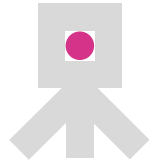


PhotoResearcher



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'Where are the pictures?'

Photography & British Public Perception of the Bombing of Germany, 1941–45

Tom Allbeson

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between the photographically-illustrated press and the government vis-à-vis the bombing of Germany during the Second World War. It will look at publications issued by the Ministry of Information, such as *Bomber Command* (1941) and *Bomber Command Continues* (1942), which sought to shape public perceptions of the campaign, as well as the depiction in *Picture Post* (the most widely circulating photo-magazine of the period) of this aspect of the British war effort following the escalation of the air offensive from 1942 onwards. This research addresses photography as a key facet of the British government's interaction with the press, taking the MOI photo-books and *Picture Post* as illustrative case studies in the public presentation of the bombing campaign. Specifically, this article considers the production, management and presentation of photographic depictions of the results of aerial bombardment to propose a disjunction in wartime Britain between public knowledge of Bomber Command's actions and public understanding of the consequences of this campaign. These case studies illuminate ways in which the contemporary field of public relations so prevalent in liberal democracies of the twenty-first century—mediating between governments and publics via the press—took shape during the Second World War in Britain.

Introduction

In 2012, a memorial to the 55,573 members of Bomber Command who lost their lives during the Second World War was unveiled in London's Green Park. That this memorial was only created nearly 70 years after the end of the war is testament to the debates about the efficacy and morality of the Allied bombing campaign that claimed the lives of an estimated 410,000 Germans, 60,000 French and others in occupied Europe.¹ The purpose of this article is not to pass judgement on the strategic or ethical issues regarding the bomber offensive, however, nor to trace the evolving debate on this issue over the decades. Rather, it will look at knowledge and understanding by the British public of Bomber Command's campaign between 1941 and 1945. An analysis of the photographic representation in both official publications and photo-magazines reveals that many of the tensions which characterise debate about Bomber Command today were present in wartime. Moreover, such an analysis prompts broader reflection on the interaction of government, military and the press in wartime.

The historiography of Bomber Command's involvement in the bombing of Germany suggests at least two alternative analyses of the British public's awareness of the air offensive. Philip M. Taylor, for instance, asserted that 'perhaps the greatest single achievement of any service department's publicity unit during the war' was the concealment from the British of the aims and impact of the bombing campaign.² Mark Connelly, however, argues that the

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1. Richard Overy, 'Introduction,' in: Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp and Richard Overy (eds.), *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe, 1940–1945*, London:

Continuum 2011, 1–20 (1).

2. Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1999, 187. See also David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* Basingstoke: Macmillan 1992, 'During the war the public were deliberately misled as to the aims of wartime bombing' (64).

aims—although not always explicitly stated—were broadly known and supported by the public.³ Despite appearances, these different perspectives are neither diametrically opposed nor irreconcilable. As Ian McLaine observed in his history of the Ministry of Information (MOI), there was an attempt by arms of government to mislead the public, but the public were nonetheless aware of the campaign and its targets—a situation that amounted to ‘a tacit conspiracy to pretend that Britain declined to use the methods of total war.’⁴ This article addresses the disjunction between the publicly-circulating representations of Bomber Command and the reality of its changing capacities and results over the war; that is, it addresses the image of Bomber Command in wartime.

The concept of ‘image’ is ambiguous, albeit ubiquitous in contemporary culture. Image implies reputation, but it also contains within it a sense of the superficiality of appearance. To talk of the image of an organisation or an individual is at one and the same time to suggest that the ideas associated with that subject are based on the look of things, not necessarily the nature of things. The image of an organisation or person admits of inconsistencies, impressions and emotion, as much as clarity, evidence and rationality. The idea of an organisation’s image encompasses both its own managed presentation to a public and the public’s attitude to that organisation informed by representations beyond the subject’s control. As such, image sits uneasily or ambiguously between notions of representation and reception. It implies a shared idea that is somewhat fragile or insubstantial. Of course, image also suggests the heavy reliance on visual representations of such issues of public perception and reputation. Indeed, it points to the traffic between physical representations in public (like photographs in the press) and private mental representations (pictures in the mind’s eye). In his 1922 book, *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann highlighted reliance of the public on the media to form the pictures in in our heads that enable us to understand and navigate the world around us.⁵ Thus, the notion of image is not simply a figure of speech. Nor is it a twenty-first century phenomenon. It is a facet of modern culture that has a historic development and has been influential in contemporary history. Image is a concept as equally relevant to propaganda as public relations. Indeed, it highlights the interplay between the two fields which is at the centre of this research. Bomber Command is an important and illuminating case study regarding the historical problem of image: It allows us to reflect on the growing importance of visual media and public relations during the twentieth century’s most destructive conflict.

As evident in remarks by the Controller of the News and Censorship Division at the MOI, war-time brought the realisation that ‘photographs were one of the most potent instruments of war-time information’: ‘The really superb picture [...] could have the same effect upon public

3. Mark Connelly, ‘The British People, the Press and the Strategic Air Campaign against Germany, 1939–1945,’ *Contemporary British History*, 16:2 (2002), 39–58. See also, Andrew Knapp, ‘The Allied Bombing Offensive in the British Media, 1942–45’, in: Andrew Knapp and Hilary Footitt (eds.), *Liberal Democracies at War: Conflict and Representation*, London: Bloomsbury 2013, 39–66; and Dietmar

Süss, *Death from the Skies: How the British and Germans Survived Bombing in World War II*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014, 93–99.

4. Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II*, London: George Allen & Unwin 1979, 166.

opinion abroad as a great victory.⁶ Photography was central to that crucial wartime propaganda effort that Jo Fox characterised as ‘shaping perception and manipulating information.’⁷ Yet, while Connelly and others have addressed the importance of film and cinema-going to British wartime reporting of Bomber Command operations, the equally prevalent medium of photography has been considered in much less detail.⁸ Analysing publications co-produced by the Air Ministry and the MOI, as well as coverage of the bombing offensive in *Picture Post* (the most widely-circulating photo-magazine of the period), the scope of this enquiry encompasses official publications up to 1942 (a key moment in the escalation of the bombing offensive against Germany) and press coverage up to the cessation of area bombing in April 1945. I consider the role of photographic imagery in shaping the public image of Bomber Command reflecting on the traffic between images on the page with the public knowledge and understanding of the aims and impact of the bombing campaign. These publications raise particular questions about the role that photography played in government relations with the press industry in wartime and beyond. What sort of photographic imagery was circulating in relation to Bomber Command? How did this visual material (encompassing aerial photos and photo stories about both aircrews and aircraft production) frame the bombing offensive for the public? What was the context in which were made the military decisions to release and the editorial decision to publish this visual material? What conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of the publicly-circulating photography about the image of Bomber Command during the war?

In short, a careful study of the role of photography in shaping the image of Bomber Command in official publications and the mainstream media suggests that the absence of imagery enabling Britons to appreciate the impact of the campaign meant that public knowledge and public understanding need to be considered as two separate issues. Even though the public may well have known what was being done, they could not adequately conceive what this meant on the ground. Taylor has asserted that ‘Propaganda [...] is as much about what is not said as overt expression.’⁹ The same is true in the field of visual culture and public relations; the image of an organisation depends as much on what is not seen as what is.

The development of British bombing policy

It is instructive to outline briefly the strategic and policy background before analysing how Bomber Command was presented in official publications during the early years of the war.¹⁰ Bombing of civilian populations having already been experienced during the First World

5. ‘The real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it. [...] What each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him,’ Walter Lippmann, in: *Public Opinion*, New York: Macmillan 1922, 16 & 25.

6. Francis Williams, *Press, Parliament and People*, London: Heinemann 1946, 215–216.

7. Jo Fox, ‘The Propaganda War,’ in: R.J.B. Bosworth and Joseph A. Maiolo (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015, vol. 2, 91–116 (100).

8. Mark Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars: A New History of Bomber Command in World War II*, London: I. B. Tauris 2002, 8.

9. Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day*, 3rd ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003, 216.

10. For more detailed discussion of the bombing war in Europe, see Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe, 1939–1945*, London: Allen Lane 2013.

War, the use of aircraft in conflict situations was much debated in the interwar period. In Britain, the prevailing attitude was one of apprehension regarding an attack on Britain, but this sat alongside a belief in the technological capacities of the bomber as a weapon of attack for Britain.¹¹ This viewpoint was summed up in Stanley Baldwin's famous phrase, 'The bomber will always get through.' In line with military strategists across the continent, Baldwin argued: 'The only defence is in offence, which means that you have got to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy if you want to save yourselves. I mention that so that people may realize what is waiting for them when the next war comes.'¹² While there were differing opinions over the most effective target (civilians or infrastructure), the demand for preparedness was common and, in 1936, Bomber Command was established.

On 3 September 1939, the day Britain declared war, Bomber Command was issued with orders to drop 8m leaflets on the German population.¹³ On 10 May 1940, Churchill formed a coalition wartime government and on the night of 11/12 May the bombing of Germany began.¹⁴ In September 1940, following British bombing of Berlin in August, the Blitz on Britain started in earnest. In the period up to 31 December 1940, 22,069 British civilians were killed by bombing and a further 19,918 were killed in 1941.¹⁵ That year, unsurprisingly there was evidence of a hardening of attitudes in Britain regarding the bombing of Germany. In March 1941, a Home Intelligence report conducted by Mass Observation for the MOI claimed that, 'people will want a lot of convincing that really heavy raids on civilian centres in Germany are not our most efficacious weapon.'¹⁶

A debate taking place within the Air Ministry and the cabinet's Defence Committee over this period was to move policy decisively away from a restricted focus on military targets. As early as 30 October 1940, Bomber Command had been told to direct their efforts not only at the enemy's oil industry, but also at their morale through 'regular concentrated attacks [...] with the primary aim of causing very heavy material destruction which will demonstrate to the enemy the power and severity of air bombardment.'¹⁷ A revised directive of 9 July 1941 articulated the dual priority as 'dislocating the German transport system and [...] destroying the morale of the civil population as a whole and of the industrial workers in particular.'¹⁸ Simultaneously, considerable effort was expended on ascertaining the accuracy and impact of the bombing campaign. Contested though it was, the Butt Report of 18 August 1941 was an important part of the development of policy. Based on the analysis of 650 photographs made

11. Regarding the apprehension of aerial warfare, see Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908–1941*, Farnham: Ashgate 2014. Regarding the faith in technology, see Edgerton 1992 (reference 2).

12. Reported in *The Times*, 11 November 1932, 7.

13. Richard Overy, 'Making and Breaking Morale: British Political Warfare and Bomber Command in the Second World War', in: *Twentieth-Century British History*, 26:3 (2015), 370–399 (374).

14. Martin Farr, 'The Labour Party and Strategic Bombing in the Second World War', in: *Labour History Review*, 77:1 (2012), 133–153 (136).

15. Terence H. O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, London: H.M.S.O. 1955, 677.

16. Cited in Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War, 1939–1945: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1979, 201. Regarding public appetite for reprisals, see Tom Harrisson, 'A Public demand for reprisals?', in: *Cambridge Review*, 30 May 1941, 454–456, and Brett Holman, "'Bomb Back, and Bomb Hard": Debating Reprisals during the Blitz', in: *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 58:3 (2012), 394–407.

17. This directive and others are reproduced in the official four-volume history of the campaign: Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany, 1939–1945*, London: H.M.S.O., vol. 4, 1961, 128–129.

18. Webster, Frankland 1961 (reference 17), 136–137.

by automatic cameras fitted to bombers during 100 raids between 2 June and 25 July 1941, the report suggested that as many as one-third of the aircraft failed to locate the target, while of the remaining aircraft only one in three had dropped their bombs within five miles of the aiming point. The report made clear that precision bombing was at this point more myth than reality.¹⁹ Also central to the on-going revision of policy was the conviction that targeting workers and their houses was an effective means of disrupting the enemy's war effort. As Overy observes, in the summer of 1941 research was underway to determine the most effective bombing strategy to cause the maximum amount of damage.²⁰ These findings too were contested. Nonetheless, this combined research represents the significant shift in policy that took place in 1941.

