

HELLSTORM

H E L L S T O R M

The Death of Nazi Germany

1944–1947

by
THOMAS GOODRICH

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Hellstorm: The Death of Nazi Germany, 1944-1947
By Thomas Goodrich

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*To the voiceless victims of
the world's worst war*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue

1

1 Hell from Above

13

2 The Dead and the Dead to Be

43

3 Between Fire and Ice

69

4 Crescendo of Destruction

95

5 The Devil's Laughter

129

6 The Last Bullet

161

7 A Sea of Blood

185

8 Unspeakable

225

9 A War without End

277

10 The Halls of Hell

299

11 Crime of the Age

325

Epilogue: Of Victors and Victims

347

Bibliography

361

Index

367

ILLUSTRATIONS

Ilya Ehrenburg

261

Hamburg

261

After the Fire Storm

262

Arthur Harris

262

The “Good War”

263

The *Wilhelm Gustloff*

264

Yalta: Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Josef Stalin

265

Fire Bombs Over Germany

265

Dresden

266

Kurt Vonnegut

266

Berlin: The Battle Below	267
Adolf Hitler: The Final Review	267
The Fall of Berlin	268
Total War	269
On the Road to Siberia	270
The Dachau Massacre	270
American Death Camp	271
Germany in Ruins	271
Andrey Vlasov	272
Henry Morgenthau	272
Leni Riefenstahl	273
Expulsion: Millions on the Move	273
The Spoils of War	274

Victor Gollanz

274

Jan Montyn

275

German POWs in Kiev

275

Public execution of Germans on Kreschatik

276



MAP BY JOAN PENNINGTON

PROLOGUE

ON THE NIGHT OF October 20, 1944, the village of Nemmersdorf lay mantled in sleep. Dark and still, only the twinkling of street lamps suggested life in the tiny town. It was now the sixth autumn of the war. The once-mighty German nation teetered at the brink. Her cities lay in ruins, her industry had been shattered, her economy was on the verge of collapse and worse, the Allied armies of the world were locking a death-grip on the very borders of the Reich itself. No one with eyes to see or mind to think could doubt that utter defeat was not only certain, but imminent. And yet, the village of Nemmersdorf slept.

For six years now the Third Reich had been mortally engaged in the most violent and cataclysmic war the world had ever known. Millions of Germans were already dead, millions more were crippled or maimed and many others who had survived in tact were staggering toward starvation. And yet, Nemmersdorf slept. The children of the village lay snug, warm and seemingly secure beside their mothers, as they always had and as they imagined they always would; in the bedrooms below, grandfathers, now the only men remaining, coughed quietly in the night, then rose from time to time as they always had for a cup of water, a glass of shnapps or perhaps a quiet moment's draw on the pipe. Just beyond, in the barns that adjoined most homes, milk cows rustled softly among the hay and fodder. In the dark village square, the old town clock patiently tolled the passing hours as it had night after night, year after year, century after century. Outwardly, at least, and despite a world engulfed in smoke and flame, nights in Nemmersdorf passed peacefully, predictably, as they always had. But



MAP BY JOAN PENNINGTON

that was about to change; all was about to be violently swept away forever. The war, like a wall of angry red lava, was rushing down on the sleeping hamlet and was only moments from arrival.

For six hundred years East Prussia had served as the frontier outpost of Germany. Jutting eastward into often hostile Slavic lands, the old Teutonic province, unlike the rest of Germany, had faced a host of real or potential enemies for the entirety of its long existence. As a consequence, a strong military tradition had developed. It was here, in the “Breadbasket of Germany”—a fertile plain of large estates and proud, noble families—that much of the leadership for the German Army, past and present, had come. Thus, it was with no small amount of irony that despite its martial reputation, East Prussia was one of the few spots in Germany that had not been devastated by the current war. While the rest of the Reich’s urban centers had long since been reduced to smoking rubble, the cities and towns of East Prussia, beyond the range of Allied bombers, remained, for the most part, untouched.

Although the unscathed condition of the province was envied elsewhere in Germany, Prussians, especially those nearest the eastern frontier, knew better than most that the war was reaching its climax. Each day the rumble to the east grew more distinct; each night the red glow on the horizon throbbed more angrily. By mid-October 1944, the Soviet Army had finally reached the Reich’s border. And yet, as was the case at Nemmersdorf, there was no panic.

As a dedicated National Socialist, as a fanatical follower of Adolf Hitler, it was Erich Koch’s duty as district chief of East Prussia to hold the line, no matter the cost. With the battered and bleeding remnant of the German Wehrmacht now fighting desperately on the nation’s eastern approaches, Koch was determined to stamp out all forms of panic and defeatism among the populace. Except for a five-mile buffer directly behind the front, the district leader forbid any and all attempts at flight or evacuation. Civilians disregarding the order faced summary execution. Moreover, any manifestation of panic—withdrawal of bank funds, slaughtering of farm animals, packed luggage—could bring down the death penalty.¹

1. Juergen Thorwald, *Flight in the Winter* (New York: Pantheon, 1956), 13; Martin K. Sorge, *The Other Price of Hitler’s War* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1986), 126.

“[N]o true German would allow himself even the thought that East Prussia might fall into Russian hands,” the Nazi die-hard announced menacingly.²

While Koch’s threats and iron rule were no doubt needed to bolster some nervous Prussians, for most it was not necessary. Hopeless debacle that the war had become, faith in the Fatherland and trust that the beleaguered Wehrmacht would yet hold the “East Wall” against the red tide predominated. As was the case during the First World War, there was a general feeling that in this war too, the front would stabilize on the frontier and the Russians would be ground down through attrition. Concerning the rumors of “Bolshevik bestiality” and the horrible hints of what might be expected should the “Asiatic hordes” overrun Germany, most Prussians only laughed. Such notions, many felt, were merely the government’s attempt to harden their will to resist.³

Thus it was, that on the night of October 20, as Nemmersdorf and other communities nearest the front slept in imagined security, the unthinkable occurred. After punching a hole through the German line, the Red Army suddenly burst into the Reich. Within hours, the Soviets widened the gap and swarmed over the countryside. After several days of desperate fighting the Wehrmacht regrouped, launched a furious counterattack, then eventually drove the Russians back across the border.⁴ What German troops found upon reclaiming the lost ground, however, was staggering.

“[T]hey tortured civilians in many villages . . . ,” reported one German officer, “nailed some on barn doors and shot many others.”⁵ Along the roads, “treks” of fleeing refugees had been overtaken by the communists, the people pulled from their carts, then raped and murdered on the spot. It was at Nemmersdorf, though, where stunned soldiers first viewed hell on earth. Recorded a physician with the army, Lt. Heinrich Amberger:

On the road through Nemmersdorf, near the bridge . . . I saw where a whole trek of refugees had been rolled over by Russian tanks; not only the wagons and teams,

2. Thorwald, 13.

3. Marlis G. Steinert, *Hitler’s War and the Germans* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), 292.

4. Alfred M. deZayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 61.

5. *Ibid.*

but also a goodly number of civilians, mostly women and children. . . . [They] had been squashed flat by the tanks. At the edge of the road and in the farm yards lay quantities of corpses of civilians who evidently . . . had been murdered systematically.⁶

Added another horrified witness:

In the farmyard further down the road stood a cart, to which four naked women were nailed through their hands in a cruciform position. . . . Beyond . . . stood a barn and to each of its two doors a naked woman was nailed through the hands, in a crucified posture. In the dwellings we found a total of seventy-two women, including children, and one old man, 74, all dead . . . all murdered in a bestial manner, except only a few who had bullet holes in their necks. Some babies had their heads bashed in. In one room we found a woman, 84 years old, sitting on a sofa . . . half of whose head had been sheared off with an ax or a spade.⁷

“Every female, including girls as young as eight, had been raped,” noted another viewer.⁸

Old men who had feebly tried to protect their wives, daughters and granddaughters, were themselves knocked down, then sawed in half or chopped to bits. A group of over fifty French POWs and Polish workers who had instinctively stepped in to protect the people were likewise castrated and killed.⁹ Lt. Amberger continues:

On the edge of a street an old woman sat hunched up, killed by a bullet in the back of the neck. Not far away lay a baby of only a few months, killed by a shot at close range through the forehead. . . . A number of men, with no other marks or fatal wounds, had been killed by blows with shovels or gun butts; their faces completely smashed. . . . [I]n the near-by villages . . . similar cases were noted after these villages were cleared of Russian troops. Neither in Nemmersdorf nor in the other places did I find a single living German civilian.¹⁰

Staggered by the enormity of the crime, German authorities requested that neutral investigators and medical personnel from Spain, Sweden and Switzerland view the sickening carnage close up. When the visitors filed their reports, however, and when word finally reached the out-

6. *Ibid.*, 62–63.

7. *Ibid.*, 63.

8. Sorge, *Other Price*, 119.

9. *Ibid.*, 117.

10. DeZayas, *Nemesis*, 63.

side world, there was only silence. By the winter of 1944, the vicious propaganda war waged against Germany had been won. By that late stage of the conflict, the war of words had reached such hideous extremes that few individuals beyond the Reich's borders were concerned about brained German babies or crucified German women. By the final months of the war, the enemy to be destroyed was not merely Adolf Hitler, the Nazi Party or even the soldiers in the field. By the end of the war the aim of the approaching Allies was nothing less than the utter extinction of the German nation, including every man, woman and child.



