courage and perseverance. Night after night in the skies over Germany they risked their lives in a desperate attempt to bring the Third Reich to its knees. For years, Bomber Command was the only weapon the Allied forces could direct at the enemy. Many remember with patriotic pride the accomplishments of 6 (Canadian) Group, formed in January 1943 and by the end of the war one of the finest groups in Bomber Command.⁽¹⁾ But for every veteran of the bomber offensive, such pride is tinged with sorrow; the painful memory of the nearly ten thousand Canadians of 6 Group and other Bomber Command squadrons who failed to return is never erased.

In *Death by Moonlight*, the viewer is told that these lives were needlessly lost in one of the most brutal, misguided campaigns of the Second World War. Conducted by a ruthless, dogmatic commander, the bomber offensive aimed at nothing less than the annihilation of the German civilian population. Strategically it was a dismal failure, contributing little to Allied victory, and morally it gave the Germans a respectable cause for which to fight. The ultimate victims, however, were the naive airmen themselves, hoodwinked by a murderous High Command which blithely sent thousands of young men to their deaths.

These views are set forth in *Death by Moonlight* with passion and conviction. Supporters of the film have pointed to its vivid portrayal of the valour of the ordinary airman and to the savagery and senselessness of war. They have also hailed its examination of the failures of Allied command. Members of Veterans Against Nuclear Arms endorsed the episode, suggesting that it conveyed "so powerfully the feelings, the emotions, the humanity, and the valour of the comrades we served with..."⁽²⁾ C.G. Gifford, DFC, who participated in 49 bombing raids against Germany, argued before the Sub-Committee that the film was a "largely accurate expression" of a point of view that had existed since the war. *Death by Moonlight* had performed a "great service" by opening up these issues to Canadians, and teaching them "that in war, both those in uniform and non-combatants pay the price of the errors, illusions and personal tragedies of political and military chiefs."⁽³⁾

It would be no exaggeration, however, to state that *Death by Moonlight* deeply offended the vast majority of Canadian veterans and veterans organizations across the country. While in no way condoning the acknowledged inhumanity and destruction of war, many were nonetheless

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- (1) It is an unfortunate oversight that 6 Group is never once mentioned by name in *Death by Moonlight*.
 - (2) Marion Frank, President, Metro Toronto Branch, Veterans Against Nuclear Arms to Chairman, Senate Sub-Committee on Veterans Affairs, 10 August 1992.
 - (3) Proceedings, 9:111, 9:106.