The directive issued to Bomber Command on 14 February 1942 reflected what Dietmar Süß termed 'the radicalization of the air war.'²¹ It reformulated the target of Bomber Command's missions as follows: 'the primary object of your operations should now be focused on the morale of the enemy civil population and in particular, of the industrial workers.'²² Sir Arthur Harris was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command a week later. By this point, the Command was already set on a course that amounted to a policy of 'de-housing' industrial workers. This was to be achieved using incendiary bombs to destroy the largest area of urban spaces as possible.²³ The results of Bomber Command in achieving this end were appraised on the basis of estimates of the total acreage of urban space destroyed. These estimates were calculated on the evidence of aerial reconnaissance photographs.²⁴ In his memoirs, Harris extolled the value of this imagery in convincing 'the people who mattered.'²⁵ Harris had large format aerial photographs, marked with blue paint to identify destroyed areas, compiled into books. The 'blue book' was complemented by stereoscopic images viewed through replica stereopticons that Harris had specially made based on a Victorian example. In stereoscopic images, Harris enthused, 'air raid damage shows up to an extent that would hardly be believed by those who have only seen ordinary photographs.'²⁶

The development of policy and the build-up of the capacities of Bomber Command can be traced in the milestone British raids of the war, such as Lübeck (April 1942), Cologne (May 1942), Essen and Bremen (June 1942), Hamburg (July 1943), Berlin (November 1943 to March 1944) and Dresden (February 1945). While in May 1940, the RAF dropped 1,668 tons of bombs on Germany, at the peak of the offensive in March 1945 it dropped 67,637 tons. Indeed, 'In March 1945, the quantity of British and American bombs dropped on Germany was three

19. On the Butt Report and its relative importance, see Overy (reference 10), 267–269. The report is reproduced in Webster and Frankland 1961 (reference 17), vol. 4, 205–213.

20. Richard Overy, 'The Weak Link? The Perception of the German Working Class by RAF Bomber Command, 1940–1945', in: *Labour History Review*, 77:1 (2012), 1–33 (22).

21. Süß 2014 (reference 3), 248.

22. Webster and Frankland 1961 (reference 17), 144.

23. An appendix in the official history gives a graphic account of the ramifications

of this strategy ('Extract from the Report by the Police President of Hamburg on the raids on Hamburg in July and August 1943, dated 1st December 1943', in: Webster & Frankland 1961 (reference 17), 4, 310–315). Harris claimed (on the basis that the policy could reduce the number of Allied combatant deaths) that, 'In spite of all that happened at Hamburg, bombing proved a comparatively humane method' (Arthur Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, London: Collins, 1947, 176).

24. Overy 2012 (reference 20), 25 & 27.

25. Harris 1947 (reference 23), 149.

26. Harris 1947 (reference 23), 149.

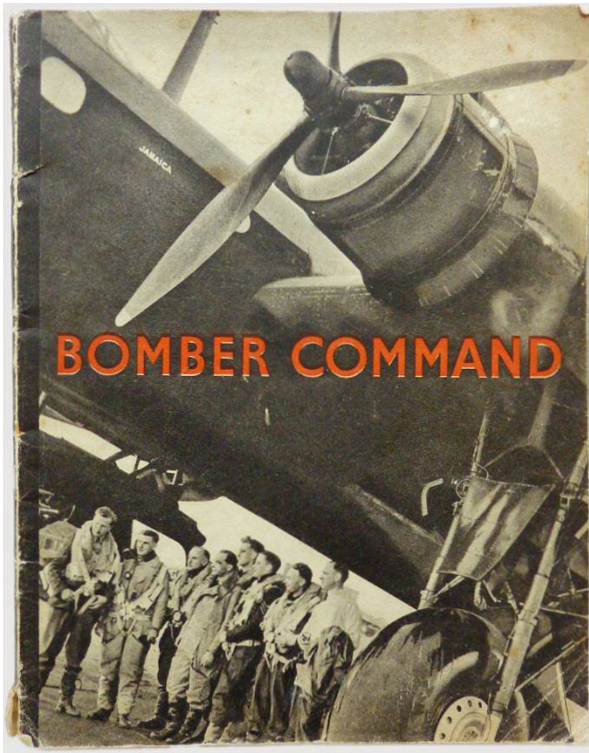


Figure 1
Unknown photographer,
cover of: *Bomber Command - The Air Ministry's
Account of Bomber Command's Offensive against
the Axis: September, 1939 - July, 1941*,
London: H.M.S.O. 1941.

times the total of those dropped on Britain in the entire war.²⁷ In major cities, half of the urban environment was destroyed while—along with 70,000 forced labourers—the majority of the 410,000 Germans killed were from the working class.²⁸ The policy of area bombing remains at the centre of debates about the efficacy and morality of the bombing campaign today.

Following the radicalisation of bombing policy, no official effort was made to clarify the objectives of Bomber Command for the public. As Overy makes evident, 'the systematic and progressive obliteration of workers and their housing became the preferred approach to undermining the German war economy, even though the British wartime authorities publicly denied throughout the war that Bomber Command was attacking anything other than legitimate military targets.'²⁹ Indeed, as a result of concerns about negative reactions, the lack of clarity was maintained through the management of the visual material that was available to the

press (e.g. photo-essays about aircraft production) and that was not (i.e. visual representations of the destruction of German residential districts). While debate about strategy did surface in the media, the public understanding of the terms of the debate was limited by, on the one hand, a paucity of photographic coverage of the impact of the offensive and, on the other, the image of Bomber Command was forged at the start of the war. The latter is discussed in the following section.

Precision and perception: Official publications to 1942

The MOI produced two publications sponsored by the Air Ministry detailing the work of Bomber Command. The first, published in 1941, was *Bomber Command* (fig. 1).³⁰ This was amongst the most popular of the many official war books produced by the MOI during the conflict to meet its aim of presenting the Allied war effort to audiences at home and abroad. As Valerie Holman observes, 'To reach a vast readership a new kind of book was needed.'³¹ The importance placed on these publications is evident in the allocation of paper towards the initiative at a time of rationing.³² According to Robert Fraser, Head of the Publications Division of the MOI, photographs were the central element of this successful format:

It must, above all, use pictures. Indeed, it must so use pictures as to become two books in one—a picture book and a text book—and it must carry the full propaganda message once in the text and for a second time in the pictures and captions which together must

27. Farr 2012 (reference 14), 148. In 1943, following the Casablanca Conference, the notion of a Combined Bomber Offensive was mooted, but as Childers notes, in reality, the US and UK bombing campaigns were really 'two distinct, parallel efforts,' Thomas Childers, "'Facilis descensus averni est': The Allied Bombing of Germany and the Issue of German Suffering', in: *Central European History*, 38:1 (2005), 75–105 (92).

28. Overy 2012 (reference 20), 32.

29. Overy 2012 (reference 20), 32.

30. *Bomber Command - The Air Ministry's Account of Bomber Command's Offensive against the Axis: September, 1939 - July, 1941*, London: H.M.S.O. 1941.

31. Valerie Holman, 'Carefully Concealed Connections: The Ministry of Information and British Publishing, 1939–1946', in: *Book History*, 8 (2005), 197–226 (213).

32. Holman notes that paper rationing began on 3 March 1940 with shortages at their worst at the start of 1942, in: Holman 2005 (reference 31), 212).

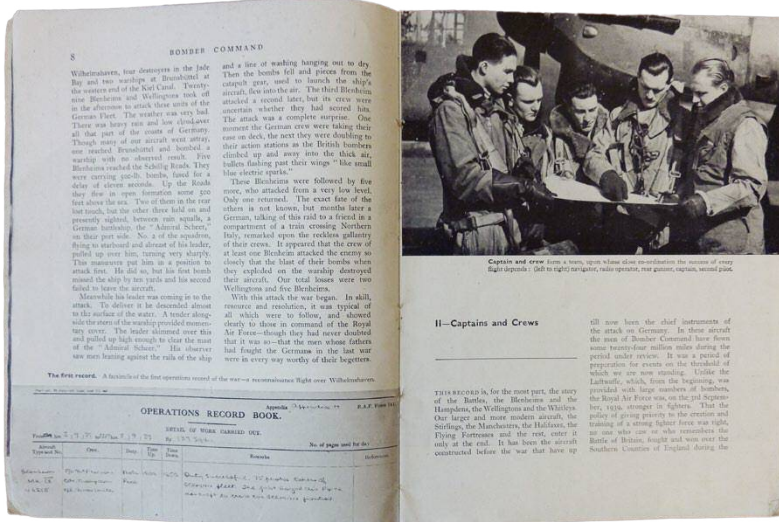


Figure 2
Unknown photographer,
double page in: *Bomber Command - The Air Ministry's Account of Bomber Command's Offensive against the Axis: September, 1939 - July, 1941*, London: H.M.S.O. 1941, 8-9.

Figure 2 is a double-page spread the photographs in which establish a sense of professionalism and camaraderie, as well as the impression of considered response. The image of the log of the first wartime sortie (a reconnaissance mission) suggests measured and deliberate activity, through its implications of research, reflection and record-keeping. The caption to the image of the aircrew reads: 'Captain and crew form a team upon whose close co-ordination the success of every flight depends.' On the following page, a photograph of the pilot and second pilot carries a quotation from the text as caption: 'Brave yet cautious, cool yet daring.' A substantial chapter of the book, ('The Crew that Strikes') covers this team in more detail.³⁵ Another chapter addresses the image of those on the ground involved in questions of intelligence and strategy. The team are depicted observing maps and reconnaissance photographs, receiving calls and recording information. This tableau, reminiscent today of countless war films, effectively conveys a sense of reassuring precision and seriousness to substantiate the ideas of considered action implied by the chapter title, 'The Mind that Plans.' On another page, a photograph of the Commander-in-Chief carries these same words as a caption.

Discussing films of the period, Edgerton notes how such representations play on 'national stereotypes, which are implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, connected to a broader picture of England: as a nation which is attacked, not a nation which attacks; as a lethargic nation

tell the continuous story to those who will not read the text. It seems that when these qualities are added to a good manuscript which has the status of being official, propaganda best sellers can be created.³³

And so they were. The format decided upon (usually measuring 23 x 16,5 cm and always photographically-illustrated) proved very popular, with nine titles selling in excess of one million copies.

A substantial publication running to 128 pages, *Bomber Command* included nearly 90 photographs. Allocated 4.5 tons of paper, it had sold 1,360,000 copies by the summer of 1943.³⁴ The cover depicts eight men under the wing of an aircraft (possibly a Stirling from 139 Squadron).

33. Cited by Holman 2005 (reference 31), 213. The comment comes from a report titled 'Books and Pamphlets Programme' and dated 4 December 1941 (National Archives, London, INF 1/123).

34. Louis Moss and Kathleen Box, 'Ministry of Information Publications: A Study of Public Attitudes towards Six Ministry of Information Books, June - July 1943', National Archives, RG 24/32, 2. This report, (based on feedback from 5,895 civilians) suggested that over half of the population had seen one of the MOI photo-books, while a quarter had seen three or more (p. 3). The authors estimated that over 10m people had potentially seen a copy of one or other of the official publications concerning Bomber Command (p. 17).

35. By analysing these representations, I do not wish simply to assert that these implications are untrue in relation to specific individuals. Rather, I aim to analyse how the public image of Bomber Command as a whole was constructed using such imagery. Through these photographs, personal qualities such as bravery or loyalty are transferred from individuals to the organisation as a whole and to its activities. By way of contrast to this analysis of official visual strategies of representing Bomber Command, see Houghton's discussion of Bomber Command members own memoirs (Frances Houghton, "'Writing the Missing Chapter": Post-War Memoirs of Bomber Command Aircrew', in: Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, London: Bloomsbury 2013, 155-174).