In his 1925 political testament, *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler laid out in unmistakable terms his plan to rid Germany of all Jewish influence—economic, political and cultural—should he ever some day rise to power. When that seeming fiction became fact eight years later and Hitler was elected chancellor to one of the mightiest industrial giants on earth, alarmed Jews world-wide declared war on Germany. Fearful lest Nazism spread and jeopardize their hard-won position around the globe, influential Jews met in July 1933 at Amsterdam to invoke global economic sanctions against Hitler's Germany. The campaign, said boycott organizer, Samuel Untermyer of the United States, was a "holy war . . . a war that must be waged unremittingly . . . [against] a veritable hell of cruel and savage beasts."¹¹ As a consequence, Germans responded in kind with a boycott of their own. While citizens were encouraged to shun Jewish businesses, a series of laws were enacted designed to not only drive Jews from German arts, media and the professions, but force them from the nation as well.

As the economic struggle continued, Jewish journalists, writers, playwrights, and filmmakers around the world joined the fray. With the outbreak of war in 1939 and the entry of the United States into the conflict two years later, the war of words reached pathological proportions. Increasingly, as rumors of savage persecution against Jews under Nazi control spread, the propaganda campaign directed at Hitler and

11. *New York Times*, August 7, 1933; Ralph Grandinetti, "Germany's Plan to Resettle Jews in Madagascar," *The Barnes Review* 4, no. 3 (May/June 1998): 26.

Fascism devolved swiftly into a fanatical cry of extermination. No where was hatred more intense than among American Jews. Wrote Hollywood script writer and director, Ben Hecht:

[A] cancer flourishes in the body of the world and in its mind and soul, and . . . this cancerous thing is Germany, Germanism, and Germans. . . . I read in their watery eyes, their faded skins, their legs without feet, and their thick jaws, the fulfillment of a crime and the promise of another. The German hates democracy because he does not like himself. He has only one political ideal. It is based on his fat neck, his watery eyes, and his faded skin. . . . He is a pure murderer. The thought of killing defenseless people brings a glow into his fat German neck. . . . The Germans outraged me because they are murderers, foul and wanton, and because they are fools such as gibber at a roadside, with spittle running from their mouths. They outraged me because they raised their little pig eyes to their betters and sought to grunt and claw their way to the mastery of men. . . . That this most clumsy of all human tribes—this leaden-hearted German—should dare to pronounce judgment on his superiors, dare to outlaw from the world the name of Jew—a name that dwarfs him as the tree does the weed at its foot—is an outrageous thing. . . . It is an evil thing.¹²

“GERMANY MUST PERISH,” echoed Theodore N. Kaufman in a widely-read book of the same name.

This time Germany has forced a TOTAL WAR upon the world. As a result, she must be prepared to pay a TOTAL PENALTY. And there is one, *and only one*, such Total Penalty: Germany must perish forever! In fact—not in fancy! . . . The goal of world-dominion must be removed from the reach of the German and the only way to accomplish that is to remove the German from the world. . . . There remains then but one mode of ridding the world forever of Germanism—and that is to stem the source from which issue those war-lusted souls, by preventing the people of Germany from ever again reproducing their kind.¹³

To implement his plan, Kaufman recommended that when the war was successfully concluded all German men and women should be sterilized. The result, wrote the author, would be “the elimination of Germanism and its carriers.”¹⁴ Far from being shocked by such a genocidal scheme, leading American journals were thrilled by the concept.

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12. Ben Hecht, *A Guide for the Bedeviled* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), 120, 125, 130, 144, 155, 156.
 13. Theodore N. Kaufman, *Germany Must Perish!* (Newark, N. J.: Argyle Press, 1941), 6, 7, 28, 86.
 14. *Ibid.*, 88–89; Michael F. Connors, *Dealing in Hate* (Torrance, Calif.: Institute for Historical Review, 1970), 28.

“A Sensational Idea!” cheered *Time* magazine.

“A provocative theory,” echoed the *Washington Post*.

While many in America and Great Britain could understand and even commiserate with Jewish emotions, many more were initially aghast by the flaming rhetoric and the murderous cries for extermination of innocent and guilty alike. Nevertheless, the sheer weight and persistence of the propaganda, both subtle and overt, in film, radio, books, magazines, and newspapers, gradually worked its way into the thoughts and attitudes of the public mainstream. Eventually, in the minds of a sizable percentage of Americans and Britons, little distinction was drawn between killing a Nazi soldier and killing a German child.

On September 15, 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt made the demand for extermination official when he endorsed the so-called “Morgenthau Plan.” Named for Roosevelt’s Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, but actually conceived by the secretary’s top aide, Harry Dexter White—both of whom were Jewish—the program called for the complete destruction of Germany after victory had been won. In addition to the dismantling or destruction of German industry and the permanent closure of mines, the Morgenthau Plan called for a reduction of the Reich’s land area by one half. As many calculated, and as Roosevelt, Gen. George C. Marshall and other proponents of the plan well knew, this act guaranteed that roughly two-thirds of the German population, or fifty million people, would soon die of starvation. With the remnant of the population reduced to subsistence farming, and with the shrunken nation totally at the mercy of hostile European neighbors, it was estimated that within two generations Germany would cease to exist.¹⁵

“They have asked for it . . .” snapped Morgenthau when someone expressed shock at the plan. “Why the hell should I worry about what happens to their people?”¹⁶

“You don’t want the Germans to starve?” Roosevelt’s incredulous son-in-law asked the president in private.

15. Russell D. Buhite, *Decisions at Yalta* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1986), 25; Eugene Davidson, *The Death and Life of Germany* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1959), 6; Gregory Douglas, *Gestapo Chief 3* (San Jose, Cal.: R. James Bender, Pub., 1998), 187.

16. Buhite, *Yalta*, 23.

“Why not?” replied Roosevelt without batting an eye.¹⁷

Another advocate of the plan was Winston Churchill. Despite his earlier protest of the scheme as “cruel [and] unChristian,” the British prime minister’s attitude was soon softened when millions of dollars in much-needed “lend-lease” supplies and equipment were dangled before him by the Americans.¹⁸ Unlike Roosevelt, Churchill’s endorsement of the Morgenthau Plan was little known in the prime minister’s home country. Even had the plot been common knowledge, however, it likely would have caused hardly a ripple in a nation that had been locked in war with “evil” for five years and where much anti-German propaganda from the First World War was still warmly embraced.

“One can’t think of anything bad enough for the diseased Germans,” hissed an English housewife. “They are like a loathsome disease spreading and spreading over Europe.”¹⁹ Added a British naval officer:

Twice running they had been the criminals who had turned Europe into a slaughterhouse, their present leader was a “bloodthirsty guttersnipe,” they themselves must “bleed and burn,” and there were “no lengths in violence” to which the British would not go to destroy their wicked power. . . . Germans [were] first cousins to the devil. . . . The population of the British Isles had been worked up by propaganda to a state of passionate hatred of Hitler, the Nazi party, the German Armed Forces, and the German people. They had been told repeatedly that “the only good German was a dead one.”²⁰

Curiously, the genocidal agreement so recently made official by the western democracies had long since been state policy in communist Russia. There, because of the massive deaths and destruction caused by the German invasion in 1941, as well as the great number of Jews who perished as a consequence, it was guaranteed Germany would receive no mercy should the Red Army ever gain the upper hand. Perhaps the most influential Jewish writer anywhere in the world was the Soviet, Ilya Ehrenburg. Unlike Morgenthau, White, Hecht, Kaufman, and others who aimed to influence men in high places, Ehrenburg lowered his sights on the common Red soldier himself,

17. Diary of Henry Morgenthau, entry for March 20, 1945.

18. Buhite, 25; *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1948), 207–208.

19. Paul Fussell, *Wartime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 122.

20. Russell Grenfell, *Unconditional Hatred* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1953), 117.

or those most likely to encounter German civilians. Whether in the columns of Moscow dailies such as *Pravda* and *Isvestja*, or whether in the front-line soldier's newspaper, *Red Star*; whether in mass distribution leaflets dropped from planes on the front, or whether in his book, *The War*, Ehrenburg urged the Red Army forward with a cry of total, complete and utter extermination:

The Germans are not human beings. . . . If you have not killed at least one German a day, you have wasted that day. . . . If you cannot kill your German with a bullet, kill him with your bayonet. . . . [T]here is nothing more amusing for us than a heap of German corpses. Do not count days. . . . Count only the number of Germans killed by you. Kill the German—that is your grandmother's request. Kill the German—that is your child's prayer. Kill the German—that is your motherland's loud request. Do not miss. Do not let through. Kill. . . . Kill, Red Army men, kill! No fascist is innocent, be he alive, be he as yet unborn.²¹

In public, Russian premiere Josef Stalin sought to distance himself from such sentiments. "Some time we hear silly talk about the Red Army intending to exterminate the German people and to destroy the German state," smiled the Soviet dictator with an eye to the world. "This is, of course, a stupid lie."²² But if Josef Stalin dismissed Ehrenburg's blood-thirsty words as "silly talk," his soldiers did not. Already bursting with hatred and revenge, such admonitions from sanctioned individuals writing in official Soviet organs lent an air of legality to those already eager to act out their own savage fantasies.

"There will be no mercy—for no one . . ." grimly warned one Russian commander. "It is pointless to ask our troops to exercise mercy. . . . The land of the fascists must be made a desert."²³

Most Germans actually knew little of thoughts such as those above. Most Germans were yet living under the illusion that the war still had rules. Few could bring themselves to believe that the horror at Nemmersdorf was anything other than an aberration; that the butchery was only a bloody mistake destined never to be repeated. Unbeknownst to those in Prussia and other German regions facing east, the

21. DeZayas, *Nemesis*, 65–66; Thorwald, *Flight*, 33.

22. DeZayas, 66.

23. Sorge, *Other Price*, 127.

nightmare at Nemmersdorf would soon prove only the faintest foretaste of what was ahead.

