

## *ROUEN: La Semaine Rouge*

**Stephen Bourque**

A simple monument, approximately twelve feet high, stands in a corner of the main lobby of Rouen's train station. Inscribed upon it are the names of almost 200 rail workers from this French city and its suburbs killed while performing their daily duties during the Second World War. (Photograph 1) Four hundred and seventy kilometers east, a comparatively impressive plaque rests above commuter's gaze at the station in Metz. In fact, numerous train stations throughout France display similar monuments and plaques reminding citizens of the service and sacrifice of these workers almost seventy years ago. It is probable that some of the modern commuters know that, above them, the names of their family members are engraved in stone, whereas tourists will simply notice and move on. Emerging from these stations, especially in larger cities like Rouen, Metz, Caen, and Nantes, an alert observer will notice additional indicators of the scale of violence around these transportation hubs. Most obvious are the ancient town centers, now dominated by 1950s-era construction, or churches and other buildings with bombed-out portions still prominently displayed. Few visitors probably ponder the nature of this damage.

Monuments in and around almost every major French city allude to bomb damage by aerial attacks. Sometimes they are discreetly hidden away in small parks or adjacent to historic buildings. Others demand a traveler's attention, such as a massive

plaque on the side of the promontory, called the *Enclos*, in Saint Lô which proclaims (in French): “To the memory of the victims of the bombardment that destroyed the city of Saint-Lô. Six June Nineteen forty-four.” On the edges of these *villes*<sup>1</sup> are the most poignant memorials: the cemeteries. Often grouped together are the sarcophagi containing the remains of multiple family members who perished during the war, such as Daniel, Germaine and Yvonne Faucon, who died during the bombardment of Lisieux on June 7, 1944.<sup>2</sup> The burial markers have been in place for almost seventy years, but many of the monuments are of much more recent construction and represent the survivors’ need to pass on to subsequent generations an understanding of the trauma of the time. Each monument testifies to local memory and this represents something fundamentally unique to each locale. On a broader scale, however, the aggregate of these monuments and family memorials combine to form a growing aspect of France’s collective memory of the Second World War. The resulting national narrative is essentially missing from the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the war. As Paul Fussell points out in his classic, *Wartime*: “For the past fifty years the Allied war has been sanitized and romanticized almost beyond recognition by the sentimental, loony patriotic, the ignorant, and the bloodthirsty.”<sup>3</sup> The missing French civilian experience is part of that modern sanitization. The destruction of these cities, and the killing, wounding, and displacement of tens of thousands of civilians, was a direct result of Allied aerial bombardment.

While many are familiar with the Normandy Invasion, few American, Canadian or British citizens know about the massive air campaign waged against their occupied ally. This offensive lasted four long years and targeted most of France’s population centers and infrastructure. By the time the war was over, the Allied air forces killed as many French as the Germans killed British civilians during the “blitz” and vengeance weapon assaults, equaling between 60,000 and 75,000 out of a total of 150,000 French

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to a village, town, or municipality.

<sup>2</sup> Author’s visits in 2007 and 2010. Thanks to the United States Army’s Command and General Staff College for its generous support of this research.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. ix.

civilian deaths during the war were caused by Allied bombs.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately for the French, the American and Commonwealth bombers were far more methodical and efficient, causing more physical damage to their cities, harbors and rail lines than had the Germans.<sup>5</sup> This is not a narrative that the former allies are comfortable with, and it certainly detracts from the wholesome image of American, British, and Canadian soldiers battling Nazis to liberate an eagerly awaiting French population.<sup>6</sup> When confronted with contrary evidence, English-speaking audiences often defend these bombings as necessary to defeat Hitler's forces, or note that many French were supporting the German war effort. Usually one hears from some participant the retort that these attacks and any resulting casualties were the "price of liberation."<sup>7</sup>

The greater French narrative is extremely complex and begins with Germany's invasion in 1940 and the resulting occupation. A hundred thousand men, mobilized in the prime of their lives, were either dead or in German prisoner of war camps. Their wives and families, meanwhile, remained at home to cope with their new reality. Fighting had damaged dozens of cities in the north and along the coast. France, both the occupied zone and the rump Vichy Government, now became a supplier and supporter of the German war machine. As Robert Gildea, Julian Jackson and Robert O. Paxton have demonstrated, most citizens were not crying out for liberation, but rather for stability.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately for the Allied cause, Hitler never welcomed the defeated Vichy

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<sup>4</sup> Michèle Battesti and Patrick Facon, eds., *Les Bombardements Alliés Sur La France Durant La Seconde Guerre Mondiale: Stratégies, Bilans Matériels Et Humains*, Cahiers Du Centre D' Études D'histoire De La Défense, no. 37 (Vincennes: Ministère de la Defense, 2009), pp. 7-9.