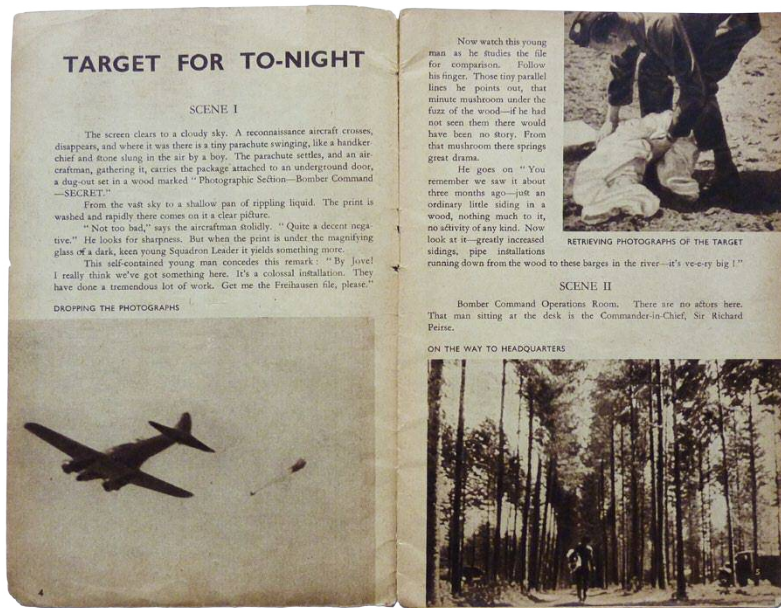


Figure 3
Unknown photographer, 'Target for Tonight',
in: Harry Watt & Paul Holt, *Target for Tonight*,
London: Hutchison & Co. 1941, 4–5.

raised to genius by emergency, and saved by heroic, aristocratic pilots and shy boffins.³⁶ *Bomber Command* illustrates how these stereotypes were operative across a number of cultural formats, not just film. Moreover, this publication shows the manner in which photography played a vital supporting role alongside film. Explicit references are included in the MOI photo-book to a 1941 documentary-style film, *Target for Tonight*.³⁷ The film (in which RAF members played themselves) told the story of the crew of bomber 'F for Freddie' on a sortie over Germany. Not only is the film's title phrase used in *Bomber Command*, but so are stills from the film. The MOI publication thus provides a prolongation of the film experience beyond the space of the cinema and the duration of the screening; it extends the spectacle into domestic spaces and spaces of working life where the booklet would be viewed and commented upon.

Likewise, a booklet of the film was produced by a commercial publisher featuring stills and a narrativisation of the on-screen action written by Paul Holt of the *Daily Express* (fig. 3).³⁸

Film, photo-book and spin-off booklet all depict the importance of photography to the war effort. The film begins with the dropping of a package from an aircraft (also depicted in the double-page spread from the booklet). The package is then taken into a bunker through a door marked 'Photographic Section - Bomber Command - Secret.' Here, the negatives of aerial images from the package are developed and discussed, kick-starting the rest of the film's narrative. The MOI publication in turn devotes considerable space to reproducing and discussing aerial imagery. The copywriter reflects on the issue of interpreting photographs of bomb damage as follows:

Though it is said that the camera cannot lie, it often does not reveal the whole truth. A bomb may wreak havoc in a building but make only a small hole in its roof, and this is all that appears on the photograph. [...] Large-scale vertical photographs reveal what remains of the buildings as stark skeletons composed of uncovered walls and naked supports; but the bursting of high explosive bombs in streets or in houses can create immense damage to the roadway and façade of the buildings, while leaving the roofs themselves more or less intact. [...] In aerial shots] The long shadows caused by the houses in

36. Edgerton 1992 [reference 2], 61

37. *Target for Tonight* (dir. Harry Watt), Crown Film Unit UK 1941.

38. Harry Watt & Paul Holt, *Target for Tonight: The Record in Text and Pictures of a Bombing Raid on Germany*, London: Hutchison & Co. 1941.



the narrow streets preclude detailed interpretation, by any but an expert, of the damage which does in fact exist; and this should be borne in mind when inspecting the air photographs published in the Press.³⁹

The experience of looking at the photographs reproduced in Bomber Command is a very directed form of visual experience as a result of the accompanying text and captions. The reader/viewer is being exhorted to look and to see, but at the same time is being told that only experts can appropriately interpret for them what they are seeing. A photomontage supports this interpretation of photographic material (fig. 4) combining

Air photos may deceive.
 1. The bursting of high explosive bombs may do heavy damage to roadways and façades and leave the roofs untouched. In these photographs of Schulzendorfer Strasse, Berlin, the vertical air view does not register road-level damage which the ground view of the same spot clearly shows.

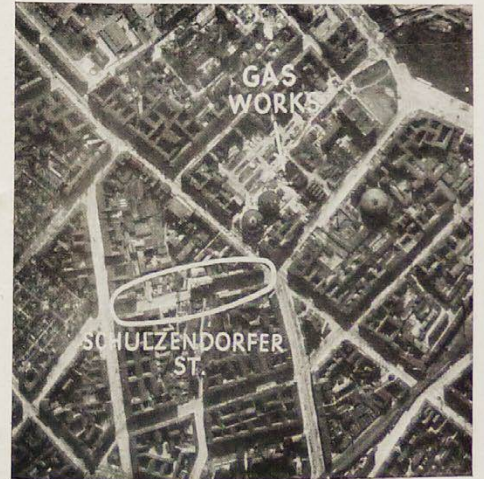


Figure 4
 Unknown photographer, Aerial view, in: *Bomber Command - The Air Ministry's Account of Bomber Command's Offensive against the Axis: September, 1939 - July, 1941*, London: H.M.S.O. 1941, 116.

Figure 5
 Unknown photographer, 'Air photos may deceive', in: *Bomber Command - The Air Ministry's Account of Bomber Command's Offensive against the Axis: September, 1939 - July, 1941*, London: H.M.S.O. 1941, 120-121.

a marked-up aerial photograph and a superimposed magnifying glass.⁴⁰ Such direction is also evident on the following pages which contain two pairs of photographs captioned with a warning: 'Air photos may deceive' (fig. 5). The examples illustrating this dictum (both from Berlin) each comprise a street view and an aerial view. The captions emphasise the value of the former over the latter in showing damage.

Arguably, the ambiguity apportioned to the aerial image is also strongly evident in the text. That is, the damage discussed and depicted raises questions about the target and the effects of the bombing campaign. When depicting a raid earlier in the photo-book, the focus is on

39. *Bomber Command* (reference 30), 115 & 117.

40. This too is a potential link back to the film in which the Squadron Leader examines the reconnaissance photographs with a magnifying glass. In actuality, these images were often viewed with a stereoscope. For memoirs of

members of the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit, see Constance Babington Smith, *Evidence in Camera: The Story of Photographic Intelligence in the Second World War*, London: Chatto & Windus 1957; and Ursula Powys-Lybbe, *The Eye of Intelligence*, London: William Kimber 1983.

military and transportation targets. When discussing the issue of interpreting photography, however, the text refers to high explosives in houses, while the street view photographs appear to show destruction of a potter's workshop and a pub in Schulzendorfer Strasse, Berlin, as well as other residential areas in Invaliden Strasse, Berlin. The aerial photographs alongside are marked with military or industrial targets, but the pairing of photographs and their discussion in the text clearly show that bombing raids create widespread destruction; they do not amount to precision bombing.

Notwithstanding such ambiguity, when the author turned to the issue, viewers of these images and readers of the accompanying text could be left in little doubt about what the continued offensive would mean in Germany:

What, however, has been the effect of our raids on the morale of the Germans? The importance of this aspect of our bombing attacks on them needs no emphasis. As soon as German morale begins to wilt, victory will be in sight. [...] The third and present phase, in which our attacks have assumed a more concentrated form, is producing a feeling of nervousness and apprehension at the increasing weight of the assault.⁴¹

The final two images of aircraft are captioned 'Growing Might' and 'Growing Mastery' clearly implying the increasing ferocity of the campaign. And it was explicit in the follow-up publication issued in 1942.

Although a smaller, shorter and less lavishly illustrated publication, *Bomber Command Continues* adumbrates the 'rising offensive' in the final chapters: 'The Hammer Falls: One Thousand Bombers over Cologne' and 'The Blow Strikes Home.'⁴² This later chapter title (with its reference to 'home'), whether intentionally or not, points to the many houses of German civilians that were being destroyed by the offensive. However, the images in this later publication do not depict this. Notwithstanding the earlier official proclamation about the value of the street view photograph, none are reproduced in this follow-up booklet. Instead, examples of some of the hard-to-read aerial images discussed in the previous publication are deployed, including one of Lübeck which clearly shows the whole town severely damaged and not just harbours or factories. Indeed, this smaller publication includes only 11 photographs. Alongside aerial images are photographs of aircraft and crews, as well as considerable imagery of aircraft production. Thus, while the text describes the raids, the choice of accompanying photographs deliberately focuses on the stereotypical image of the aircrew and the hard-working experts

41. *Bomber Command* (reference 30), 122.

42. *Bomber Command Continues - The Air Ministry's Account of the Rising Offensive against Germany: July 1941 - June 1942*, London: H.M.S.O. 1942. This publication had sold 505,000 copies by summer 1943 [Moss and Box, National Archives, RG23/42, 2].

who support them. The value of selecting imagery of this type is evident and parallels the direction issued to the viewer of aerial photographs. It focuses attention on aspects of the campaign that take place in Britain (production, planning and preparation) rather than those taking place in Germany (loss of aircraft and crew, destruction of homes, death of civilians). Intriguingly, the final lines in *Bomber Command Continues* (which covered the period to June 1942) stated that, 'This is an interim report.'⁴³ However, there was no subsequent official publication publicising the work of Bomber Command.⁴⁴

Censorship and public relations

As well as analysis of the printed page and the way text and photograph together frame subject matter in these official publications, to ascertain the means by which the public image of Bomber Command was constructed it is also necessary to reflect on the restrictions and procedures put in place by arms of government to manage the circulation of news images.

The sorts of street view photograph advocated in 1941 remained largely absent throughout the conflict. War, disrupting international networks, imposes limitations on the circulation of goods across national borders including photographs. No doubt, there were practical issues that influenced the depiction in Britain of the effects of the bombing of Germany. These limitations alone, however, do not explain the lack of imagery depicting the impact of bombing in the wartime British press.⁴⁵ As relevant as the challenge of sourcing such material was the sensitivity to public perceptions of Bomber Command both within the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Information. Going beyond the issuing of official publications, a number of strategies were developed to address these concerns and manage the image of the bombing offensive. The first was the organisation of censorship; the second, the deployment of public relations staff.

The MOI was responsible for developing and implementing wartime censorship procedures, operating in collaboration with the various Armed Service Ministries and other government departments.⁴⁶ After initial strained relations between the press, the MOI and Service Ministries, a putatively voluntary arrangement became established whereby editors could submit items for review to the MOI Press and Censorship Division which they felt might be of military value to the enemy, thus contravening legal requirements on the press.⁴⁷ National

43. *Bomber Command Continues* (reference 42), 56.

44. There were two subsequent H.M.S.O. publications in 1944 regarding the involvement of other Allied nationals in the bombing campaign against Germany: *Target Germany: The U.S. Army Air Forces' Official Story of the VIII Bomber Command's First Year over Europe*, London: H.M.S.O. 1944; *There's Freedom in the Air: The Official Story of the Allied Air Forces from the Occupied Countries*, London: H.M.S.O. 1944. The latter was written by novelist H. E. Bates, who worked at the Air Ministry Publications Directorate (F.C. Gillman, 'Public Relations in the United Kingdom prior to 1948', in: *International Public Relations Association Review*, April 1978, 49).

