SUMMARY REPORT (EUROPEAN WAR)

The new relation of air power to strategy presents one of the distinguishing contrasts between this war and the last. Air power in the last war was in its infancy. The new role of three-dimensional warfare was even then foreseen by a few farsighted men, but planes were insufficient in quality and quantity to permit much more than occasional brilliant assistance to the ground forces.

Air power in the European phase of this war reached a stage of full adolescence, a stage marked by rapid development in planes, armament, equipment, tactics and concepts of strategic employment and by an extraordinary increase in the effort allocated to it by all the major contestants. England devoted 40 to 50 percent of her war production to her air forces, Germany 40 percent, and the United States 35 percent.

Nevertheless, at the end of hostilities in Europe, weapons, tactics and strategy were still in a state of rapid development. Air power had not yet reached maturity and all conclusions drawn from experience in the European theatre must be considered subject to change. No one should assume that because certain things were effective or not effective, the same would be true under other circumstances and other conditions.

In the European war, Allied air power was called upon to play many roles – partner with the Navy over the sea lanes; partner with the Army in ground battle; partner with both on the invasion beaches, reconnaissance photographer for all; mover of troops and critical supplies; and attacker of the enemy’s vital strength far behind the battle line.

NOTE: All RAF statistics are preliminary or tentative.
SOURCE: United States Strategic Bombing Survey (European) and (Pacific) (New York: Garland, 1976).
In the attack by Allied air power, almost 2,700,000 tons of bombs were dropped, more than 1,440,000 bomber sorties and 2,680,000 fighter sorties were flown. The number of combat planes reached a peak of some 28,000 and at the maximum 1,300,000 men were in combat commands. The number of men lost in air action was 79,265 Americans and 79,281 British. More than 18,000 American and 22,000 British planes were lost or damaged beyond repair.

In the wake of these attacks there are great paths of destruction. In Germany, 3,600,000 dwelling units, approximately 20% of the total, were destroyed or heavily damaged. Survey estimates show some 300,000 civilians killed and 780,000 wounded. The number made homeless aggregates 7,500,000. The principal German cities have been largely reduced to hollow walls and piles of rubble. German industry is bruised and temporarily paralyzed. These are the scars across the face of the enemy, the preface to the victory that followed.

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Allied air power was decisive in the war in Western Europe. Hindsight inevitably suggests that it might have been employed differently or better in some respects. Nevertheless, it was decisive. In the air, its victory was complete. At sea, its contribution, combined with naval power, brought an end to the enemy’s greatest naval threat – the U-boat; on land, it helped turn the tide overwhelmingly in favor of Allied ground forces. Its power and superiority made possible the success of the invasion. It brought the economy which sustained the enemy’s armed forces to virtual collapse, although the full effects of this collapse had not reached the enemy’s front lines when they were overrun by Allied forces. It brought home to the German people the full impact of modern war with all its horror and suffering. Its imprint on the German nation will be lasting.

Some signposts
1. The German experience suggests that even a first class military power – rugged and resilient as Germany was – cannot live long under full-scale and free exploitation of air weapons over the heart of its territory. By the beginning of 1945, before the invasion of the homeland itself, Germany was reaching a state of helplessness. Her armament production was falling irretrievably, orderliness in effort