Meanwhile, as Russian pressure in the east grew ever more menacing, further west, Soviet allies were already engaged in their own brand of extermination. Here, in its western and central provinces, Germany was within easy striking distance of enemy bomber fleets. Here, the United States, and especially Great Britain, seemed determined to make atrocities attributed to the Nazis seem like child's play by comparison. Unlike the war further east, here in western Germany hell came not from the ice and mud below, but from the clouds and heavens above.

1

HELL FROM ABOVE

ON THE NIGHT OF July 24, 1943, air raid sirens sounded in Hamburg for the hundredth time.¹ No city the size of this great German port could hope to escape for long in a major European war and Hamburg had not. To date, however, the Royal Air Force raids and the sirens they elicited had been more a trial than terror. With a population of over one million, Hamburg was a huge northern city of harbors, canals, lakes, and rivers, and citizens in one part of town often were oblivious to enemy air raids in another part. While the bombing attacks proved destructive and caused significant loss of life, they were no greater, and in many cases far less, than raids on other communities across Germany. Because of pre-war economic and cultural ties to Great Britain, many felt that Hamburg, the “most English city in Germany,” was being spared as a result of this relationship.

And thus, as the population responded dutifully to the wailing sirens and sought shelter on this mid-summer night in 1943, the first waves of British bombers appeared overhead. Few below doubted that this raid would be any different from those of the past. Soon, hundreds of planes began raining down tons of high explosives on the heart of Hamburg, blowing to bits schools, churches, hospitals, and homes. The onslaught increased in fury with each succeeding wave of bombers, building minute by minute to a fiery, devastating crescendo. Then, the planes suddenly disappeared, the skies were clear and all was silent again. When the stunned survivors reemerged from their cellars later that night, they saw that their once beautiful city was now a smoldering ruin.

1. Sorge, *Other Price*, 101.

The following day, as rescue crews and firefighters from throughout northern Germany battled the blaze, bombers of the US Army Air Force appeared over Hamburg.² As planned, the Americans surprised not only the emergency workers, but columns of fleeing refugees as well. During the ensuing massacre, thousands perished.

The next night, RAF bombers returned. In addition to the normal payload of high explosives, the British sent down tons of phosphorous bombs to accelerate the fires. The resulting conflagration ignited a “fire storm.” Hurricane-force winds created by the intense heat and subsequent updraft uprooted trees, ripped roofs from buildings and sucked screaming victims back into the inferno. Some who escaped the 150 mph winds in the streets became mired in melting asphalt and quickly burst into flames. Those who threw themselves into the city’s canals died of thermal radiation to the lungs, then, as they floated on the water’s surface, they too ignited. In the center of the holocaust, temperatures reached 1,500 degrees and when the great mass of flames joined they rose to a height of three miles.³ The hellish drama below was not lost on those above.

“As I looked down, it was as if I was looking into what I imagined to be an active volcano,” said one horrified British crewman. “Our actual bombing was like putting another shovelful of coal into the furnace.”⁴

“Those poor bastards!” another airman muttered as he gazed down in disbelief.⁵

The attacks against Hamburg continued unabated for another week. Finally, there was nothing left to destroy. Aptly dubbed by the Allies “Operation Gomorrah,” the raids had been a cold and calculated attempt to scorch Hamburg and its people from the face of the earth. The plan succeeded. With thirteen square miles of total destruction, with 750,000 homeless, with an estimated 60,000 to 100,000 dead, mostly women and children, Hamburg, for all intents and purposes, had ceased to exist. For those who had harbored hopes that the British and American war against Germany would be waged in a humane

2. Ibid., 102.

3. Ibid.

4. Martin Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1981), 244.

5. Ibid.

manner and directed solely at the fighting forces, the events at Hamburg was final and powerful proof that indeed it would not. It was now clear to all that the Allied air war had become a war of massacre and unmasked terror.



The obliteration of Hamburg was only the most graphic and egregious example of a pattern that had been building since 1940. During the summer of that year, when the struggle for the skies over England was in progress, an embattled Winston Churchill gave the go-ahead to a plan that would take the air war to Germany. The architect of the idea was Arthur Harris, chief of British Bomber Command. Unlike the “Battle of Britain,” which was a military contest from first to last, it was Harris’s belief that intense, sustained air strikes against German population centers could prove decisive. The devastation of ancient cities and the destruction of priceless art works, coupled with the massive slaughter and “de-housing” of civilians would, Harris felt, soon lower German morale on both the home and battle fronts to the point that utter collapse was inevitable. While countenancing the plan, Churchill initially vacillated between striking at purely military targets and aiming at “the man in the street.”

“My dear sir,” protested the prime minister to an advocate of indiscriminate bombing during the height of the Battle of Britain, “this is a military and not a civilian war. You and others may desire to kill women and children. We desire . . . to destroy German military objectives.”⁶

As with the Morgenthau Plan, however, the mercurial Churchill soon reversed himself and gave Harris and his scheme the go-ahead. Four months following the onset of the British bombing campaign, the German Luftwaffe finally retaliated with raids of its own, notably the ancient English city of Coventry, where nearly four hundred civilians were killed.⁷ With the invasion of the Soviet Union the following year, however, much of Germany’s air arm was diverted for the desperate contest in the

6. Stephen A. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War II* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 44.

7. Sorge, 90.

east. As a consequence, swarms of British bombers began the systematic destruction of Germany. “German cities . . . will be subjected to an ordeal the like of which has never been experienced by a country in continuity, severity and magnitude . . .,” vowed Churchill. “[T]o achieve this end there are no lengths of violence to which we will not go.”⁸

Upon entry of the United States into the war, hundreds of additional planes were eventually available for the assault on Germany. Publicly, Ira Eaker, commander of the US Eighth Air Force, expressed horror and contempt at the indiscriminate British bombing raids, usually carried out under cover of darkness. Although the risk to his own crews were infinitely greater, the American general opted for daylight “precision bombing” where the targets would be military and industrial installations alone.⁹ This course, most agreed, was the more “manly and civilized” approach.

“[W]e should never allow the history of this war to convict us of throwing the strategic bomber at the man in the street,” Eaker announced.¹⁰

Unfortunately, and despite such promising pronouncements, the Americans did not hesitate when occasions arose to “pitch in” and join their British comrades for raids on residential areas, as the survivors of Hamburg could sadly attest.

Although Churchill, Arthur Harris and RAF communiqués continuously referred to their air campaign against Germany as area-, carpet-, saturation-, or unrestricted-bombing, the old, the young and the weak who were forced to endure the nightmare and who made up the overwhelming majority of its victims called it by a simpler, more accurate name—“Terror-Bombing.”



Beep—beepbeep—beep. . . . Beep—beepbeep. . . . beep. Silence, then the cool, detached voice of the announcer: “Incoming flight in zero-five north, course south-southeast. . . .” My heart beats, and the uncontrollable shaking takes

8. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 31.

9. Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (New York: Dial Press/James Wade, 1979), 181.

10. Garrett, xiii.

over. . . There is a voice again. "The bomber formations have now passed Hamburg, still flying east-southeast. An attack on the capital is to be expected." We are in our coats, out on the street with the bike in no time at all. The bike will be faster. The bags are easier to carry this way, and on the even stretches of road Mutti can sit on the baggage rack. . . . I pedal hard, furiously, with the strength of fear.

House doors slam, garden gates squeak, dark figures hurry through the night. They come from everywhere, out of every street. A constantly swelling stream that turns into a solid black mass. Like a flood-swollen river at springtime, it moves with irresistible force toward the bunker. Individual faces become visible for a second when a red flare illuminates the sky. No, they are not faces, they are spooky masks, frightening. The sirens howl "Alert". . . Still three hundred yards to go over an open field. Hundreds race toward the one door.

Luckily, the door is at the side, right next to the fence, where I leave my bike, even lock it. And then we are catapulted, sluiced, past the soldier guards with their rifles at the ready, pushed by those behind us, through the steel door. Inside, we are forced against those already there. There's no room, and still we get packed tighter. A little more and we won't be able to breathe. Flattened, squeezed to death in the fight to stay alive. Screams . . . and shouting outside. The guards have closed and locked the door and it's suddenly quiet.¹¹

So wrote a young Berliner, describing what was for her and millions of other Germans the central event of their lives—the air raid alert. By 1944, the bombing of the Third Reich had become so pervasive that almost every person in every city and town was affected. For the frightened fraulein above and her fellow urban-dwellers, the radio was more than a temporary escape from the horrors of war—it was the front line in their struggle to survive. In the words of Ilse McKee:

A steady "ping, ping, ping" would . . . come over whenever there were enemy aircraft over German territory either attacking or on their way to attack. At regular intervals an announcer would give the exact position, number and type of the aircraft and warn the district or town for which the formations were heading. Any alteration in direction was of course reported immediately and a warning given to the town or district concerned. As soon as the enemy aircraft formation had left Germany the "ping" was replaced by a monotonous "tick-tock" like that of a clock.

In this way we were able to get our warning when the bombers were still hundreds of miles away, and we knew that we could expect sirens later. Special

11. Ilse Koehn, *Mischling, Second Degree* (New York: Greenwillow, 1977), 194–195.

maps were issued to each household on which we followed the course and progress of the aircraft formations right to their final point of attack. . . . With so many people in the house and the constant air alarms we had soon worked out a plan for a proper . . . shift duty. Every adult in turn had to sit up at night and listen to the air reports. The first shift was from 10 P.M. until 2 A.M. and the second from 2 A.M. until 6 A.M. This system gave everybody else in the house a chance to get a little sleep between the five trips to the cellar which on average we now made every night.¹²

Such watching and waiting, and the seemingly endless trips to the shelters, taxed the endurance of everyone, especially the young and the old. Although the great majority of alerts were naturally false alarms, those weary individuals who treated any with indifference did so at their peril.