45. The monitoring of the foreign press conducted throughout the war would have been a potential source of additional imagery to illustrate coverage of

the bombing campaign. This was acknowledged in the MOI photo-book: 'The main source of information about damage are photographs and reports of all kinds, from statements made in the enemy and neutral press and radio to the tales of returned travellers', in: *Bomber Command*, 115. See also Knapp 2013 (reference 3), 42.

46. Regarding the development of the system of press oversight, see Taylor 1999 (reference 2), 153–175, and Nicholas Wilkinson, *Secrecy and the Media: The Official History of the United Kingdom's D-Notice System*, Abingdon: Routledge 2009, 169–196.

47. This division was overseen by Francis Williams, Editor of the *Daily Herald* in 1939 before becoming an MOI Advisor on Press Relations and then Controller of the News and Censorship Division from 1941, Williams exemplifies the fact

security was established as the chief concern, the general principle being that facts were subject to censorship, but not opinion. The publication in the press of photographs of wartime Britain (including not only damage from the Blitz, but also Bomber Command personnel at bases in the UK) came under this 'voluntary' system. Censorship of photography was the responsibility of the Photographic Section of the Ministry's Press and Censorship Division, led by Hugh Francis.⁴⁸ Photography was the subject of a Control Order issued under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act of 1939.⁴⁹ These Control Orders were also supported by a pamphlet compiling the relevant Defence Notices circulated to the press as guidance for them regards operating under this system. These D-Notices indicated issues 'where publication without previous submission to censorship is considered likely to prove dangerous to the national security.'⁵⁰

It seems likely that the threat of government action and the weight of arguments about national security were both relevant to the press handling of photography, precipitating instances of self-censorship that determined the stories covered and the viewpoints published in wartime. Certainly, the Chief Censor at the MOI felt justified in remarking approvingly after the war that an editor's 'first consideration was to avoid giving information of value to the enemy.'⁵¹ Harris—frequently critical of the press—was fulsome in his praise for the *Daily Telegraph*: 'Among my many visitors I must especially recall Lord Camrose of the *Daily Telegraph*. [...] without his support and that of the *Daily Telegraph* life would have been much more difficult than it was; and it was difficult and wearing enough.'⁵² In addition to both the threat of censorship and self-censorship, however, historians of photography must also reckon with the MOI involvement in overseeing news coming from outside of the UK. News coming through commercial cable networks had first to pass through a point of entry overseen by the Ministry of Information, the result being a process of review that amounted to 'an effectively compulsory pre-censorship system.'⁵³

Nonetheless, the public perception of a free press was deemed of great importance, as exemplified by a BBC radio broadcast on 'How Censorship Works' by the then Controller of the Press and Censorship Division at the MOI. On 31 December 1940, Cyril Radcliffe broadcast an explanation of why censorship was required and how the press and the censors worked with one another: 'Each side at heart genuinely wants to help the other: though hearts are not always worn on sleeves. It is for the Press Censors to reconcile the right of the Press to produce their newspapers with the common duty of the Press and Government to hold back information

that government public relations work drew heavily on press expertise and personnel.

48. On the organisation of the Photographic Section, see Williams 1946 (reference 6), 215–218.

49. These Control Orders were published by H.M.S.O.: 'The Control of Photography Order (No. 1) [No. 1125, dated September 10, 1939]' and 'The Control of Photography Order (No. 2) [No. 1710, dated November 27, 1939]', in: *Statutory Rules and Orders*, London: H.M.S.O. 1940, vol. I, 1171–1174; 'The Control of Photography Order (No. 3) [No. 1297, dated July 12, 1940]', in:

Statutory Rules and Orders, London: H.M.S.O. 1940, vol. II, 916–917.

50. Press and Censorship Bureau, *Defence Notices, Revised Edition 1939*, 3 (National Archives, T 162/600); this edition was circulated in January 1940.

51. George P. Thomson, *Blue Pencil Admiral: The Inside Story of Press Censorship*, London: Sampson Low, Marston 1947, 176.

52. Harris 1947 (reference 23), 155–156.

53. Taylor 1999 (reference 2), 161.

from the enemy.⁵⁴ This positive assessment of the wartime relation between Fleet Street and the Ministry was to prove reasonably accurate with only four prosecutions of newspapers resulting from actions taken by the Press and Censorship Division. As Taylor diagnoses, 'Clashes [...] were primarily between Churchill and individual newspapers rather than between MOI censors and Fleet Street. [...] the flare-ups that did occur were so few in number that they bear witness to the routine day-to-day efficiency of the censorship system.'⁵⁵

Radcliffe's statement was itself indicative of another essential part of managing both news and public opinion in wartime: public relations. From articles by two staffs at the Air Ministry, it is possible to reconstruct a picture of the public relations organisation that informed the public image of Bomber Command in wartime.⁵⁶ The Air Ministry Directorate of Public Relations (based principally in Whitehall with offices in the MOI building) employed 371 staff handling press enquiries, press releases and questions of censorship. In 1944, it was described as 'one of the most comprehensive Public Relations departments to be found anywhere in the world.'⁵⁷ It had its genesis in the First World War which saw the first moves by the British state 'to develop information policy on a national scale' and, when the Air Ministry was established in 1919, it 'had a Press and Publicity Officer from its inception.'⁵⁸ This was C. P. Robertson who was a Deputy Director of Public Relations with the Air Ministry during the Second World War. It was at his instigation that a number of journalists were lined up as volunteer reservists before 1939. Following the war's outbreak, public relations staff were attached to all RAF units including Bomber Command.

A key part of this operation was the Air Ministry News Service. The output of the service was considerable; by May 1944 it had issued 13,000 news bulletins.⁵⁹ Narracott provides a hypothetical example of the management of news by the service:

Let us assume that Bomber Command has carried out a big attack on Berlin, using the squadrons of Nos. 27, 28 and 29 Groups for the purpose. The P.R.O.s of these groups talk to the crews on their return build up a picture of what has happened over Berlin, and telephone a news story to the Command Headquarters. There the news from the three groups is collated and then telephoned to the Air Ministry. It is next "vetted" from a security angle by the Air Ministry Censorship Department, known as A.I.6, and issued to the Press and the B.B.C. by the news division of the Public Relations Department of the Air Ministry, via the Ministry of Information. The Air Ministry News Service story of the attack (that made up from the Command P.R.O.s' talk with the crews) is usually sent out in full over private wires of the Press Association, the biggest news agency in Britain, so

54. Wilkinson 2009 (reference 46), 185.

55. Taylor 1999 (reference 2), 162.

56. A. H. Narracott, 'Air Ministry Public Relations', in: *Aeronautics*, May 1943, 56–57; Gillman 1978 (reference 44), 43–50. Narracott worked at *The Times* before becoming an Air Ministry Public Relations Officer. Gillman, a member of the London staff of the *Yorkshire Post* before the war, became a Deputy Director

of Public Relations at the Air Ministry.

57. Narracott 1943 (reference 56), 56.

58. Gillman 1978 (reference 44), 43–44.

59. Narracott 1943 (reference 56), 57.

60. This procedure, directing the attention of audiences and influencing attitudes to the bombing offensive, was evident in *Bomber Command Continues*:

that it reaches the offices of the newspapers and the B.B.C. within a few minutes of being issued from the Ministry of Information.⁶⁰

Thus, news about Bomber Command operations was carefully managed. So too was press access to air bases in Britain. Permits were required for such visits by journalists and photographers. Visits were stage-managed by PROs, the respective station receiving advance notice.⁶¹ This overview of the organisation of the public relations operations amply substantiates Francis Williams's assertion that 'the Air Ministry was the most publicity-minded of all the Service Ministries.'⁶²

The intensive activity around public relations was not at first the expression of a sensitivity to the public image of Bomber Command. This preoccupied government departments and the military in later stages of the conflict following the radicalization of the bombing war. In the early years, aside from Bomber Command Britain possessed no obvious offensive weapon with which to counter the Third Reich that had achieved considerable military successes on the continent before launching the Blitz in 1940. The Soviet Union only joined the Allied nations in June 1941 and the US later still in December 1941. In a period of uncertainty and apprehension, Bomber Command stood as the chief symbol of the British war effort—a position aided by the role of the RAF during the Battle of Britain in counteracting German preparations for an invasion of the UK. As Balfour notes, as late as 1942, 'Bomber Command was still the only real weapon of offence which Britain possessed. To meet the public demand for action against Germany, a picture of the Command's strength and effectiveness had been sedulously built up.'⁶³ *Bomber Command, Target for To-night* and *Bomber Command Continues* were a part of building up that picture. Having been constructed, it had to be carefully managed and maintained.

Such efforts were not always well regarded. Thomson, for instance, was underwhelmed by the results of the Air Ministry News Service, retrospectively criticising the quality of the written reports it produced.⁶⁴ Moreover, Air Ministry public relations efforts came under fire at the time and within the organisation. McLaine discusses fractious exchanges between Harris and various members of the Air Ministry. In 1943, Harris complained that the work of Bomber Command in targeting German civilians was not receiving due coverage or credit. He argued that the aim of the offensive should be 'unambiguously stated as the destruction of German cities, the killing of German workers and the disruption of civilised community life throughout Germany.'⁶⁵ Albeit couched in evasive language, the message from Harris's superiors was obvious: a public lack of clarity or emphasis on the aims and achievements of the bombing offensive was more important than an accurate depiction of the true impact and toll which could

⁶⁰ Here is an extract from a log in which a Public Relations Officer for the R.A.F. who took part in one of these assaults has recorded the impressions of a spectator not in the front row but on the stage itself' (40). Note the emphasis on spectacle implied by the theatrical analogy.

⁶¹ Narracott 1943 (reference 56), 56.

⁶² Williams 1946 (reference 6), 22.

⁶³ Balfour 1979 (reference 16), 262–263.

⁶⁴ 'Much better publicity would have been obtained for the magnificent work of the R.A.F. if press representatives have been allowed to talk to the pilots when they returned' (Thomson 1947 (reference 51), 180).

⁶⁵ Cited by McLaine, 1979 (reference 4), 161–162. See also Knapp, 'The Allied Bombing Offensive in the British Media, 1942–45,' 39–40.

A GIRL GOES INTO WAR INDUSTRY

Most exciting form of war-work to most women is the aircraft factory. Our reporter samples the work, records a picture of the life.

"At first, you think you'll never do it. You drop your tools and everything. But the men are very good. They teach you. To anybody with commonsense it's quite simple. And when you can do it—well, it's a real man's job . . ."

That was what Mrs. Payne said to me on my first day in a Ministry of Aircraft Production factory. Two years ago, Mrs. Payne was running a grocery-cum-Post Office in Blackpool. To-day she is an electrical fitter on the final assembly line of an aircraft works. What Mrs. Payne could do, so could I, I thought. So, apparently, could thousands of others. Down the long lines of the final assembly shop, girls were at work.

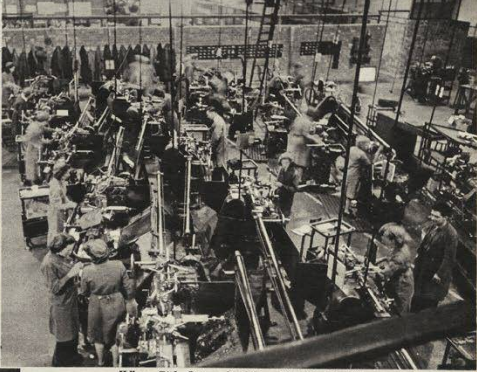
There are difficulties and problems, hard work and inconveniences in industry—and we may as well face the facts. Even so, my choice would be industry every time.

It may be that I was fortunate in going to a

modern factory—it was built pre-war, but is light, airy and warm and in country surroundings. My factory was some six miles outside the town, so the working day began at 6.30 a.m. in order to catch the works bus at 7.15 a.m. Despite the hour, it was a crowded cheerful journey through the dark countryside. It ended in time to clock in at 7.55 a.m. By 8 o'clock, the day shift was at work. As a recruit, my first visit was to the Employment Office to sign on, and receive identity disc, etc. Then to the Welfare Superintendent for advice and instructions on my place in the works, the importance of secrecy and so on. It was a friendly chat. In future, I was told, the Welfare Superintendent would be my friend in case of need. This was no concession. It is impressed on all recruits. This interview over, I was taken along to my job on the final assembly line, and introduced to my foreman.

