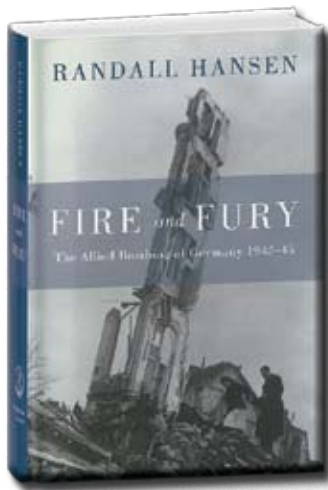


BOOK REVIEWS



FIRE and FURY: **THE ALLIED BOMBING OF** **GERMANY 1942-45**

BY RANDALL HANSEN

TORONTO:
DOUBLEDAY CANADA, 2008
353 PAGES ISBN 978-0-385-66403-5

Review by Colonel Randall Wakelam, CD, PhD

In the fall of 2008 a number of full page op-eds appeared in Canadian papers dredging up, yet again, the debates about and changes to the wording of the Bomber Command panel in the Canadian War Museum. The authors of these rebuttals were Canadian historians Robert Bothwell and Margaret MacMillan (*Paris 1919*) and Canadian political scientist Randall Hansen. Perhaps coincidentally (or not) Hansen's own work about the bombing campaign was published in mid-October. *Fire and Fury* argues that Arthur Harris's insistence on city busting and area bombing did not shorten the war as the bomber commander claimed that it could, but that by not concentrating on target systems, actually lengthened the conflict.

This argument is not really all that new, but it is not Hansen's real agenda. Rather, the author fairly deliberately paints Harris as a commander who was simply bent on employing city bombing regardless of its effectiveness or morality. Hansen spends considerable time pointing out how Harris's superiors attempted to get him to take on precision attacks, how Harris refuted their arguments and how Harris, at least passively, ignored their direction.

Hansen juxtaposes Harris's bloody-mindedness with the apparently zealous pursuit of precision bombing by the United States Army Air Force. He points out that the Americans had developed various technologies and tactics which allowed them to hit military targets precisely. Equally, he describes how they, both at the command and individual level, vehemently opposed any direction to conduct attacks against cities and civilians, which was the Bomber Command norm.

Unfortunately, for readers, Hansen does not represent the historical facts accurately. He misses existing sources which clearly show that the Americans conducted extensive area attacks and worse (in Hansen's eyes one might conclude) sought to hide this fact by claiming that their visual techniques, regardless of the 10/10s under cast, allowed precision aiming. Hansen also limits discussion of the United States' bombing of Japan, both incendiary and atomic, to just a few sentences.

The author is also guilty of misinterpreting hard data. In one case he claims that 11,000 bombers raided Dortmund on 12 March 1945 when in fact the figure was 1,100. In another

instance he misinterprets a significant study. He says that the 1941 Butt Report showed that two-thirds of Royal Air Force bombers bombed more than 75 miles from their targets while in fact Butt said that aircraft were bombing outside of a five mile radius of the target (an area of 75 square miles). A suspicious reader might conclude that these misinterpretations serve to make Hansen's attack on Harris all the louder.

There is little argument among air power historians that Harris does represent a curious case. Why, as the war was being won so convincingly and as his crews by mid-1944 were capable of better precision accuracy than the Americans, did he continue to insist on area attacks? If Hansen's volume causes us to reflect on this question—and on the morality of war in any form—then it does have a redeeming value for aviators and military professionals. ■

Colonel Randall Wakelam is currently Director of Research and Symposia at the Canadian Forces College.



NO CLEAR FLIGHT PLAN: COUNTERINSURGENCY AND AEROSPACE POWER

EDITED BY JAMES FERGUSSON AND WILLIAM MARCH

WINNIPEG:
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Review by James R. McKay, PhD

The current trend in warfare is land-based asymmetric war waged by non-state actors against large coalitions led by the United States. The use of asymmetric war (in the form of an insurgency) means that the enemy seldom presents itself in a manner convenient for what the aerospace-minded community considers the optimal application of aerospace power. In recent years, aerospace power has often ended up being applied in a supporting role to land-based forces in counter-insurgency operations, namely those of surveillance/reconnaissance or acting as “flying artillery.” To a community that developed as a result of

the belief that aerospace power is best applied decisively (i.e., the means by which a war is won) against a near-peer competitor, this is not an intellectually comfortable position. It strays perilously close to the existential debates of the past. As a result, the potential effects of counter-insurgencies on air forces form an issue that is ignored only at an air force's peril.

This edited anthology of papers is the product of a pair of conferences that occurred in 2007 and sought to explore issues surrounding the effects of the growth of counter-insurgencies on air forces. The two