“Most of the time I didn’t even wake my children when there was an alarm,” admitted one mother. “But on this particular evening, when I turned on the radio—I always turned on the radio when the sirens began wailing—I was horrified to hear that large bomber formations were on their way and that we were to take shelter immediately. I woke and dressed my three small daughters and helped them into their little rucksacks containing extra underwear. I took along a briefcase, which held a fireproof box with family documents, all of my jewelry, and a large sum of money.”¹³

“Shuffling feet. Suitcases knocking against walls . . .” another woman recounted. “The way leads across a courtyard with stairs above. . . . Some more steps down, thresholds, corridors. Finally, behind a heavy, rubber-rimmed iron door which can be locked by two levers, our cellar. Officially called Shelter, we call it by turns cave, underworld, catacomb of fear, mass grave.”¹⁴

“It was terrible sitting and waiting in those stone cellars from which there would have been no escape,” said Gisela-Alexandra Moeltgen. “Our nerves were at breaking point, the fear of death was constantly with us.”¹⁵

12. Ilse McKee, *Tomorrow the World* (London: J.M. Dents & Sons, 1960), 130–131.

13. Peter Pechel, Dennis Showalter and Johannes Steinhoff, *Voices from the Third Reich* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1989), 224.

14. Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954), 19.

15. Alexander McKee, *Dresden 1945* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982), 261.

As was often the case, however, after enduring hours, even days underground, the anticipated attacks usually failed to materialize. Bomber formations, reportedly on a collision course with a city, often veered right or left for other targets or sometimes passed harmlessly overhead. Consequently, among many apathy unavoidably set in. Some, like young Jan Montyn, were claustrophobic and dreaded the thought of sitting passively in “sealed tombs.”

Having seen inside an air raid shelter a couple of times, I had decided that even a minute in there was more than I could stand. The very thought of being shut away in an underground hole with hundreds—sometimes even thousands—of others, waiting for the inevitable, made me break out in a cold sweat. . . . I preferred lying behind a wall in the open air to crouching behind a hermetically sealed steel door underground—completely at the mercy of blind fate.¹⁶

And others, like sixteen-year-old Olga Held, soon became bored with the monotonous routine:

In the beginning, when the air raid siren sounded, we would run the one kilometer to the shelter that was always crowded. We had to squeeze through the door and stand on the jam-packed stairway. In a way it was fun because I had ample opportunities to flirt with the soldiers who were home on leave. But we quit running after several months. Too many times the air raid siren sounded and the bombers flew on. . . . Thereafter, we went to a shelter only if we happened to be near one, if it was convenient.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the great majority of prudent adults heeded each warning as if it were their first . . . or their last. Terrifying as the spate of alarms had been, Germans suddenly realized the true meaning of the word once the real thing began.



“Sirens! A drill? An alert? Probably one or two reconnaissance planes . . .” thought Ilse Koehn when she found herself one day in an unfamiliar part of Berlin. “I look for a shelter just in case.”

I keep on walking, hoping to reach the shelter before there’s a full alarm. The sirens blare, howl. Full alarm! Oh my God, where is everyone . . . ? We

16. Jan Montyn and Dirk Ayelt Kooiman, *A Lamb to Slaughter* (New York: Viking, 1985), 68–69.

17. Olga Held Bruner, unpublished manuscript, 97.

race onto the bridge, stop for breath in the middle of the hundred-yard span. What's that noise? A swarm of hornets? Where? And then we see them, and for one long moment we stand frozen.

"Oh my God!" What a sight! Hundreds, thousands of airplanes are coming toward us! The whole sky is aglitter with planes. Planes flying undisturbed in perfect V formation, their metal bodies sparkling in the sun. . . . Only the terrifying, quickly intensifying hum of engines, thousands of engines. The air vibrates, seems to shiver; the water, the ground and the bridge under us begin to tremble. . . . We run. The first formation is already overhead.¹⁸

"There was a brilliant flash in the sky as the lead elements of several formations opened their bomb-bay doors, catching the sun like many mirrors," recalled another awe-struck witness.¹⁹

For those tardy or doubting individuals who viewed the onset of a night raid, the sight was even more spectacular. To aid the waves of bombers that followed, advance aircraft staked out the area to be destroyed by dropping clusters of colored markers. Because they cascaded in a brilliant shower of red, green and white lights, the flares were called "Christmas trees" by those on the ground. "When my husband and I came out of the house, we could already see the Christmas trees nearly overhead . . ." one woman near Hamburg wrote. "They lit up the street so brightly that we could have read a book. We knew what these meant and we were frightened."²⁰

Generally, to witness the flash of bomb-bay doors by day, or flares by night, almost always meant that it was too late for the viewer to find shelter since the rain of death was only moments away.

"Then came a roar, similar to a thousand trains moving through the air," remarked one listener. "Those were the bombs beginning to cascade to earth. . . . [T]he roar became louder and louder. . . . Women ran in with their hair pinned up, mop buckets and brooms in hand . . . some were screaming in terror."²¹

As she sat trembling in her shelter, Rosa Todt of Neustadt also recalled

18. Koehn, *Mischling*, 188–189.

19. Sorge, *Other Price*, 109.

20. Middlebrook, *Battle of Hamburg*, 147.

21. Sorge, 109.

the horror when doubters outside the steel doors first heard the hellish roar. "All at once, crowds of people who had been standing on the street and in front of the entrance to the air-raid shelter wanted to come into it . . .," Rosa remembered. "People drummed with their fists against the entrance to the air-raid shelter but it was closed because it was full. People were running around outside, frantically trying to save their lives."²²

"Mother of God, pray for us . . .," a woman in Ilse McKee's bunker cried. "Holy Virgin, please protect us."

The next moment there was an unpleasant whistle, followed by an explosion. In an instant everybody was flat on the floor. The cellar shook, mortar came trickling down, and all was quiet again. We raised our heads, hoping that it was over. There were a few more explosions in the distance and then the aircraft returned. This time the whole earth seemed to tremble. There were a number of crashes outside. It sounded as if the house were breaking into pieces. We listened and then the planes came back. We put our heads down. Nobody was praying now. The mothers were lying on top of their children, protecting them with their bodies. Some of the suitcases came tumbling down the stairs where we had put them.²³

"It felt as if the whole house had come down on us with one gigantic crash," said a terrified ten-year-old from her shelter. "The dogs were frantic, rushing around in the darkness; their owners kept calling them. . . . 'Everything is going to be all right,' mother told us. 'Just keep calm and don't worry.'"²⁴

"It was like an earthquake," added Eva Beyer. "We all crouched together, and cried, and prayed, and trembled, absolutely terrified. One of the women was so fearful that she had diarrhea, two other women passed out, the children screamed, the baker's wife started to have a bilious attack. It was like a lunatic asylum."²⁵

Wrote Liselotte Klemich:

22. Middlebrook, 147.

23. McKee, *Tomorrow the World*, 133.

24. Kamilla C. Chadwick, *The War According to Anna* (Woodside, Calif.: Seven Stones Press, 1986), 53.

25. McKee, *Dresden*, 208.

The people in the shelter reacted in very different ways. Some screamed every time there was a hit. Some prayed. Some sobbed. I was choked up with emotion. I kept thinking, “My poor, innocent children. They will be taken now.” I kept trying to protect them. What’s more, I was pregnant.

Finally it stopped and we were all still alive. I couldn’t believe it, because no one had thought we could come out of that shelter alive.²⁶

Unfamiliar with air raids as most were, some like Liselotte naturally assumed that the first wave of attacks was the last. All too often, however, it was not. The haggard mother continues:

I thought it was over, but my poor Annemarie kept crying out, “They’re coming back, they’re coming back.” She was right. . . . We ran into the shelter again. The children were at the end of their ropes; they cried and clung to me. We stood in the hallway—we couldn’t get back into the shelter because the windows had been blown in. We stood crowded together. Some were sitting on the floor. My little Karin, who was five years old, began to pray very loudly, “Dear God protect us, dear God protect us.” Her little voice kept getting louder and more penetrating.²⁷

“The children immediately started screaming again,” noted Eva Beyer.

[T]hen three women began to scream and rage like mad, while one old woman stood in a corner and prayed from the bottom of her heart to God. It was horrifying. I got down under an arch and waited for what was to come. I crouched on my knees with my face buried in my arms, and my heart doing overtime out of fear. I experienced an incredible dread of being buried alive, for it is absolutely terrible to lie there and wait for the end when you don’t know what the end is going to be like.²⁸

No amount of crying or praying could protect the people from direct hits. A variety of bombs were used by the Allies to reach the huddled crowds, including incendiaries, aerial mines and the 11-ton Blockbuster, which, like its name, was designed to level an entire city block and kill every living thing in it. Special delayed-action devices were also developed to penetrate buildings and explode in basements and shelters. While relatively few bunkers actually suffered direct hits, death came in many ways.

26. Pechel et al, *Voices From the Third Reich*, 225.

27. *Ibid.*

28. McKee, *Dresden*, 137–138.

“An elderly lady had a heart attack and died right in front of us,” revealed a little girl from one terror-filled shelter. “There was nothing anybody could do for her, Mother said. The strange thing was that nobody seemed to care very much that she had died.”²⁹

Added a witness from another shelter:

She had been sitting on the floor with her back against a mirror. The mirror had been fixed low down on the wall. . . . And after the house had been hit the whole mirror had smashed in a thousand splinters which had penetrated the woman’s back and head. Very quickly, without anyone noticing it in the dark and excitement, the old woman bled to death.³⁰

“A cloud of dust from the cellar ceiling settled over us as a gigantic explosion boomed and the lights went out,” Olga Held wrote from Nuremberg. “The force of the blast pushed me down the foundation wall and a sharp pain stabbed my right ear. I screamed. Mother held me tightly and it seemed to relieve the pain for a minute or two, but the damage was done. . . . I had lost half of the hearing in my right ear.”³¹

For those forced to endure the seemingly endless assault, the strain soon took its toll. “The earth shook, the walls cracked and the plaster came down like flour until the whole basement was one cloud of dust . . .,” recorded Elli Nawroski of Hamburg. “No one spoke a word. Then, the nerves of one of my colleagues snapped. There was complete silence in the shelter when this girl suddenly started to laugh. . . . Someone said, ‘This is nothing to laugh about,’ to which the girl replied, ‘This is all I have ever wanted.’ She really had no idea what she was saying. Her mother and grandmother were both killed that night.”³²

“It was not death that was terrible that night,” explained Jacob Schutz of Darmstadt, “but the *fear* of death—the whimpering, the shrieks, the screams.”³³

With fingers “still trembling round the fountain pen,” one woman who had experienced other air raids tried to block from her mind the death above and the “fear of death” all around by jotting in her journal:

29. Chadwick, *Anna*, 53.

30. Anonymous, *Woman in Berlin*, 273–274.

31. Bruner manuscript, 113.

32. Middlebrook, *Hamburg*, 258.

33. Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 315.