Continued below

The First Day in an Aircraft Factory
The new recruit signs on. Then the Welfare Officer (left) takes her to her job in the factory.



A Corner of the Machine Shop
19-year-old Jacqueline Gardner, formerly Woolworth's assistant, works a No. 2 coplaner.



A Trained Girl is an Inspector
Daphne Greeney examines parts, passes them as O.K., or rejects them if imperfect.

Where Girls Outnumber Men: The Machine Shop
They are making small parts for aircraft. Some are trainees. Others are through their training. Minimum wage for a trainee of 21 or over is 43s. With overtime and on piece work, girls can earn more.

Some girls, of course, go through Government Training Centres before they join a factory. The Ministry of Labour encourages women to go to training centres first, as more and more skilled women must be ready to free skilled men for the Services. At the moment, there is no guarantee that a skilled woman can be put into just the job for which she has been trained right away. But this should prevent women from getting themselves trained. Their skill will be needed before long.

On the final assembly line, there is interest and variety. The work is light, but you must be agile enough to nip up and down ladders, or haul yourself into unfinished cockpits, over half-made

wings or through an incomplete fuselage. Light is good and the place is airy. On some of the jobs, you may smoke. On all of them, there is a chance to pass a word with your workmates, or to rest if you feel tired.

At 10.30 a.m., the tea-tray comes round—tea 1d, a cup, piece of cake 1d—and at mid-day, you knock off for dinner. Some bring their own food; they can get hot drinks in the canteen. For the rest, there is a variety of snacks or a full-course meal. Food is plentiful, freshly-cooked and quite cheap—soup 3d, meat (more on one plate than I've seen for months), potatoes and two veg. 3d, jam tart 3d, coffee 4d. Most of



Ivy Burfit is in the Dope Shop
Says, "My husband's a prisoner of war. I must do something to get him home quicker."



Rita Stewart is an Acetylene Welder
Aged 24, married, with a small son. She used to do needlework. Now she learns welding.



Our Reporter on the Final Assembly Line
Inside the cockpit, our reporter connects the flexible cables leading from the control box.

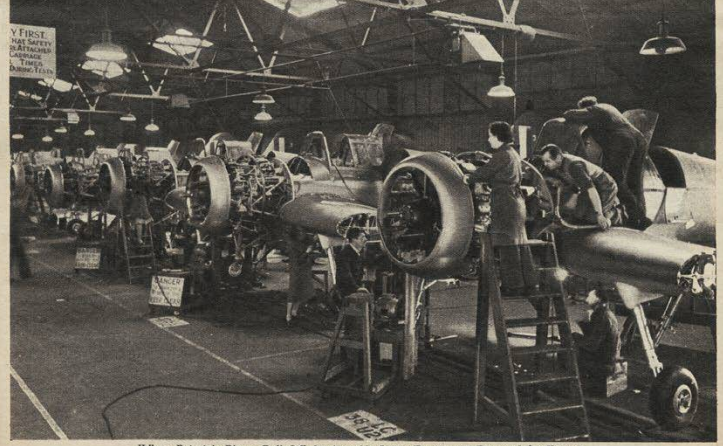
the workers only eat about 10d. worth of all this. Back on the job at 1 o'clock. Tea trolley at 2.30 p.m. Knock off at 5.30 p.m. unless you are working overtime.

Not all jobs are so interesting or pleasant as

those on the final assembly line, but there were no grumbles about work anywhere. Now about wages. If you are over 21 and a trainee in a factory covered by the Engineering Agreement, you'll get a basic wage of 43s. a week.

If at a Government Training Centre, you'll get 43s. plus increments, provided you pass certain tests. Once through your training and in a factory, you'll get the rate for the job. This depends on a

Continued overleaf



Where Britain's Planes Roll Off the Assembly Line: Engines are Prepared for Testing
At the far end of the shop, the planes are only scattered parts. Stage by stage, they are put together—undercarriages attached, instrument board installed, engines fitted. There are some men here, but more girls. Most jobs are shared between them.

Figure 6
Unknown photographer,
'A Girl goes into war industry',
in: Picture Post, 10 January 1942, 16-17.

provoke protest from religious or pacifist groups. As McLaine concludes, 'What appears to have been a serious policy disagreement, with fatal consequences for thousands of Germans, was, after all, a mere difference of view on what should be said publicly about the RAF's raids.'⁶⁶

This deliberate lack of clarity regarding bombing policy is also evident from numerous exchanges in the House of Commons. On 1 December 1943, for instance, MP Richard Stokes challenged Air Minister Archibald Sinclair, asking whether the policy of 'limiting objectives of Bomber Command to targets of military importance' had shifted to one of bombing towns and wide areas in which military targets are situated.' No was the unequivocal (and untruthful) answer.⁶⁷ Having constructed an image of considered and informed action by dedicated teams of experts prior to 1942, fidelity to the Command's direction after 1942 was not a priority for the Air Ministry as a whole (much to Harris's annoyance). Rather, the aim was to maintain the public image of Bomber Command. Limp publicity, ambiguity and misdirection were central to this effort.

Thus, there were serious limitations placed on the choices open to newspapers and magazines regarding what images they could publish depicting Bomber Command and its operations. As important as the system of censorship operated by the MOI was the control exercised by the Air Ministry via the drafting and the issuing of stories to the press. As Fox summarises, 'While liberal governments publicly stated that censorship was "voluntary," in reality, the fighting

66. McLaine 1979 (reference 4), 162.
67. Hansard, HC Deb, 1 December 1943, vol. 395, cc.337-9.
68. Fox 2015 (reference 7), 97.
69. Picture Post was a weekly photo-magazine launched in October 1938 that achieved circulation figures of 1,350,000 within four months. While it was subject to paper rationing in wartime, as Britain's most popular photo-magazine

it still enjoyed wide circulation; a publication's ration was calculated as a percentage of their usage in the year before war began. Moreover, as noted in the report of the Royal Commission on the Press in 1949, 'Circulation figures of course give no indication of the number of people who read the publications. Even a newspaper which is out of date in a matter of hours is normally read by more than one person; and a periodical, which, with a life of a week or more,

services and other government departments tightly controlled the release of information.⁶⁸ It was within this context that *Picture Post* operated and I turn now to look at their coverage following the escalation of the bombing offensive from 1942.

Industrious Britain: Images of aircrews and aircraft manufacturing

The Air Ministry sponsored MOI publications provided a template for subsequent press coverage of Bomber Command. This template was taken up by the press presumably because it tapped into existing stereotypes and conventions, but also because it was reinforced by the material (visual and verbal) released by Air Ministry public relations staff. Demonstrating this uptake, key facets of *Picture Post* coverage of the air offensive between 1942 and 1945 included a focus on the people working in the wider support services for Bomber Command such as aircraft production; on servicemen and the technology they rely on; and on aerial reconnaissance photography.⁶⁹

'A Girl Goes into War Industry' (fig. 6) is a typical photo-essay regarding those working in positions supporting the bombing campaign.⁷⁰ The fifth instalment of a series titled 'Women at War,' it depicts working life inside an aircraft factory overseen by the Ministry of Aircraft Production.⁷¹ At the height of production, 1.5m people were employed making aircraft (representing a third of the wartime manufacturing labour force), while a further 1m 'largely non-combatant personnel' were employed by the RAF.⁷² Not only does this photo-story show the factory's impressive interior, it also exemplifies the inclusive ethos and collective effort that typified representation of the war effort. A letter by a reader later the same year characterised this attitude when they referred to the production of the Lancaster as 'a magnificent social achievement.'⁷³ The combined 2.5m employees of the RAF and associated industries was a sizeable audience for *Picture Post*. Moreover, the issue of war production was an ongoing topic of debate in the press at the time and good news stories about this issue were deemed to be of interest to the magazine's readership. Perhaps more importantly, such stories would have been pushed by public relations officers all the more to compensate for the absence of detailed information about the impact of the bombing campaign. A wealth of positive imagery could be generated from the many factories producing aircraft and munitions. These were uplifting photo-stories, tapping into the romance of the air while avoiding the specificities of the horrors of war.

Like 'A Girl goes into war Industry,' 'An Airman gets ready for an op' is a human-interest story focused on the experience of one individual.⁷⁴ Like other stories of aircrew in the magazine, coverage is limited largely to the experience of the servicemen in the UK, addressing

passes from hand to hand in homes and clubs and waiting rooms, has a correspondingly higher readership', in: *Royal Commission on the Press, 1947-1949: Report*, London: H.M.S.O. 1949, 14).

70. 'A Girl goes into war industry', in: *Picture Post*, 10 January 1942, 16-19. See also, 'Another mosquito to bomb Berlin', in: *Picture Post*, 11 Dec 1943, 8-12.

71. The Ministry was itself presided over by the proprietor of the *Daily Express*,

Lord Beaverbrook, until November 1942, see: Edgerton 1992 [reference 2], 69.

72. Edgerton 1992 [reference 2], 65, 72.

73. 'The Masses who make the Lancaster' [Reader's letter], in: *Picture Post*, 24 October 1942, 2.

74. 'An Airman gets ready for an Op', in: *Picture Post*, 26 February 1944, 17-19.



Figure 7
Unknown photographer,
'An Airman gets ready for an Op',
in: *Picture Post*, 26 February 1944, 19.

the planes themselves.⁷⁵ Likewise, 'Experiment in Ballistics' is a photo-story developed in collaboration with the Armaments Research Department concerning new munitions.⁷⁶ It includes a photograph of a 500lb bomb, as well as discussion of the innovative new camera used to record the testing.

In *Picture Post*, as in *Bomber Command*, photography itself was a topic of debate, not merely a means of illustration. In June 1943, including images of the Dambusters raid on the Möhne dam, the magazine published a story titled, 'How to read an aerial photograph' (fig. 8).⁷⁷ Self-reflexive discussion of the medium was a hallmark of the emerging photo-magazines of the interwar period. But as well as continuing this practice, it is likely that this article was a solution to a particular problem—that a lot of imagery coming out of the Air Ministry was not particularly engaging.⁷⁸ The article is at pains to emphasise the strategic importance of photography, describing the images after the raid as 'a brilliant example of photography's value in warfare.'⁷⁹ Moreover, the article flags up the use of holiday snapshots submitted to the Air Ministry by the public in analysing the structures for vulnerabilities. There are no images of the destruction caused in the communities living beneath the dam. The aerial photographs (as highlighted two years earlier in *Bomber Command*) actually mask levels of destruction, rather than reveal them. The focus here is instead the medium itself. Attention is directed away from the content of the image to the practice of aerial reconnaissance, celebrating how, in the words of an Ilford advert of the time, 'Photography is mobilized for war' (fig. 9).⁸⁰

Reconnaissance photographs were a central aspect of the maintenance of the public image of Bomber Command. Such imagery implies a sense of mastery and power. As John

75. For instance, 'A Stirling carries eight tons of bombs', in: *Picture Post*, 19 September 1942, 13–15. See also, 'A Bomber goes on test', in: *Picture Post*, 10 October 1942, 8–12.

76. 'Experiment in Ballistics', in: *Picture Post*, 13 January 1945, 20–23.

77. 'How to read an aerial photograph', in: *Picture Post*, 5 June 1943, 20–21 & 25. Other photo-stories using aerial reconnaissance imagery include: 'A Mosquito's view of the city of Berlin', in: *Picture Post*, 11 September 1943, 18–21 and 'Photo-reconnaissance: Prelude to Attack', in: *Picture Post*, 4 November 1944, 8–11.