<sup>5</sup> Lindsey Dodd and Andrew Knapp, "'How Many Frenchmen Did You Kill?' British Bombing Policy Towards France (1940-1945)," *Society for the Study of French History* (2008): pp. 469-70; Eric Alary, Bénédicte Vergez-Chaignon, and Gilles Gauvin, *Les Français Au Quotidien, 1939-1949* (Paris: Perrin, 2006), p. 504; Dodd and Knapp have the best overall summary of the difficulties of estimating numbers. They have also provided the only comprehensive overview of Allied, especially British, bombing policy during the war.

<sup>6</sup> A good illustration of the Allied, certainly the American, narrative is found in Douglas Brinkley, *The Boys of Pointe Du Hoc: Ronald Reagan, D-Day, and the U. S. Army 2nd Ranger Battalion* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> This has been a common theme after this author's presentation at many seminars and conferences. It is also the title of an article: William I. Hitchcock, "The Price of Liberation," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France During German Occupation*

government of Marshal Philippe Pétain into the fold, in spite of the efforts of German and Vichy French governmental officials. The Nazi retention of the prisoners of war and the forced deportation of Jews and forced laborers led to a growing resistance movement against German occupation and the supporting Vichy Republic by 1943. Most citizens found themselves trapped by the war and its confusing political, social and economic forces.<sup>9</sup>

The Allied bombing campaign began slowly after the collapse of the French government in June 1940. In the beginning, the Royal Air Force struck back against the *Luftwaffe's* airbases in France in conjunction with the Battle of Britain. By 1941, Winston Churchill added the German submarine pens near Lorient and Brest, as well as France's western ports such as Nantes to the list of targets. As the combined bomber offensive against German industry developed after 1942, manufacturing plants across both the occupied territory and the Vichy Republic began receiving regular visits from Bomber Command and, later the United States Army Air Forces. As Operation OVERLORD the Allies' planned invasion of France, approached in the spring of 1944, General Dwight David Eisenhower, Commander Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), and his subordinate commanders took control of the strategic air forces and directed a complex series of operations. These included a deception plan in the Pas de Calais area, called FORTITUDE, and an operation, known as the Transportation Plan, to isolate the intended invasion site in Normandy by attacking bridges and rail yards. Meanwhile, upon learning of the impending launch of Adolf Hitler's "vengeance" weapons, the V1 and V2, Churchill ordered the air forces to destroy them, becoming the air arm's second most important mission (behind protecting the landing beaches) in the summer of 1944. Many of these targets overlapped with those of FORTITUDE.<sup>10</sup>

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(New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003); Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life under the Occupation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> The French narrative, like those of other occupied states, is extremely complex and the repercussions of that era extend well beyond the war years. See Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Dodd and Knapp, "'How Many Frenchmen Did You Kill?' British Bombing Policy Towards France (1940-1945)," pp. 473-76; Memorandum: Eisenhower to Spaatz, Subject: Crossbow Priorities, June 18, 1944 (NARA: RG331, 381 (Crossbow), Box 71).

Then, of course, there was the assault on June 6. Heavy and medium bombers attacked the beaches before the landing and then, unknown by most Anglo-Americans, shifted their sights towards the destruction of vital “choke points:” a series of towns and villages along routes the Germans might use for moving reinforcements to the front.<sup>11</sup> Most students of the war are familiar with the devastating bombing around Saint Lô and Caen in July and the massive airpower used during the Mortain Counterattack and the encirclement of the Falaise Pocket. In August, the Allies landed in southern France and, like Normandy, this area received its share of bombardment before, during, and after the landing. Finally, the Allied armies pursued the withdrawing German forces back to the Franco-German border, with the accompanying use of airpower in places like Strasbourg and Colmar. It was a massive enterprise.<sup>12</sup> Through August 1944, the United States Army Air Forces dropped more bombs on France than Germany. It was only after the ground forces approached the German border that these air attacks shifted east and more bombs began to fall on the Nazi homeland. The Royal Air Force statistics are comparable, and from April through August 1944, over three fourths of all bombs dropped were against targets in France and other occupied territories.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen A. Bourque, "Operational Fires: Heavy Bombing of Norman Towns on D-Day," *Canadian Military History* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2010). For many reasons, this has been a difficult period for French historians to consider. The most comprehensive of recent works on the war is Alary, Vergez-Chaignon, and Gauvin, *Les Français Au Quotidien, 1939-1949*.