I'm drenched, as though after heavy work. . . . Ever since I myself was bombed out and during that night had to help rescue the buried, I've been attacked by the fear of death. The symptoms are always the same. The palms of my hands begin to sweat. Then a circle of sweat round the scalp, a boring sensation in the spinal cord, a twitching pain in the neck, the roof of the mouth dries up, the heart beats in syncope, the eyes stare at the chair leg opposite, memorizing its carved knobs and curves. To be able to pray now. The brain gropes for fragments of sentences: 'Let the world go by, it's nothing. . . . And no one falls out of this world. . . . *Noli timere*.'³⁴

And then, continued the woman, to the relief of all "the wave subsides" and there was only silence overhead. "As though by command a feverish babbling broke out. Everyone began to laugh, to shout to the others, to crack jokes."³⁵

Too often, however, such laughter and levity was cut short by yet more waves of bombers. As nightmarish and surreal as conditions were in the shelters, the situation was vastly more terrible for those trapped outside. Caught in the open with an old woman and her grandchildren, Ilse Koehn lay helpless as "all hell breaks loose."

[B]ombs fall like rain. Millions of long, rounded shapes come tumbling down around us. The sky turns gray, black, the earth erupts. The detonations begin to sound like continuous thunder. . . . "Grandma! Grandma!" wails the little girl, pulling at her skirt. "Grandma, let's go to the bunker; please, please, Grandma!"

I'm flat on the ground. Bombs, bombs, bombs fall all around me. It can't be. It's a dream. There aren't that many bombs in the whole world. Maybe I'm dead? I get up, drag pail, old woman and girl with me toward a porch, a concrete porch with space underneath. Above the detonations, flak fire, [and] shattering glass, rises the old woman's high-pitched voice: *God in Heaven! God in Heaven!*" And now the baby's wailing, too.

Hang on to the earth. It heaves as if we are on a trampoline, but I cling to it, dig my nails into it. Why is it so dark? The old woman crouches over the baby. She shakes a fist at the little girl, then screams: "God in Heaven forgive her. Forgive her her ugliness, her sin. . . . O Lord, I know she didn't say her prayers!" Her fist comes down on the little girl's head.

A sizzling piece of shrapnel embeds itself in the concrete of the porch. The little girl grabs me, her nails dig into my neck. Her voice, as if in excruciating pain, pierces my eardrums: *Mama! Mama! Where are you, Mama?*" A clod of soil

34. Anonymous, *Woman*, 24.

35. *Ibid.*

hits me in the face. I'm still alive. Alive with fear and ready to promise any powers that be that I'll become a better person if only my life is spared.

Warroom. Warroomwarroomwaroom. My whole body is lifted off the ground, dropped again, up and down again. . . . "You wicked girl . . . O Lord! . . . Why didn't you say your prayers?" Over and over again. . . . "Mama! Mama! Mama!"

Rrrahrrahrrahhhh!

Grandma, little girl and baby wailing over the bombs, the flak. Will this ever end?³⁶

And then, like a miracle, there was nothing. Ilse continues:

Suddenly, it's quiet. Dead quiet. A spine-chilling, eerie quiet. I'm breathing. We're all breathing. Strange to hear our breaths. What's that? Oh, only a fire engine. Sirens. Sirens again? All Clear. That means I can leave.

"I'm sorry, but I have to go. I have to collect some pig fodder," I say.

"Of course, my dear," the old lady replies. "I'm sorry you have to leave so soon. You must come again. Come visit us. We'll have tea. It's very nice to have met you." We shake hands very formally.³⁷



As the above experience illustrated, one of the few advantages survivors caught outside possessed was that they could generally stagger away to safety once the "All Clear" had sounded. Those underground often could not. Moments after a raid, frantic rescue squads set to work. One searcher, naval recruit Jan Montyn, left a vivid account of devastated Mannheim:

Smoke. The crackling of fire. The smell of sulfur and TNT. A rumbling of houses collapsing. The occasional delayed explosion. And people. People giving orders, calling out, shouting, screaming, crying. Footsteps. Running. Shuffling. People scrambling about in a daze amid the debris—not knowing what they are looking for, much less where.

The first rescue teams were already feverishly clearing access routes to allow fire engines and ambulances to reach those streets that could still be made to some extent passable. Others roamed about the ruins, clambering over heaps of rubble, in search of gas leaks and burst water mains. There was a risk of further explosions. The cellars might fill up with water. Anyone who had not

36. Koehn, *Mischling*, 189–190.

37. *Ibid.*, 190.

been buried, who had not been asphyxiated, had not been roasted in the heat, could still drown. With the aid of maps, efforts were made to locate the air raid shelters. Then the rubble had to be cleared: with spades, with our bare hands, a wet cloth in front of our faces, our eyebrows and lashes scorched. Stone by stone, fragment by fragment. The debris is removed by a living chain of hands. And look out. Be careful. A floor can cave in without warning under the weight of the rubble—be careful. Meanwhile the fire is still burning everywhere and, from time to time, far away or close at hand, comes the sound of an explosion. Unexploded time bombs. You might trip over one at any moment.³⁸

Their havens buried beneath tons of debris, survivors could only huddle together, choke back the terror and await what they prayed would be their deliverance. Wrote one little girl:

People were weeping and saying, “Oh my God, oh my God, where is the water coming from?” I could feel my feet getting wet. Some candles were lit so we could see where the water came from, but one man went around blowing out all the candles again, shouting, “You blockheads. Do you want us all to blow up? Can’t you smell the gas? . . .” Nobody could find where the water was coming from; it just kept on rising slowly. We pulled up our feet onto the benches and waited for something to happen.

“Don’t worry,” Mother told us again. “They’ll find us in a minute or two.”

A woman started singing a hymn about God being a strong fortress and a mighty defense who would help us through whatever happened. I knew that hymn and sang along as other people joined in. . . . Singing helped a lot. While I was singing, I didn’t have time to be scared.

And then the cellar door opened with a loud crash and I saw a man poking his head in. He held a large flashlight and said, “The party is over. Let’s go.” Then everybody shouted “Hurray” and “Thank God” and “What took you so long?” It was as if nobody had been frightened and shouted and cried just a little while earlier.³⁹

While the search for those buried in the ruins continued, others emerged from hiding to discover a landscape turned surreal. “As we slowly made a cautious move out of the cellar we were shocked by the darkness,” said a survivor of one Berlin raid. “Two hours earlier it was a beautiful summer day. Now we couldn’t see the sun. All there was to see was a putrid looking greenish blue sky, with scraps of burned

38. Montyn, *Lamb to Slaughter*, 71.

39. Chadwick, *Anna*, 53–54.

cloth and paper floating through the air. It was dark in the middle of the day.”⁴⁰ Recalled little Traute Koch:

With great apprehension we stepped out on to the street. There was only one way, in front of us, but what a way! There was a great heat and leaden gloom over us. Where there had been houses only a few hours before, only some single walls with empty windows towered upwards. In between were large heaps of rubble, still glowing. Torn overhead wires were hanging everywhere. . . . Suddenly, I saw tailors’ dummies lying around. I said, “Mummy, no tailors lived here and, yet, so many dummies lying around.” My mother grabbed me by my arm and said, “Go on. Don’t look too closely. On. On. We have to get out of here.”⁴¹

From Hamburg, Otto Mahncke recorded a new horror at every step:

On the corner . . . a woman who had come back from a birthday party was screaming, “My child! My child! Up there!” None of the men or women dared to go into the house to save the baby. . . . [W]e saw sailors rescuing people out of a burning house, passing them from balcony to balcony. Some people were saved. Then, suddenly, the house collapsed like a pack of cards. Everybody standing on the balconies fell into the ruins. . . . An old woman of seventy was calling for help from the third-floor window of a half-timbered house. The room was ablaze. I ran with some other men to fetch a ladder. We found a long one and a number of men climbed up to save the woman. But they all came back after the second floor; it was too hot. I tried, too, but had to retreat only a few steps under the window. The heat was too great. When I got to the ground, I saw the woman looking down with wild eyes and then fall back to her death among the flames.⁴²

From the same city, seventeen-year-old Helmut Wilkens witnessed similar scenes in his burning neighborhood:

Someone stood at a second-floor window, calling for help. It was Mr. Schwarz, who never went down to the shelter; only his wife did that. People called up to him to jump. We stretched out some blankets for him to jump into but he was afraid. The blankets would not have saved him. Suddenly, there were two sailors. . . . They said, “Shoot him. He won’t suffer in agony any more. He’s burning already.” They started to fire at him with their pistols. He fell forward, then, and smashed on to the pavement.⁴³

40. Sorge, *Other Price*, 109.

41. Middlebrook, *Hamburg*, 274.

42. *Ibid.*, 169–170.