78. Thomson noted with a sense of disappointment that, 'Photos of devastated areas with arrows pointing to damaged buildings were issued from time to time, but it was impossible for the average layman to appreciate their significance', in: Thomson 1947 (reference 51), 179–180.

79. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see for example F. J. Mortimer, 'Photography's part in the war', in: *Photographic Journal* LXXXI (1941), 124–145.

80. This advert ('RAF Jigsaw,' *Picture Post*, 7 August 1943, 7) was part of a campaign that sought to enhance the Ilford brand by depicting the use of its products in the work of photographic reconnaissance.

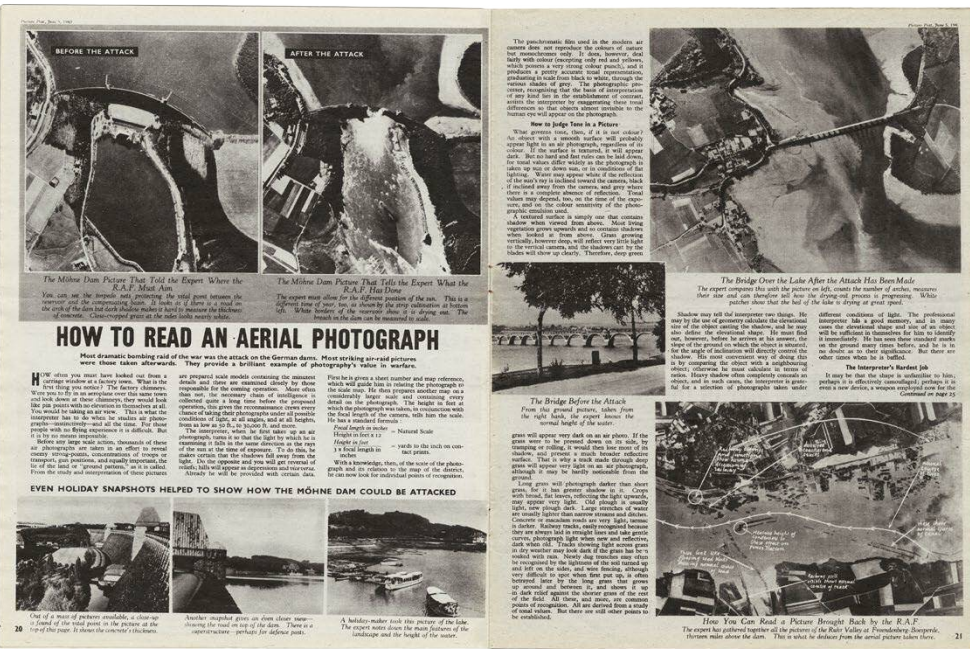


Figure 8
Unknown photographer,
'How to read an aerial photograph',
in: *Picture Post*, 5 June 1943, 20-21.

Taylor suggests, a God's eye view is evocative of forms of omniscience through the vicarious power of surveillance which it offers.⁸¹ The powerful potential of the aerial photograph was recognised and deployed by the Press and Public Relations Section of the Photographic Reconnaissance

Unit which in March 1943 organised, *Bomb Damage on Germany*, a touring photographic exhibition.⁸² However, the public recirculation of aerial imagery did not only suggest a form of visual dominance over the enemy. It had positive connotations for the viewing audience. The *Picture Post* story on how to read an aerial photograph offered viewers membership of a community whose efforts were striking at the heart of enemy territory; 'it brought together boffins and civilians.⁸³ The conventional wisdom about aerial imagery is that it has a distancing effect. No doubt, this is accurate in this instance vis-à-vis British perspectives on German suffering. But it can also be seen in this context to have a more complex character—a binding effect, bringing together a community of disparate members under the banner of a common purpose through shared acts of both production and interpretation. The pages of *Picture Post* were a fitting place for deployment of such visual strategies. Combining articles and letters, alongside engaging visuals. Although *Picture Post* is more renowned for its focus on social democratic issues in wartime, the same successful format can be seen to have had a bearing on public understanding of the bombing war.

Public debate about bombing policy

Picture Post was instrumental in helping to shape the political agenda in wartime Britain in ways that had a significant impact on postwar decisions regarding social provision. This campaigning aspect—memorably termed, 'the social eye of *Picture Post*' by Stuart Hall—was central to the way the magazine presented itself to its readers.⁸⁴ In an article from January 1942, the editor, Tom Hopkinson, outlined the magazine's record of critiquing the war effort and the government in the national interest. He described the publication as 'a paper which not only reports, but criticises. It is a paper of opinion—on politics, on social questions, above all



81. John Taylor, *War Photography: Realism in the British Press*, Abingdon: Routledge 1991, 57.
 82. While the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit was based at RAF Medmenham, the PROs were in Wembley. They also published *Evidence in Camera*. A magazine for RAF personnel, it comprised aerial reconnaissance imagery of German cities, providing a visual record of the destruction (albeit of a very particular sort). First weekly, then fortnightly it ran to 103 issues. See Allan Williams, *Operation Crossbow: The Untold Story of Photographic Intelligence and the Search for Hitler's V Weapons*, London: Preface 2013, 68-69; and Powys-Lybbe, 44-45. Air Ministry PROs ran a similar campaign, called 'Works Relations' showcasing

the results of bombing for munitions and aircraft manufacturing workers (see Gillman, 49, and Williams, *Press, Parliament and People*, 80-81). The wartime reconnaissance photographs now form part of the National Collection of Aerial Photography, (Edinburgh: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland) <http://ncap.org.uk/> (14 January 2016).
 83. Stuart Hall (reference 81), 59.
 84. Stuart Hall, 'The Social Eye of *Picture Post*', in: *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 2 (1972), 71-120. A seminal photo-essay concerned the Beveridge report: 'Beveridge: The Fight is on', in: *Picture Post*, 6 March 1943, 7-11.



Figure 10
Unknown photographer,
'A rear-gunner of a Stirling prepares for
a raid over Germany',
cover of: *Picture Post*, 17 October 1942.

cles covering the period from summer 1942 to autumn 1943, and of the imagery that accompanied them. Around the time of the raids on Essen and Bremen, *Picture Post* published a map to illustrate, 'What British Bombers can do to Germany.'⁸⁹ It was only a one-page item, but it suggests both public appetite for and knowledge of the escalation. The unnamed author wrote about the excitement generated by a thousand bomber raids on Germany and suggested, 'There is disappointment now if a few days pass without another big raid.' The map showed the opportunities provided for bombing by longer daylight hours, including more easterly urban areas described as 'leading manufacturing cities.' This positive assertion that

on the conduct of the war.⁸⁵ The self-definition of the magazine as a paper and not a magazine—as part of the institution of the press, not as a vehicle of entertainment—is noteworthy. Here, as elsewhere, Hopkinson was contributing to building a picture of a free press in general. Specifically, he was projecting an image of *Picture Post* as a critically engaged and socially responsible publication. The article resulted from a censure by the MOI following criticism in *Picture Post* of the kit supplied to soldiers in North Africa. In his memoirs, Hopkinson describes being called before the Minister, Brendan Bracken, in winter 1941.⁸⁶ The editor asserted that while the MOI took action against *Picture Post* (stopping circulation of the magazine in North Africa), the magazine did not alter its conduct of speaking truth to power. In his 1942 article, Hopkinson invited the public to join the debate: 'we intend to continue our policy exactly as before, to criticise when there is need for it, to applaud when it is deserved. [...] What do you think? We should like to know.'⁸⁷ Accepting both the invitation and the image of *Picture Post* as an organ of democratic debate, readers wrote in.⁸⁸

On the issue of area bombing, however, this spirit of informed debate was not assiduously pursued. At the time of the escalation of the offensive, the little discussion there was about bombing policy lacked a strong critical edge. This is evident from an analysis of arti-

85. Tom Hopkinson, 'Should we stop criticising?', in: *Picture Post*, 31 January 1943, 22–23.

86. Tom Hopkinson, *Of This Our Time: A Journalist's Story, 1905–50*, London: Hutchison 1982, 202–204.

87. Readers' responses were published over four consecutive weeks from 14 February 1942.

88. On this, see also an article on government criticism of the *Daily Mirror*, 4 April 1942, 16–17; and 'The fight to maintain the freedom of the press', in: *Picture Post*, 25 April 1942, 14–15.

89. 'What British bombers can do to Germany', in: *Picture Post*, 20 June, 1942, 10.

attacks could 'affect the course of the war' was little different from the official line expressed in the MOI publications and it changed little in subsequent *Picture Post* coverage.

In October 1942, *Picture Post* published what at first glance appears to be a considered assessment of the bombing strategy in an article trailed on the front cover using an image of a rear gunner in a Stirling aircraft (fig. 10).⁹⁰ The tone taken is not deferential, describing belief in victory through bombing as 'almost a religion' and noting how 'with stern single-mindedness, our Air Marshalls cling to their creed.' Using quotations from British and American commanders, the Air Ministry's case is set out. Harris is reported as saying, 'We will bomb Germany so persistently and so severely that her power to make war will be crippled.' General Ira Eaker, commanding US Air Force personnel in the UK, is quoted as remarking, 'The German workpeople must have houses to live in and utility services to keep them alive. These are very vulnerable to air attack.' The text goes on to address the issue of 'area bombing' using exactly that term and drawing a comparison between the Allied policy and German tactics:

The Germans gave up target bombing quite early in their attack on this country. They came to the conclusion that there is no such thing as accurate night bombing, but that it did not very much matter, because production is slowed down just as much by hitting the homes of the workers as by bombing their factories.⁹¹

There is no room for public doubt about what the Allied strategy will bring about. As regards an opposing point of view, the article suggests that critics of the policy question the cost and time taken to achieve the objectives of disrupting industry and communications. However, while efficacy is under scrutiny, the creed itself is not the focus of reflection. Almost as an aside, the article concludes by suggesting that bombing might be the prelude to a land offensive. Thus, although the article is described as 'a full objective survey,' it stops short of an engagement with the issue in anything but strategic terms, failing to meet the standards of critical reflection that the paper set itself. Moreover, approving responses to the article (by a Norwegian official and from the director of the De Havilland Aircraft Co.) were published, but no opposing points of view were aired amongst the readers' letters printed subsequently.⁹²

The relationship between the text and the imagery is crucial in regard to this compliant or accepting stance. The photographic illustrations further denude the lacklustre critical nature of the article. Statements of the extent and focus of the campaign articulated through the words of Harris and Eaker do not chime with the imagery. The two photographs above the article's headline are before and after aerial shots of a factory in Cologne from May 1940 (a duet also

90. 'Can bombing break Germany?', in: *Picture Post*, 17 October 1942, 13–18.
91. *Picture Post* 17 October 1942 (reference 90), 16.

92. 'Readers' Letters', in: *Picture Post*, 7 November 1942, 3.

THE TOOLS TO DO THE JOB



Figure 11
Unknown photographer,
'The tools to do the job', in: *Picture Post*,
17 October 1942, 14.

used in *Bomber Command Continues*). Moreover, a double-page spread with a map and 36 labelled towns or cities implies the legitimacy of the targets of area bombing, listing population sizes alongside the chief industries. A selection of images of aircraft in flight is labelled 'the tools to do the job' (fig. 11) assuming the validity of the job. Another visual shows 'what one bomb can do,' but resolutely works against what critical reflection there is on what the bombing policy should do. The one outspoken moment in the article might help explain the dissonance between the positive imagery and the more questioning (albeit not outright critical) text. The author comments disapprovingly of the Air Ministry News Service:

Whether it is printed anonymously or re-written under the names of the air correspondents, the source of the news is always the same. [...] A nation that understands what it is trying to do in war is much stronger than one that fumbles along, hoping for the best, but ready to be pleasantly lulled by its own official publicity.⁹³

Presumably the imagery for the article on this issue was provided by the Air Ministry, perhaps originating with the RAF Directorate of Public Relations or the Press and Public Relations Section of the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit.

