



# WORLD WAR II

## MILITARY HISTORY

- 1776 The British evacuate Boston. 17 March commemorated at Evacuation Day.
- 1836 Fort Alamo falls to Mexican troops led by GEN Santa Anna.
- 1864 Ulysses S. Grant is commissioned as LTG and assumes command of Union armies.
- 1918 The Second Battle of the Somme begins.
- 1938 Germany annexes Austria.
- 1943 The Battle of Bismarck Sea begins in the Pacific Theater.
- 1946 The "Iron Curtain" speech took place in Fulton, Missouri.
- 1968 The massacre at My Lai in Vietnam occurs.
- 1979 The Camp David Accord is signed.
- 2003 The United States begins invasion of Iraq.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The current Government Bridge that connects Rock Island Arsenal with Davenport, Iowa was constructed in 1896. An engineering marvel of its time, the bridge was built with reinforced steel which allowed it to hold even the heaviest locomotive engines. However, the piers of the 1896 bridge are actually the piers from the iron bridge that was constructed in 1872. In its 123 year history, the bridge has lost less than ten percent of its structural integrity.

### TRIVIA

- ① What was the name of the B-29 bomber that dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki?
- ② What was the main language used for encryption by the Americans during World War II?
- ③ What RIA structure was built as a storage and freight loading warehouse that could fit two whole locomotives?

#### Last Month's Answers:

- ① What abbey built by the Benedictine Order in the sixth century was destroyed during World War II?  
**Monte Cassino**
- ② How many occupants did Quarters One at Rock Island house from 1872 thru 2008?  
**38**
- ③ Before RIA converted to steam power, what system utilized pulleys and belts used in the shops?  
**The Telodynamic System**

Answers to trivia and more are available on the ASC History Office's SharePoint page.



## Combined Bomber Offensive

The world trembled as fire rained down from the skies above. People were disoriented, frantic, and running for shelter as churches, hospitals, and houses burned to the ground. By the time the explosions ceased, most of the city was ablaze and in ruin. The date is 1 September 1939, and the name of the town is Wieluń, Poland. World War II has just begun in Europe with the *Luftwaffe* carrying out a series of pre-emptive attacks against its neighbors prior to invasion.

At the time of the attack on Poland, the *Luftwaffe* was considered one of the greatest threats to the Allies. The German's had begun to perfect the use of jet-engines, cruise missiles, and rocket propelled artillery. The V-weapons that Germany was producing were a troubling concern, especially to Great Britain by 1941. Over the course of the war, Germany had launched numerous assaults against many British towns with V-1 and V-2 rockets.

This was the stage that was set for the Allies as German forces raced across Europe. By the time the United States entered into the war after Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Europe was just trying to hang on while and adjust to this new multi-domain warfare.

The speed and progression of technology in Germany was not only a source of concern for the Allies, but also a prime target for a counter-strike. Striking at the pride of the German forces would deal an undeniable blow to the enemy. It also would mean that a major obstacle in the road to Berlin would be removed. Almost four years after the bombing of Wieluń, the Allies moved to launch a sustained bombing offensive against the Germans in a move to cripple them. This was the Combined Bomber Offensive—a series of strategic bombing campaigns designed to send the German forces running.

Prior to the proposed offensive, the U.S. and the British had been acquiring targets and bombing those targets on their own. *Operation Pointblank* unified the Allied air forces into a structured format for the bombing of hostile facilities, materiel, and cities. The British were charged with utilizing heavy bombers under the cover of night to attack their targets. Meanwhile, U.S. bombers with fighter escorts would attack targets during the day. Due

to the nature of bombsights in World War II, accuracy was poor at best. Night time bombing raids meant even lower accuracy. As a result, there were often high amounts of collateral damage from British bombing runs.

The first raids of the Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) occurred on 10 June 1943 in the middle of the ongoing air battle in the Ruhr region. The Royal Air Force (RAF) had launched a raid against industrial German centers near the Rhine River on the border with Belgium. All of the locations that were bombed by the RAF were key industrial complexes which in some way handled production, movement, or management. Of 783 aircraft that were launched, thirty-eight were lost. Ruhr would continue to be a CBO target through the end of the war.