43. *Ibid.*, 295.

“People with an arm or leg caught under heavy burning timbers cried for help . . . ,” remembered Olga Held as she ran through the streets of Nuremberg. “Screams came from under tons of burning debris. In every direction I looked trapped people begged to be freed.”⁴⁴

To the shattered survivors following a raid, the dead seemed to outnumber the living. One victim, noted a horror-struck man in Darmstadt, was “lying like a statue, her cold heels in their shoes stuck up in the air, her arms raised . . . , her mouth and teeth gaping open so that you did not know whether she had been laughing or crying.”⁴⁵

“One fat air-raid warden lay, his little lantern beside him, his hands peacefully folded on his enormous chest,” another witness reported from the same city. “He looked like a sleeper replete after a banquet.”⁴⁶

Not everyone discovered was a nameless stranger. “My two children were pulled out dead,” agonized one mother in Cologne. “You could hardly see any injuries on them. They only had a small drop of blood on their noses and large bloody scrapes on the backs of their heads. I was in a state of total shock. I wanted to scream . . . I wanted to scream.”⁴⁷

Even as stunned survivors escaped their shelters and wandered through the streets, workers frantically searched for those still trapped underground. For many victims, it was far too late. When would-be rescuers finally broke through to buried bunkers they often found scenes of unimaginable horror. In cellars suffering direct hits, walls were awash in blood, with bone, brains and body parts splattered everywhere. In some shelters, broken water mains had slowly drowned the occupants. Ruptured steam pipes had boiled alive other screaming victims. Nevertheless, the grisly search for life went on. Jan Montyn:

We were busy for hours, stone after stone. The rubble was piled up metres high. Chalk, cement, straw, broken furniture, beams. From time to time we stuffed some food into our mouths, at a hastily erected aid post. And on we went again. Grimly, unthinking, uncomprehending. Our eyes ran with tears, but we were oblivious, our hands were raw and covered in blood, but we felt nothing. We heard tapping signals. We heard voices coming from the depths of the

44. Bruner, 120–121.

45. Hastings, 315.

46. Ibid.

47. Pechel, *Voices*, 463.

earth. And we worked faster. Stone after stone. But the time passed. Hour after hour. The night passed. The tapping signals grew fainter. We quickened our speed. The sun came up. We no longer heard any voices. Nor any tapping sounds.

Towards noon we managed to open up the entrance to the shelter. But we found nothing but death. We sat down, scorched and sooty, defeated, exhausted. And then suddenly a miracle happened. It was Bo'sun Heyne. He tore like a madman at a mansize hunk of masonry, his face contorted like an idiot's. His eyes bulged. He became redder and redder. The veins in his temples seemed about to burst. But the wall of stone yielded and he had to jump aside to avoid being crushed. A cavity was revealed. And in that cavity there was a large rush basket.

"I knew it, goddammit, I knew it, goddammit, goddammit," stammered Bo'sun Heyne. And he took something in his arms. Something that was very small, that moved. Something that cried.⁴⁸



And then, after hours, even days, of death, screams, tears, irony, and occasionally, miracles, something often occurred that many thought impossible—the sirens sounded again. For many incredulous victims of the first raids, the sound seemed—and often was—the end of the world. As was the case with the attacks against Hamburg, Berlin, Nuremberg, Darmstadt, Cologne, and other German cities, after first blasting a targeted town to splinters, the British and American bombers soon returned in hopes of catching survivors and rescuers in the open and igniting with fire bombs all that remained.

Stumbling once again to the shelters, few could have imagined that they were returning to death traps. When the roaring bombers released their lethal cargo, a veritable rain of fire descended on a doomed town.

"[A] huge burning cloud . . . slowly settled on the city . . ." said a witness from Wurzburg. "This fiery cloud knew no pity. It sank on churches and houses, palaces and citadels, broad avenues and narrow streets. At the outset burning drops spurted from the cloud causing isolated fires, then the burning veil enveloped Wurzburg. In a few moments a gigantic path of flame lit up the dark night and turned the clouds to scarlet."⁴⁹

48. Montyn, *Lamb*, 71–72.

49. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, x.

“It was as if fire was poured from the sky,” added one horror-struck viewer from another town.⁵⁰

“Everything, everything is burning!” shouted a man who rushed into the shelter occupied by Martha Gros.

There was a dreadful crash, the walls shook, we heard masonry cracking and collapsing, and the crackle of flames. Plaster began to fall and we all thought the ceiling would collapse. . . . About thirty seconds later there was a second terrible explosion, the cellar-door flew open, and I saw, bathed in a brilliant light, the staircase to the cellar collapsing and a river of fire pouring down. I shouted “Let’s get out!” but the [captain] gripped me: “Stay here, they are still overhead.” At that moment, the house opposite was hit. The armored plate in front of our cellar flew up in the air, and a tongue of fire about fifteen feet long shot through at us. Cupboards and other furniture burst and fell on to us. The terrible pressure hurled us against the wall.⁵¹

Many victims initially tried to toss hissing fire bombs out windows. To discourage such attempts, some incendiary sticks carried deadly delayed charges.⁵²

Soon, the thousands of small fires joined to form one huge blaze, creating a vortex of wind and flame. “The noise,” one terrified listener remembered, “was like that of an old organ in a church when someone is playing all the notes at once.”⁵³ Now, for the first time, many in the cellars and bunkers realized that their havens would soon become ovens. Wrote Rolf Witt of Hamburg:

Word of what was happening in the street must have spread to the people at the back of our shelter because they broke down the wall to the next-door basement. That was a great mistake because, when they did this, they found that they were looking into a furnace. The street door was half open and, with the air being drawn out of our basement, the smoke and fire came pouring through the break in the wall. Everyone became severely affected by smoke. I heard people screaming but this became less and less. . . . We were within seconds of death. I could not speak to my parents because of the gas mask I was wearing. I tapped father on the shoulder as a sign that I was going. I thought they would follow me. A few seconds before I would have suffocated, I must have had a

50. McKee, *Dresden*, 169.

51. Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 311–312

52. McKee, *Dresden*, 140.

53. Middlebrook, *Hamburg*, 269.

tremendous burst of strength. At a moment when the door was open and when no burning debris was falling down, I sprang out into the street.⁵⁴

Like young Witt, other trapped victims were frantic to escape the blistering heat. Martha Gros:

[S]omebody shouted: "Get out and hold hands!" With all his strength he pulled me out from under the wreckage. I dropped my cash box and pulled the others with me. We climbed through the hole leading to the back. . . . More bombs were already falling into the garden. We crouched low, each of us beating out the small flames flickering on the clothes of the one in front. Phosphorous clung to the trees and dripped down on us.⁵⁵

"People who got phosphorous on them presented a fearful sight," recalled Rosa Todt. "Their skin was bright red, water dripping out of the pores of their skin; their ears and nose, their whole face, was a nauseating mask."⁵⁶

Despite almost certain death in the streets, most instinctively knew that their only hope was to escape the shelters. "Mother wrapped me in wet sheets, kissed me, and said, 'Run!'" recounted Traute Koch. "I hesitated at the door. In front of me I could see only fire—everything red, like the door to a furnace. An intense heat struck me. A burning beam fell in front of my feet. I shied back but, then, when I was ready to jump over it, it was whirled away by a ghostly hand. I ran out to the street. The sheets around me acted as sails and I had the feeling that I was being carried away by the storm."⁵⁷

Hellish as the earlier raids had seemed, many now, for the first time, discovered the true meaning of the word. "The heat from the surrounding houses . . . was unbearable," said a teenage boy as he staggered through the furnace. "We whimpered and cried from the pain of it."⁵⁸

"Burning people raced past like live torches," Martha Gros remembered, "and I listened to their unforgettable final screams."⁵⁹

54. *Ibid.*, 265.

55. Hastings, 312.

56. Middlebrook, 147.

57. *Ibid.*, 264.

58. *Ibid.*, 268.

59. Hastings, 312.

“All we could hear were the terrible screams for help from the cellars of the streets around us,” added a girl from Darmstadt.⁶⁰

With every fiery step, a new nightmare appeared. “I struggled to run against the wind in the middle of the street . . . ,” wrote nineteen-year-old Kate Hoffmeister. “We . . . couldn’t go on across . . . because the asphalt had melted. There were people on the roadway, some already dead, some still lying alive but stuck in the asphalt. . . . They were on their hands and knees screaming.”⁶¹

In a desperate bid to escape the inferno at Hamburg, fifteen-year-old Herbert Brecht and several other rescue workers fled in a car and small trailer.

Burning people ran and staggered after us. Others were lying on the road, dead or unconscious. . . . [O]ur trailer got stuck in a bomb crater. We unhitched it and jumped into the car which was still running; there were six of us crammed inside. After another 200 metres we were forced to a halt between the trams standing in front of the tram depot. Our car caught fire immediately. We all managed to get out and we stood there in those fires of hell. The storm pulled me, unwillingly, into an enormous bomb crater in the middle of the road. Those of us who did not get into this crater had no chance of survival. . . .

There was a smashed water main in the bomb crater. Although there was no pressure left in the pipe, the water still ran into the crater and we had to fight against the flood. Some people drowned or were buried when the sides of the crater caved in. . . . Because I always wore my goggles on duty, I could see everything very clearly. The burning people who were being driven past our bomb crater by the storm could never have survived. Eventually, there were about forty people lying in the crater. There was a soldier in uniform near me with a lot of medals. He tried to take his life with a knife. . . .

About this time, I noticed that a car had driven into our crater and had buried some people beneath it. . . . I hadn’t seen this happen. It was only through the crying of a small boy that I noticed it. He was lying with the front bumper of the car on top of him. . . .

The screams of the burning and dying people are unforgettable. When a human being dies [like that], he screams and whimpers and, then, there is the death rattle in his throat.⁶²

60. *Ibid.*, 313.