A hagiographic article on Harris the following year has the feel of a syndicated piece where both text and illustrations are provided to the paper (fig. 12).⁹⁴ It comprises a set of photographs of Bomber Command's Commander-in-Chief and a commentary by E. Colston Shepherd, editor of *The Aeroplane* (a commercial weekly aviation magazine launched in 1911). The article is a carefully crafted portrait whereby stage-managed

photographs and deferential text collaborate to project a firm-but-fair image of Harris. The photographs depict him at work and at home with his family. One picture shows Harris at his desk looking at aerial reconnaissance images and surrounded by members of staff. The caption reads: 'The men who help him to decide - In the Conference Room the C.-in-C. studies bomb damage. With him are the Senior Air-Staff Officer, Deputy Senior Air-Staff Officer, and the Group Captains of Intelligence and Armaments.' Again, the image of considered action by experts in their field is conveyed. Reinforced throughout for the audience in this combined visual and verbal portrait is the image of Harris as resolute and determined: 'Of all his

93. *Picture Post* 17 October 1942 (reference 90), 13.

94. 'The Man who picks the target for tonight', in: *Picture Post*, 10 July 1943, 8-10.

characteristics, a quality of persistence is one of the most valuable [...]. Harris's restless search for better ways and means ... therein lies the true greatness of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris.⁹⁵ Readers are even directed by the text as to how they should interpret his appearance in the accompanying images: 'To look at Sir Arthur Harris, broad-shouldered, bull-necked, of medium height, unsmiling [...] is to see the sort of officer with whom no one takes liberties.' But even if the article itself was pre-digested and printed as directed by official PROs in *Picture Post*, the central reverent message is supported by the content and tone of other items included in the same issue. A letter from a reader in Cardiff, for instance, passionately demands the RAF 'Smash Germany Thoroughly Now.' Preceding the piece on Harris is an article on Franco with reference to Guernica. Following are reproductions of extracts from the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* carrying theatrical drawings of German raids on the UK.⁹⁶

An article in the autumn of 1943 titled 'Bombing: A Choice of Policies' seemed like it might offer an alternative position in the interests of balance.⁹⁷ Vernon Blunt takes issue with 'the "bomb Germany to hell" school,' arguing that the idea Germany is on the point of collapse due to bombing is 'a matter of faith rather than of proved fact.' However, Blunt is not concerned about whether to bomb or not, but how best to bomb. He talks of the 'justifiable pride in the achievements of the men who fly heavy bombers' and aims only 'to correct extravagant

Figure 12
Unknown photographer,
'The Man who picks the target for tonight',
in: *Picture Post*, 10 July 1943, 8-9.



theories according to which we can win the war on the cheap.' A bombing policy that supports advancing forces is the proper approach according to Blunt, but this is a very controlled articulation of a moderate criticism. Nor is the measured critique enhanced by the accompanying photographs of industrious ground crew readying runways at night using electric lighting.

That the debate on area bombing hosted on the pages of *Picture Post* was measured and slight is also corroborated by an article published a fortnight previously.⁹⁸ 'A Mosquito's view of the city of Berlin' shows

95. As evident from his memoirs, Harris was not indifferent about his public image: 'There is a widespread impression, that has often got into print, that I not only invented the policy of area bombing but also insisted on carrying it out in the face of the natural reluctance to kill women and children that was felt by everyone else. The facts are otherwise. [...] Whenever anyone wish to blackguard me, as the *Economist* and the *Daily Worker* have done [a compliment from

such sources), they accuse me of not only being the executor of the bombing policy but also its author' (Harris 1947 (reference 23), 88-89).

96. This latter publication was a repeated formula, reproducing and denigrating German propaganda. On German wartime press coverage see also, 'How the German People see the war', in: *Picture Post*, 28 August 1943, 7-13.

97. 'Bombing: A Choice of Policies', in: *Picture Post*, 25 September 1943, 7-9.



THE BLAZING JAPANESE TRANSPORT: Bombs in the South Pacific Off New Britain Island in the South Pacific lies a Japanese transport. She is heavily camouflaged with palms and foliage. But the palms and foliage do not deflect bombs. She is soon a blazing ruin to those on board—to the bomb-aimer an elegant plane of smoke.

WHAT THE BOMB-AIMER SEES

Patterns of strange delicacy and beauty meet the eye of the bomb-aimer, as he waits the moment to make terrifying changes in the shapes he sees below.

"THE palm-trees looked like a field of mushrooms"; "the flak came up at us like flowers opening"; "a cloud of black smoke began to roll slowly away from the target: it looked like a dark cloak blowing in the wind"; "the ship seemed to open up as if she were being dissected by a knife"—in these and a hundred other phrases men have tried to convey to those of us who live on the ground the sights they see below them from the skies. You get a taste, say some of them, for these strange aerial pictures—in which the curves may stretch 100 miles and be drawn past you at 300 miles an hour. Strange of all is the mixture of depth with expansion. The blossoming flowers, that



THE PALM-FRINED HARBOUR: Bombs Over New Guinea

In the harbours and bays of New Guinea lie the Japanese transports bringing reinforcements, food, supplies. One by one they are sought out and attacked. Like mushrooms are the palm trees from a great height. Lower down they look like colonies of tiny starfish.

—like one of those "mazes" which small boys draw to occupy the time of the French lesson—is a German airfield ploughed all over to make it useless. Those moving fingers, racing along the surface of the ground and dragging each its own smoke cloud as it goes, are our fighter-bombers taking off from an improvised airfield near by. The experienced pilot or observer reads the pictures he sees far below him. But there is far more in the pictures which he cannot see. The photographs he takes, examined closely at headquarters, may contain information that will set an army in motion and bring a new armada scurrying across the sea.



THE ALASKAN GLACIER: A Highway of Ice It flows. It has carved out its own bed. Headlands run out into it. But its majestic movement is reckoned in feet per year.



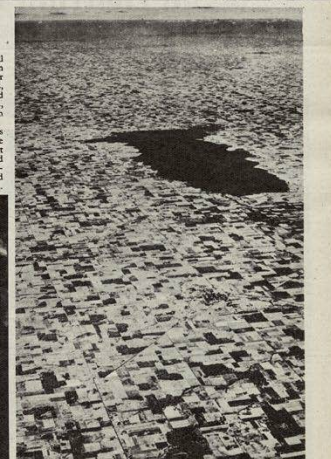
THE CARGO SHIPS OFF THE SOLOMONS

The Flying Fortresses are out hunting. The sea is black beneath them, marbled faintly by the varying depths and shallows. Clear against the blackness are two slender shapes.



The Flying Fortresses Let Go Their Bomb-Loads

The target is small, but the bombs fall true. A cluster of spiky-petalled flowers opens all round the doomed cargo ships—and the Flying Fortresses bank for a second run in.



THE MID-WESTERN LANDSCAPE: A Sky-view

This is America from the air, a cross-section of the Mid-West. Once a land of ranging prairie, it is now cut up, trimmed and portioned off into a million farm-plots and industrial sections.



THE TORPEDO BOAT'S WAKE: A Feather of Spray She puts on speed. She struggles and twists to get away. But still she draws behind her the wake that attracts the enemy.

10

11

Figure 13
Unknown photographer,
'What the bomb-aimer sees', in: *Picture Post*,
13 March 1943, 10–11.

some of the great landmarks of the German capital 'before they were bombed' alongside a commentary that offers 'some of the reasons why Berlin is the most important target of all for the R.A.F.' The text running alongside the aerial views of potential targets addresses the topic of housing, describing the many tenement blocks and the civilian defence issues they present: 'This method of construction presents special A.R.P problems, for the families living in the back courtyards are virtually trapped if a bomb falls near the entrance to the front court.' A paragraph later, the author proposes the following rhetorical question: 'Will civilisation lose anything of vast importance by the destruction of the "city of tenement-blocks, built on sand"?' Not only is the text here evidence of a public knowledge of and proposing a particular attitude towards the bombing of German residential areas, but the photographic imagery which accompanies it underpins this attitude.⁹⁹ The images show the public buildings of a city intact; there is no intimation of the effects of the bombing of civilian populations in this photo-story. The article concluded by stressing the symbolism of Berlin rather than the experience of Berliners. 'Berlin has a mystical importance to every German. It is the city of Frederick the Great, that sovereign on whom Goebbels so frequently calls in his efforts to rally the people. It is the city which symbolises the idea of a powerful, unified Germany.' The *Picture Post* audience was encouraged to relish the symbolic resonance of raids on Berlin, rather than appreciate their material and human impact.

Indeed, no photo-story on the topic of bombing indicated through its imagery the scale or experience of what was taking place. Following the escalation of the bombing war from 1942,

98. 'A Mosquito's view of the city of Berlin', in: *Picture Post*, 11 September 1943, 18–21.

99. This attitude was itself a subject on which *Picture Post* did stage debate, even if the bombing war was not an issue which attracted substantive critical reflection. See for example: 'Should we blame the whole German people?', in: *Picture Post*, 17 July 1943, 24–26; and H.G. Wells, 'How should we treat the German people?', in: [*Picture Post*, 31 July 1943, 20].

there is a notable absence of the street views advocated in *Bomber Command* in 1941. Thus, while the public were in a position to know what was going on, they were not viewing the sort of imagery that would allow them to understand what the prosecution of an air war on this scale meant. Indeed, they were actively discouraged from doing so, being asked to think about technology, experts and aircrews instead. When attention did turn to Germany, it was with a tightly managed frame of reference.

There were forthright and articulate critics of the bombing offensive who could have provided a stronger critical edge to the public debate about bombing staged in wartime issues of *Picture Post*. These were known entities. They included members of the clergy and of parliament, as well as committed pacifists.¹⁰⁰ Economist H. Stanley Jevons was, for instance, Chair of the Bombing Restrictions Committee. Established in 1942, it published nine pamphlets against area bombing including Vera Brittain's 'Seed of Chaos: What Mass Bombing Really Means.'¹⁰¹ MP Richard Stokes spoke in the House of Commons on 24 November 1942, protesting that 'women and little children are women and little children to me, wherever they live, and it fills me with absolute nausea to think of the filthy task that many of our young men are being invited to carry out.'¹⁰² Bishop George Bell, perhaps the most prominent critic, spoke in the House of Lords on 4 February 1944 against the campaign. Citing articles from *The Times* of 10 January 1944, he reprimanded the government, observing that 'the policy is obliteration, openly acknowledged' and describing the belief that bombing would shorten the war and reduce Allied fatalities as 'pure speculation.'¹⁰³ From outright condemnation to more modest calls for a change in policy, such critics held a range of positions on the issue of bombing. All sought a wider public debate on what Stokes critiqued Sinclair for terming, 'almost gloatingly,' 'the swelling crescendo of destruction.'¹⁰⁴ Yet, notwithstanding its stated commitment to report critically 'on politics, on social questions, above all on the conduct of the war,' *Picture Post* failed to provide that platform.

Visual spectacle and the bombing war

Coverage of the bombing campaign did not simply fail to meet the critical standards *Picture Post* set for itself; it reduced the campaign to the sorts of spectacular imagery that was the staple of the commercial photo-magazine. There were frequent invocations to readers to take forms of enjoyment in looking at photographs that depicted the bombing war. A host of articles aestheticized the air war, repeating the templates from the interwar period of reveling in unusual and arresting views provided by means of the airborne camera. For instance, 'What the bomb-aimer sees' (fig. 13) offered seven aerial photographs depicting 'Patterns of strange delicacy and beauty [that] meet the eye of the bomb-aimer, as he waits the moment

100. Regarding wartime tolerance and marginalisation of dissenting voices on the issue of area bombing, see Richard Overy, 'Pacifism and the Blitz, 1940–1941', in: *Past and Present* 2013, 219 (1), 201–236; and Andrew Chandler, 'The Church of England and the Obliteration Bombing of German in the Second World War', in: *English Historical Review* (1993), 920–946. Overy observes that, 'There is no doubt that pacifist activity was deliberately inhibited both by formal restrictions and by popular hostility' (Overy, 'Pacifism and the Blitz,' 208).