Due to the nature of the weapons used, many U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) aircraft were unable to carry the payloads of British weaponry. The USAAF bomber fleet consisted primarily of B-17 *Flying Fortress* and B-24 *Liberator* heavy bombers. As a result, American air raids tended to have a much higher number of bombers in their formations. Likewise, American bombing raids also were spread out over a wider area rather than a straight line. The USAAF's first campaign would be on 22 June in Huls, Germany against a synthetic rubber plant.

Intense anti-aircraft fire from the ground meant that losses were high, especially the earlier campaigns. The Germans had amassed a large amount of flak guns, air-burst rounds, and anti-aircraft guns. Britain would have over 40,000 aircraft losses by the end of the Battle of Europe, with the USAAF mounting just over 38,000. For comparison, Germany lost the same amount of both air forces combined. Between the RAF and USAAF, almost three million tons of bombs were dropped on Axis territories across one million sorties.

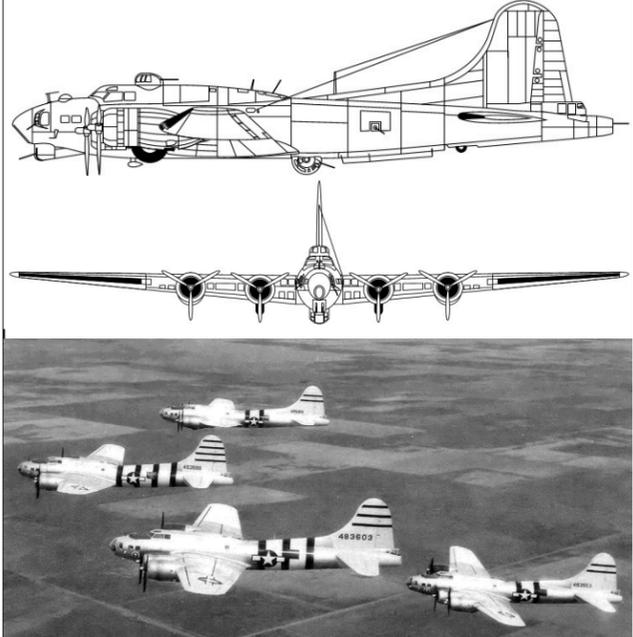
By the time the Combined Bomber Offensive ended in April of 1945, the Allied forces had pushed well into Germany. Some estimates conclude that many German cities had been completely destroyed by incendiary bombs from the British or carpet bombing from the Americans. The Allies had achieved their mission objective by breaking the industrial backbone of the Germans, and leaving the *Luftwaffe* totally stripped of any potential.

## The Boeing B-17 *Flying Fortress*

The B-17 was one of the USAAF's heavy bombers, and a primary bomber used during World War II. The need for the bomber was established in 1934 when the Air Corps requisitioned a replacement for their interwar era Martin B-10 bombers. The need was to have an aircraft that could reinforce units in the American Pacific territories. The Army outlined that the bomber be capable of flying at 10,000 feet, with a minimum top speed of 200 miles-per-hour. The range of these bombers was to be at least 2,000 miles. Much like today's defense contractors, the Air Corps decided a building competition be used to select the most appropriate air frame design. The winner was the Boeing Model 299.

The first flight of the Boeing Model 299 was on 28 July 1935. The B-17 model was introduced just shy of three years later in April of 1938. Boasting a top speed of 287 miles-per-hour, a ceiling of 35,600 feet, and a range of 2,000 miles with 6,000 pounds of bombs on board, the B-17 met all of the Air Corps requirements. The U.S. would use the B-17 throughout World War II, with it subsequently being retired in place of jet bombers after the war, such as the B-45 *Tornado*. The B-17 remained in

service with the Brazilian Air Force until 1968, marking a career of thirty-three years. Today, only ten aircraft remain airworthy, none of which saw active combat.



*A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.*

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