61. *Middlebrook*, 266–267.

62. *Ibid.*, 268–269.

Like the badly burned Brecht, some miraculously survived the holocaust, reaching safety in rivers, canals and parks. Thousands more, however, did not. When the raids finally ended and the firestorms began to recede, the fortunate few began to reemerge. Again, young Herbert Brecht:

At midday—it never got light—a man came and pulled some of us survivors out of the crater. He was an elderly man who also had a burnt face. When he pulled me out by the hands, my skin stuck to him in shreds. He looked at me—I cannot describe his look—and he could only say, “Child! Child! . . .” The air was hardly breathable and my injuries hurt hellishly. Dead lay everywhere. Most were naked because their clothes had been burnt away. All had become shrunken, really small, because of the heat. . . . I saw a burnt-out tramcar in which naked bodies were lying on top of each other. The glass of the windows had melted.⁶³

“There was a deathly silence in the town, ghostly and chilling,” remembered Martha Gros as she stumbled through the ruins of Darmstadt. “It was even more unreal than the previous night. Not a bird, not a green tree, no people, nothing but corpses.”⁶⁴

“Four-story-high blocks of flats were like glowing mounds of stone right down to the basement,” Anne-Lies Schmidt noted as she searched for her parents in a section of Hamburg.

Everything seemed to have melted. . . . Women and children were so charred as to be unrecognizable. . . . Their brains tumbled from their burst temples and their insides [spilled] from the soft parts under the ribs. . . . The smallest children lay like fried eels on the pavement. Even in death, they showed signs of how they must have suffered—their hands and arms stretched out as if to protect themselves from that pitiless heat.⁶⁵

Many survivors, including Martha Gros, now returned to the death-traps they had fled in hopes of recovering valuables.

We climbed over the wreckage into the garden and proceeded to the burnt-out cellar. The ashes were almost two feet deep. I found the place where I had dropped our cash box, picked it up and opened it. The 1,000 Reichmark note

63. *Ibid.*, 274, 275.

64. Hastings, 321.

65. Middlebrook, 276.

which I had saved for emergencies was a heap of ashes. The little boxes of jewelry had been burned. The best piece, a large emerald, had cracked. Around our safe lay large lumps of melted silver, and in the wine-racks, there were melted bottles hanging in bizarre long ribbons. For this to have happened the temperature must have been something like 1,700 degrees.⁶⁶

Sad and disappointing as discoveries such as these were, others who returned to cellars found scenes straight from the blackest of nightmares. Due to the tremendous heat, some bunkers contained only dozens of log-like shapes, charred and shriveled to only a quarter their original size. Dogs and cats had been reduced to the size of rats. In still other cellars, only a powdery gray ash remained. When rescuers entered some shelters they found floors covered in up to a foot of greasy fat—the victims having been rendered into a dark, evil liquid.⁶⁷

Because of sickening sights and smells such as the above, many dazed rescuers quickly slipped into a state of “nervous hysteria.” When offered liquor by understanding officials, not a few workers drank to drunkenness in an effort to bear up.⁶⁸ One of those ordered to bring in burn victims prior to their transfer to a waiting hospital ship was Otto Muller. Relates the Hamburg policeman:

The burnt people were marked with a label round their neck giving their personal details and their degree of burns. I talked to a doctor and he told me that the larger the area of burn, the less pain the people felt but that, when the burns had reached a certain percentage of the body area, death was inevitable. The doctor went through the rows of injured and those with too much area of burn he left behind because there was only room for those with a chance of survival. He was looking for those who were still in pain and these were chosen to be put on the ship. The people being left behind knew that they had no chance. One man dragged himself up my leg to get at my pistol holster—it was simply dreadful.⁶⁹

In many cases, nurses and doctors could do little more than soak sheets in salad oil and spread it over the wretched victims. Officer Muller continues:

66. Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 321.

67. Middlebrook, *Hamburg*, 266, 272; Hastings, 319.

68. Hastings, 321, 322.

69. Middlebrook, 374.

I was going through burning streets . . . when I suddenly saw a young girl. I thought it might even be my own daughter. . . . I stopped my motor cycle and the girl came running towards me. Her face was black with soot except for two streams of tears which were running down her face. She was dragging her little dead brother behind her; the right side of his face was already scraped smooth. She had been wandering around aimlessly for three days and two nights. . . . This little girl put her hand round my neck and said . . . "Please take us along with you."⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, because of the severe and continuous emotional shock such as Muller and others experienced—shock, not only from the devastating air raids and firestorms, but also from the hellish aftermaths—hundreds of survivors soon lost their reason and ran through the smoldering streets shouting and screaming at everything, or nothing. "One man has gone mad," noted Anne-Kaete Seifarth. "He's standing in front of a mound of bricks from a collapsed wall, on top of which he had erected the swastika flag. He is screaming at the fugitives with a steel helmet on his head—his face mad—and he is bombarding the fugitives with bricks."⁷¹

More often the case, however, unhinged survivors simply staggered aimlessly amid the rubble, babbling and gesturing incoherently. Others were so utterly stunned as to be all but dead to further emotion. Liselotte Klemich recalled seeing refugees resting on a toppled tree trunk after one shattering air raid. "And from under [the] fallen tree," observed the woman, "a hand in a white glove was slowly opening and closing. No one even tried to lift up the huge tree trunk."⁷²

Frantic to escape the stricken cities, terrified that the bombers would return, survivors fled pell-mell toward the countryside. "We were carried along by the stream of people who had been bombed out, their faces gray and their backs bent, heavily laden with their belongings," recorded Ursula von Kardorff in her diary. "When evening fell over the burning city one hardly noticed it, because it had been so dark all day."⁷³

"It was the most pathetic sight I had ever seen . . .," Margot Schulz added as one flight of victims passed through her village.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., 279.

72. Pechel, *Voices*, 226.

73. Ursula von Kardorff, *Diary of a Nightmare* (New York: John Day, 1966), 191.

They were in their night dresses—half burned sometimes—and pajamas, sometimes a coat thrown over their shoulders. They pushed their belongings in a pram, still with the baby in. . . . You have to imagine the hysteria, with some of the people burnt and crying. It went on for days. It was just endless. . . . I remember a woman suddenly collapsing on the pavement across the road from where I lived and giving birth to a baby. The baby came after about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes of moaning and groaning. . . . There was another woman, sat on the pavement near by, breast-feeding her baby. She was only dressed in a nightdress and all her hair was burnt away. And, all the time, the exodus went on. It was a constant stream of misery.⁷⁴

Carolyn Schaefer, herself desperate to flee burned-out Darmstadt, tried to shield her sons' eyes from the hideous sights in the corpse-strewn streets, "I felt that if the boys were to see this, they could never grow up to lead happy lives," explained the mother. Carolyn soon abandoned her efforts, however, since a new horror arose at seemingly every step. Spotting an old friend pushing a bicycle with melted tires, the woman quickly noticed a box fastened to the back.

"Silently she embraced me," said Carolyn. "Then she began to cry, pointing to the box. 'In there is my husband,' she said."⁷⁵



When word first filtered to the outside world of the butchery being visited upon the women and children of Germany by the RAF, the British government initially tried to deflect criticism by simple denial. Well aware that many voices at home and abroad would denounce such slaughter in the strongest terms, military and civil spokesmen of the United Kingdom were trotted out on a regular basis to solemnly assuage the world.

"The targets of Bomber Command are always military," Air Minister Sir Archibald Sinclair assured the House of Commons in early 1943.⁷⁶

"There is no indiscriminate bombing," chorused Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee a short time later. "As has been repeatedly stated

74. Middlebrook, 279–280.

75. Hastings, 322.

76. *Ibid.*, 171.

in the House, the bombing is of those targets which are most effective from the military point of view.”⁷⁷

Added political leader Harold Balfour: “I can give the assurance that we are not bombing the women and children of Germany wantonly.”⁷⁸

Despite the power and persistence of government denial, grim truth could not be skirted long. Some voices of conscience were outraged, calling the massacre of innocent civilians “savage,” “inhuman and un-English.”⁷⁹ Many critics, however, were more concerned by the apparent “moral collapse” of any nation that could commit such crimes than for the nation who was a victim of it.

“To bomb cities as cities, deliberately to attack civilians, quite irrespective of whether or not they are actively contributing to the war effort, is a wrong deed, whether done by the Nazis or by ourselves,” announced George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester.⁸⁰

“It will be ironical,” added the preeminent British historian, Basil Liddell Hart, “if the defenders of civilization depend for victory upon the most barbaric, and unskilled, way of winning a war that the modern world has seen. . . . We are now counting for victory on success in the way of degrading it to a new level—as represented by indiscriminate (night) bombing.”⁸¹

“The ruthless mass bombing of congested cities is as great a threat to the integrity of the human spirit as anything which has yet occurred on this planet . . . ,” author Vera Brittain later protested. “There is no military or political advantage which can justify this blasphemy.”⁸²

Evidence that the much dreaded moral demise of Great Britain had already arrived was provided by many RAF bomber crews themselves. To many airmen, the almost total lack of Luftwaffe opposition in the skies over Germany made the bombing of cities less and less like war and more and more like murder. While open criticism of government policy could have earned a reprimand, court-martial, imprisonment, or worse, the turmoil raging within many a young flyer

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid., 173.

79. Sorge, *Other Price*, 107.

80. Middlebrook, 346.

81. Hastings, 176.

82. Sorge, 108.

occasionally surfaced. During one pre-flight briefing for yet another carpet bombing raid, an anonymous voice from the back of the room cried out, “women and children first again.”⁸³

“There were people down there,” another crewman confessed, “being fried to death in melted asphalt in the roads, they were being burnt up and we were shuffling incendiary bombs into this holocaust. I felt terribly sorry for the people in that fire I was helping to stoke up.”⁸⁴

While public criticism by bomber crews themselves was considered tantamount to treason, many a troubled young soul revealed itself in private ways.

