

CHAPTER II

DEATH BY MOONLIGHT: BOMBER COMMAND

"As Vice-President of Bomber Command Association of Canada, I wish to go on record as saying that our members are appalled, disgusted and insulted by this so-called documentary."

William DuBois, Proceedings, 5:43.

"(*Death by Moonlight*) was a gross distortion of the very complex subject which was Bomber Command's war over a period of six years. Whether that distortion was the result of incompetence or of deliberate malice, I cannot judge."

Martin Middlebrook, letter to the Sub-Committee on Veterans Affairs, 26 October 1992.

AN ONGOING DEBATE

No episode of *The Valour and the Horror* has generated more controversy than *Death by Moonlight: Bomber Command*. Given its theme, this should not come as a complete surprise. As the Sub-Committee was reminded, the bomber offensive against Germany has long been the subject of controversy. During the Second World War, the strategic and moral implications of the campaign were discussed within the British Government, the military establishment, and to some extent even the public domain. Since then, historians have continued the debate. Some, with the benefit of hindsight and newly available documents, have questioned the bomber offensive on moral and strategic grounds while assessing its contribution to ultimate Allied victory. Because of conflicting evidence, wide differences of opinion continue to exist. However, most experts will agree on one point: the story of the bomber offensive is extremely complex. Meticulous research aimed at placing the campaign in its full historical context is required before any conclusions can be reached. Even then, the issues are rarely clear-cut.

These are the parameters within which Sub-Committee members have examined *Death by Moonlight*. They did not set out to condemn the film, as some have suggested, simply on account of the controversial issues it raises. Rather, what the Sub-Committee wanted to learn was whether the views expressed in the episode were based on thorough and balanced research, the essential ingredients in any historical presentation. The CBC and the NFB, as public agencies, owe that not only to the veterans depicted in the film, but to the millions of ordinary Canadians who watched the series and who have an important stake in our history.