101. A complete collection of the Bombing Restrictions Committee publications is held by the National Library of Scotland.

102. *Hansard*, HC Deb, 24 November 1942, vol. 385, cc.686.

103. *Hansard*, HL Deb, 9 February 1944, vol. 130, cc.737–45.

104. *Hansard*, HC Deb, 6 March 1945, vol. 130, cc.1864 & 1900.

to make terrifying changes in the shapes he sees below.¹⁰⁵ Notable by their absence are aerial photographs of populated urban areas; the majority are of nautical subjects. Similarly, 'Patterns of War in the German Skies' provides a montage of photographs of contrails with the strap-line: 'On German soil, the daylight war increases the indescribable chaos. In German air, the patterns, made by the bombers and fighters, are omens of the fate that is overtaking the country.'¹⁰⁶ Knowledge of what was happening is evident, but understanding is foreclosed through striking imagery of tangential subjects like cloud formations. When images of the impact on German streets were rarely shown, even these were marked by a lack of revelation. 'Phosphorous bombs in the streets of Berlin,' for instance, includes night-time photographs reminiscent of nothing more than a fireworks display.¹⁰⁷ The commentary is chilling ('Not all the sand in Berlin nor all the water in the Spree, seem likely to put out the flames which raise from the blazing asphalt and spurt all over the melting street'), but the visual material provides little additional insight. Indeed, it works against the declarations of the text, undermining whatever revelations it offers.

Throughout the war numerous other one-page features (designed around photographs of novel subjects or familiar subjects photographed in novel ways) encouraged the consumption of the bombing war as a spectacle.¹⁰⁸ Given the management of the news by the Air Ministry, we can assume these were released to the press. Conversely, we may also assume that more detailed images of the impact were not. An analysis of issues of *Picture Post* in relation to the major Bomber Command operations from 1942 onwards reveals very little correlation between the intensification of the offensive and the coverage it received. Thomson inadvertently acknowledges the success of this management when he noted that:

Of all the years, 1943 was by far the easiest and most quiet for the censors. It was a year of Allied advances and victories in Europe, Africa and the Far East, with all the new war factories in this country and in the United States in full production. And where there are victories, censorship does not seem to have the importance that is given to it in the days of defeats and imminent danger. [...] Germany was being pounded from the air day and night by the United States Army 8th and 9th Air Forces and the R.A.F. It was indeed a rosy picture.¹⁰⁹

The choice of examples (factories in full production, Germany being pounded from the air) and terminology ('a rosy picture') is telling. It reflects the central role played by photo-stories about manufacturing and technological accomplishment, as well as aerial reconnaissance imagery, in constructing and maintaining the public image of Bomber Command in wartime.

105. 'What the bomb-aimer sees', in: *Picture Post*, 13 March 1943, 10–11.

106. 'Patterns of War in the German Skies', in: *Picture Post*, 25 March 1944, 14 & 15.

107. 'Phosphorous bombs in the streets of Berlin', in: *Picture Post*, 19 Feb 1944, 16.

108. For example: 'A hit ... and a miss', in: *Picture Post*, 9 January 1943, 12;

'One ship, One Bomb', in: *Picture Post*, 19 June 1943, 17; 'After the RAF's visit',

in: *Picture Post*, 2 October 1943, 19; 'What is it?', in: *Picture Post*, 22 July 1944,

15; 'What happens when gunners and bombers pin-point an island', in: *Picture Post*, 30 September 1944, 15; and 'Nine years in the life of a bridge', in: *Picture Post*, 28 April 1945, 13.

109. Thomson 1947 (reference 51), 174.

Stories provided by the Air Ministry to the press, although they drew criticism, helped secure a commitment to the air war that was shared far and wide; a commitment based on public knowledge but avoiding public understanding of what was taking place. Michael Bromley has suggested that there may have been an element of complicity between *Picture Post* and the authorities on this issue. Noting 'the magazine's run-ins with the authorities in the early years of the war,' Bromley goes on to speculate that the magazine 'struck deals with the government, and it remains a matter of conjecture precisely how enmeshed it was in the expanding activities of the state's information services.'¹¹⁰

Analysis of the debate staged regarding bombing policy on the pages of *Picture Post* demonstrates that it did not have a sharp critical edge, while analysis of the photographs depicting the bombing war reveals that the photo-magazine did not offer readers a clear view of the impact of the campaign. Whether the magazine was complicit with or simply reactive to the unfolding situation of the new public relations terrain is not simple to judge, but it does seem evident that the editorial staff was not satisfied with the position they were put in. The problem was illustrated by the poor range and depth of coverage in an issue from 24 March 1945, for instance. While the front cover declared, 'In this issue: Into Germany,' there were only two short articles on this topic. 'The Battle of Germany: From the Heavens' showed more aerial reconnaissance imagery, while 'Into Germany house by house' showed just a few images of street fighting.¹¹¹ Moreover, the Service Ministries' image management strategies drew explicit fire from *Picture Post* following the D-Day landings, however. An editorial comment on 15 July 1944 asked, 'Where are the pictures?':

The taking of pictures at the battle front is to-day in the hands of the Army Film and Photographic Unit. It includes many extremely able photographers, taken from papers like our own [...]. Where is their work? The Ministry of Information cannot help us. It has no control over any front-line cameramen. It is simply an issuing-house for pictures handed to it by the military authorities. Where are the real front-line pictures? [...] The British public wants them. We want to give them to the public. *Where are the pictures?*¹¹²

This is clearly a signal that while *Picture Post* had a social eye when it came to the domestic political agenda, it gave a militarily-sanctioned perspective on the bombing war. This may have been an intentional response to the public mood, or simply a result of the tight management by the Air Ministry of publicly-circulating news photographs. Perhaps it was both. Clearly, by the end of the war the magazine editors felt it was not in a position to deliver what its audience wanted. Conversely, government officials were convinced of the value of the photo-magazine

110. Michael Bromley, 'Was it the Mirror Wot Won it? The Development of the Tabloid Press During the Second World War', in Jeff Hill and Nick Hayes (eds.), *'Millions Like Us'? British Culture in the Second World War*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 1999, 93–124 (119).

111. 'The Battle of Germany: From the Heavens' and 'Into Germany house by house,' in: *Picture Post*, 24 March 1945, 7–9 & 12–13.

112. 'Where are the pictures?', in: *Picture Post*, 15 July 1944, 3.

in meeting their agenda; Fraser, now Controller of Production at the MOI, wrote in April 1945 that ‘the illustrated magazine plainly has an outstanding contemporary popular appeal in all educated countries where people seem to find it more palatable than other types of printed material. [... It is] a weapon we should keep in use as long as possible.’¹¹³

Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, film has rightly received much critical attention, but credit for what Edgerton called ‘the popular picture of the air war’ in Britain must also be shared with the still camera image.¹¹⁴ Too often, photography has been notable for its absence in discussion of wartime propaganda, public relations and the press. Such reflection cannot answer questions about the efficacy or morality of the bombing campaign pursued by Britain against Germany. What it does illustrate, however, is that while the British public had ample cause to understand what this offensive entailed, they were not helped to conceive of what it meant. Public knowledge of a policy of area bombing did not amount to public understanding of the impact of area bombing. Indeed, public understanding was impeded by the image of Bomber Command forged in the early years of the war and maintained thereafter.¹¹⁵

Addressing contemporary news coverage, Judith Butler questions ‘the way in which suffering is presented to us, and how that presentation affects our responsiveness.’¹¹⁶ With regard to the war on terror, embedded photographers and photographs of torture, she has scrutinised the activities of state authorities in ‘regulating perspective in addition to content’ to manufacture a phenomenon of “‘not seeing” in the midst of seeing.”¹¹⁷ It is a comparable situation in Britain with regard to photography’s role in sustaining the disjunction between public knowledge and public understanding of the air war. Public perception of Bomber Command and the bombing offensive was fashioned by text and image, its particular character shaped by the interplay of what was said and seen, what was not said and not seen. It is only by critically addressing the position of photography as a practice in wartime, alongside analysis of the use and framing of particular photographs, that it is possible to reach an understanding of the image of Bomber Command in public debate.

The close intertwining of the state and the press in wartime is evident in the careers of individuals such as Lord Beaverbrook (proprietor of the *Daily Express* and sometime Minister of Aircraft Production), William Surrey Dane (Managing Director of Odhams Press, before becoming Head of Publications at the MOI), or Freddie Gillman (a journalist with the *Yorkshire Post* then latterly a Deputy Director of Public Relations at the Air Ministry). Paul Fussell asserts that, ‘To read widely in the wartime correspondence exchanged by persons of high rank

113. Holman 2005 (reference 31), 220. The comment comes from a report titled ‘Ministry Magazine Policy’ and dated 24 April 1945 [National Archives, INF 1/951]. Fraser was referring specifically to *Cadran*, a MOI photo-magazine launched for newly liberated territories in 1944.

114. Edgerton 1992 (reference 2), 59.

115. For a discussion of complementary verbal strategies deployed by newspapers, see Knapp 2013 (reference 3), 45–51.

116. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, London: Verso 2010, 63.

117. Butler 2010 (reference 116), 65 & 100.

and important position is to find that about one-third of their attention is devoted to matters of publicity and “credit.”¹¹⁸ What ties these phenomena together is the growth in importance due to conditions of war of a relatively young industry: Public Relations. This growth is reflected in the establishment of the Institute for Public Relations in 1948. Arguably, anxiety about the position of the press in this new terrain is exemplified in the establishment of a Royal Commission on the Press in 1946 which was to examine ‘the control, management and ownership of the newspaper and periodical Press and the news agencies’. The new situation postwar was given expression by Francis Williams. Prior to the war he was Editor of the *Daily Herald*. During the war he was Controller of Press Censorship and News at the MOI. After the war he was public relations advisor to Labour Party Prime Minister Clement Attlee. During which time he wrote, *Press, Parliament and People*, sketching the ‘new conception of Government Public Relations which developed during the war.’¹¹⁹

It is in this context that the marketing of the bombing campaign to the public was co-produced—whether by intent or by omission—through the work of individuals across a range of organisations including government, the military, the press and even manufacturing. MOI personnel shaped public perceptions of the bombing campaign through official publications. The aircraft industry provided a diversionary cover story in the absence of photographs showing the working end of the bombing offensive, foregrounding imagery of production rather than destruction. Through the work of PROs in the Air Ministry News Service and other units, government efforts to manage press coverage provided attention-grabbing photo-stories which effectively screened from public view the impact of total war.

I am not arguing that if the British public had seen the destruction they would have necessarily rejected it, only that photography was a crucial part of the management of image. It is important to note, as Taylor did, that ‘if we use the media as our window on the world, we must be under no illusions that there are forces at work attempting to draw a curtain over it to obscure our view.’¹²⁰ It is hoped that ongoing collaborative and interdisciplinary research on the Ministry of Information, the press and Bomber Command will illuminate more brightly the important question of the changing nature of public relations in wartime and beyond through examination of the work of key bodies, such as the Air Ministry News Service, the Press and Public Relations Section of the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit, the Photographic Section of the MOI Press and Censorship Division, or the Army Film and Photographic Unit.¹²¹

118. Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990, 156.

119. Williams 1946 (reference 8), 84.

120. Philip M. Taylor, ‘Journalism under fire: The reporting of war and international crises,’ in: Simon Cottle (ed.), *News, Public Relations and Power*, London: SAGE 2003, 65.

121. In 2014, a team led by Siân Nicholas at Aberystwyth University completed research on the social and cultural history of the British press during the Second World War. *The British Press and the Second World War* is forthcoming in 2017 with Oxford University Press. A team at the University of London led by Simon Eliot is undertaking research in collaboration with the National Archives titled, ‘A Publishing and Communications History of the Ministry of Information, 1939-45.’