“[M]y navigator and I cycled to Huntingdon and took a boat out on the river,” remembered one RAF pilot following a raid. “We drifted quietly downstream and Nick said, ‘What about those poor sods under those fires?’”

The young pilot reflected on the words for a moment or two, but remained silent.

“I couldn’t think of anything to say. We drifted quietly on.”⁸⁵

Surprisingly, though duty-bound to obey orders, members of the military hierarchy occasionally gave vent to personal anger and outrage at their government’s actions. Incensed by the British media’s bloodthirsty gloating over the massacres—“ALL GERMANS ARE GUILTY!” ran one headline; “NO PITY! NO MERCY!” screamed another⁸⁶—Brigadier Cecil Aspinall-Oglander at last lashed out in a letter to the *London Times*:

Britain and her Allies and well-wishers must all be devoutly thankful that the RAF is at last able to repay Germany in her own coin and to inflict upon her cities the same devastation that she has inflicted on ours. But it must offend the sensibilities of a large mass of the British population that our official broadcasts, when reporting these acts of just retribution, should exult at and gloat over the suffering which our raids necessitate. . . . Let us at least preserve the decencies of English taste. An Englishman does not exult when a criminal is condemned to the scaffold, nor gloat over his sufferings at the time of his execution.⁸⁷

83. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 82.

84. *Ibid.*

85. Middlebrook, *Hamburg*, 368.

86. Garrett, 103.

87. Hastings, 174.

While Arthur Harris was the man planning and implementing the bombing campaign, and did so with undisguised glee, Winston Churchill was the individual responsible for its onset and, ultimately, its outcome. Far from bending to the cries of mercy and humanity, the prime minister pursued the bomber offensive with a dogged determination that brooked no deviation. Even so, the enigmatic British leader was not without his moments of doubt and on occasion, pangs of conscience surfaced in an otherwise stubborn demeanor. "In the course of the film showing the bombing of German towns from the air, very well and dramatically done," a guest of the prime minister jotted in his diary, "W. C. suddenly sat bolt upright and said to me: 'Are we beasts? Are we taking this too far?'"⁸⁸

Such rare sparks of compassion, however, were quickly doused by Churchill's abiding antipathy toward "the Boche." Despite the persistent, though largely weak and easily ignored pleas for restraint, the sentiments of the British prime minister, as well as a majority of his countrymen, could be summed up succinctly by the popular phrase: "The only good German is a dead one!"

As a consequence, the fiery massacres continued. Statistics on those killed, maimed or left homeless are horrific enough. But figures failed to reveal, another category of casualties that touched the lives of many millions more. Of all segments of German society affected by the bombing terror, children suffered most.

"Mommy! Mommy!! Airplanes! MOMMY, AIRPLANES!" screamed two-year-old Freddy Schrott when he heard the sirens wail at his home in Wolfsburg. Although it had only been bombed once, and that but lightly, the town unfortunately found itself situated on the Allied flight path to Berlin. Hence, nightly the sirens sounded and nightly the terrible travail began. "He would stand in his little crib, shaking his arms and crying, 'Mommy, Airplanes! Mommy, AIRPLANES!'" remembered an older sister. "He was a nervous wreck."⁸⁹

"[T]he tears come. The tears and the terrible shaking," said another child who experienced the air raids. "The tears stop, but the shaking doesn't. I shiver, shake, tremble as if I had fever chills."⁹⁰

88. F. J. P. Veale, *Advance to Barbarism* (New York: Devin-Adair Co., 1968), 194.

89. Interview with Emma Schrott Krubel, Topeka, Kansas, 1/9/97.

90. Koehn, *Mischling*, 192.

Horribly, and in a tragedy fully as great, where frightened, confused children should have found most solace from the terror above, they often found instead only more terror below. Because of the radical disruption in their lives, parents faced incredible stress. Whether it was the loss of jobs caused by bombed-out factories and shops, or whether it was an actual increase of jobs as when those on the home front were compelled to perform air raid work at night in addition to their normal duties during the day; whether it was disruption in water, gas and electric services or whether it was simply the day-in, day-out uncertainty of their children's safety and their own—all worked to grind down parents as surely as if their homes had received direct hits. Recalled one troubled eight-year-old:

During this time I noticed that Father wasn't very nice to Mother. He'd get angry over nothing at all, and when he was very angry, he would hit her. I didn't like that. He was bigger than she was, and we had been taught never to hit anybody smaller than ourselves. It was awful to hear Mother cry in her bedroom and to listen to the arguments coming from there. Afterward, Father would go to work and Mother would come out from her room again and say, "Don't you worry, we just had a little disagreement." Then she'd give me a big smile and tell me that everything was fine. . . .

Around that time, both Dieter and Erich started wetting their beds every night, and Mother and Father had arguments about that, too.⁹¹

In an effort to save their children, both emotionally and physically, many urban parents sent offspring to the country for safekeeping. The evacuations—sometimes of entire schools, complete with teachers and books—were shattering, heart-wrenching moments for adults. Ultimately, some two and a half million children were relocated to camps and homes throughout the German hinterland.

With most of their crushing burden removed, adults who remained could now turn much-needed energies elsewhere. Despite the almost utter obliteration most cities and towns suffered, Germans who steadfastly held to their homes soon discovered that total destruction was no guarantee of sudden immunity. Operating under the premise that "bombing something in Germany is better than bombing nothing," Allied war planes returned to old targets again and again, blasting

91. Chadwick, *Anna*, 34.

buildings to bricks and bricks to dust. Nevertheless, thousands of determined Germans with nowhere to go merely dug deeper and deeper into the rubble.⁹²

“If they destroy our living room, we’ll move into the kitchen,” one tenacious woman exclaimed. “If the kitchen goes, we’ll move into the hallway. And if the hallways fall into ruins, we’ll move into the basement. As long as we can stay . . . a little corner of home is better than a strange place.”⁹³

“Like ‘little moles in their holes,’” thought Paula Kuhl as she viewed the phenomenon first-hand. The resiliency of her neighbors was as amazing and remarkable as it was sad and pathetic.

In the ruins, where basement cellars had defied all the bombs, people were quick off the mark to take possession of any four walls still standing, even if they were half underground. The cellars would soon be cleared of any debris, a ceiling fixed up and windows put in; enough building material was lying around anyway, free for the taking. Having managed to make some sort of living quarters habitable, one would find they were surprisingly comfortable, considering the unusual circumstance; even little rags of curtains adorned the windows. . . . Gradually, the enterprising “do-it-yourselfers” gathered more bricks and sticks together and built a little more “on and up” and, like mushrooms, little houses were sprouting out of the ground again.⁹⁴

Beyond the natural human inclination to abide amid familiar surroundings, another explanation for the seemingly suicidal tendency to remain was simply that many Germans were learning to cope. Explained a chronicler from the heavily bombed city of Kassel:

Three hundred times the people of Kassel ran terrified to their air-raid shelters as giant British and American planes dropped their bombs. Nearly 10,000 were killed in the first terrible bombing. . . . That was largely an incendiary attack, which set the whole center of the city afire. . . . From that night on they never knew when; they just knew they were doomed. Sometimes they got only a few bombs; often raiding parties which couldn’t reach objectives farther east around Berlin picked Kassel on the way home. Occasionally swarms of planes went directly overhead and nothing happened; other times they went overhead, and when the people of Kassel thought they were going on eastward, they wheeled around and came back to drop their powerful tons of TNT.

92. Ralph Barker, *The RAF at War* (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life, 1981), 161.

93. Sorge, 94.

94. Middlebrook, *Hamburg*, 359–360.

They got so they knew all the tricks, those that remained in Kassel. Steadily their town was beaten down upon their heads. . . . They learned how to dig in, to escape the coal fumes, the fire. Somehow, I thought it was with just a touch of pride that the Mayor said, "And then our latest raid. . . . It was by far the biggest. Perhaps a thousand big bombers, one of the biggest raids in all Germany; and we lost very few killed—less than 100."⁹⁵

That thousands of people, at Kassel and elsewhere, could survive amid the debris was nothing short of miraculous. Another miracle, and one which consistently baffled, bewildered and ultimately frustrated Allied leaders, was the failure of terror-bombing to deal a death blow to German morale. "Our walls are breaking, but not our hearts," ran a typical sign poking up from the bricks of Berlin.⁹⁶ Despite enduring five years of the worst war known to modern man, trust in Germany and faith in the Fuhrer remained surprisingly strong. Although morale occasionally cracked, particularly after a heavy air raid or yet another land defeat, it never quite crumbled. By January 1945, Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich had become so inextricably intertwined with one another, that for Germans to lose faith in the one would have been to lose faith in the other. And this, the bombed, burned and battered people never did.

With the armies of the world closing in for the kill by land, sea and air, Germans still looked to their leader for a miracle.

"Faith in the Fuhrer is so great," revealed one observer, "that just a small victory would quickly change the mood of many for the better."⁹⁷

Though few believed any longer that Germany could win the war, most felt that this incredible man who had triumphed so long and often against impossible odds would nevertheless pull off a miracle in the last hour. And this, as he paced his bunker deep beneath the ruins of Berlin, poring over maps with his generals, this was the very thing Adolf Hitler, with every ounce of energy he possessed, was striving to do—to save the German nation in this, the eleventh hour of the war.

95. Ralph Franklin Keeling, *Gruesome Harvest* (rpt., 1947; Torrance, Calif.: Institute for Historical Review, 1992), 3–4.

96. Terry Charman, *The German Home Front, 1939–1945* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1989), 147.

97. Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans*, 296.