<sup>12</sup> The outlines of these operations are well-known to all historians. Good general sources include the official histories from Forrest C Pogue, *The European Theater of Operations: The Supreme Command*, ed. Kent Roberts Greefield, United States Army in World War II (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1954; reprint, 1989); L. F. Ellis, *Victory in the West, Vol 1: The Battle of Normandy* (London: HMSO, 1962); C. P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945*, Vol. III, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War* (Ottawa,: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1960); Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *Plans and Early Operations, January 1942-August 1942*, Vol. I, *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948); — — —, *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942-December 1943*, Vol. II, *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948); — — —, *Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944-May 1945*, Vol. III, *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

<sup>13</sup> Office of Statistical Control, "Army Air Forces Statistical Digest " (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Air Forces 1945); Arthur T. Harris, *Despatch on War Operations, 23 February, 1942 to 8 May, 1945*. (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 44. These figures were refined by Andrew Knapp, one of the foremost experts in the field of Allied bombing.

This article explores the details of this narrative that is missing from our common account of the Second World War. While American, Canadian, and British authors will describe in minute detail the exploits of a particular battalion or personality,<sup>14</sup> few have dedicated any space to discuss the situations of those civilians living under the incessant bombing attacks or caught in the fields of fire.<sup>15</sup> Only recently have authors such as Antony Beevor, Oliver Wieviorka, Andrew Knapp, and William I. Hitchcock begun to fill in the story and present an extended narrative that includes the French civilian experience.<sup>16</sup> This article describes the experience of a single French city, Rouen, and considers three significant events: the American attack of August 17, 1942, the British bombing of April 19, 1944, and *la Semaine Rouge*, or "Red Week," just prior to the Normandy landings on June 6.

## Wartime Rouen

Rouen, the Duchy of Normandy's capital city since the early part of the second century, has long been a center of commerce and culture. It was an important city during France's religious wars (1562-1629) and dominated the commercial exploitation and settlement of Canada during the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> After the departmental

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Stephen E. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); Landislas Fargo, *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph* (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc, 1963).

<sup>15</sup> The Normandy invasion rivals Gettysburg and Waterloo as the most investigated and discussed campaigns in history. Besides the official histories, mentioned previously, others that gloss over the consequences for the French population include: Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day: June 6 1944* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); Geoffrey Perret, *There's a War to Be Won: The United States Army in World War II* (New York: Ivy Books, 1991); Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984); Russell A. Hart, *Clash of Arms: How the Allies Won in Normandy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); Carlo D'Este, *Decision in Normandy* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994); Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 2008); Antony Beevor, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (New York: Viking, 2009); Andrew Knapp, "The Destruction and Liberation of Le Havre in Modern Memory," *War in History* 14, no. 4 (2007); Dodd and Knapp, "'How Many Frenchmen Did You Kill?' British Bombing Policy Towards France (1940-1945);" Olivier Wieviorka, *Normandy: The Landings to the Liberation of Paris*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press, 2008). Wieviorka originally published his book in French.

<sup>17</sup> Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, ed. T. C. W. Blanning William Beik, R. W. Scribner, *New Approaches to European History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Philip Benedict, *Rouen During the Wars of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).



reorganization of 1790 during the French Revolution, Rouen became capital of the department *Seine-Inférieure*.<sup>18</sup> Today, Rouen is best known to the English-speaking world as the site of Joan of Arc's trial and execution. Others know it as the home of Gustave Flaubert, author of the controversial *Madame Bovary*.<sup>19</sup> The community began building *Cathédrale Notre-Dame* in 1145 on the site of a previous church constructed in 396. It is one of the world's most famous religious structures and contained priceless stained glass windows as well as a wide array of art and sculpture. Claude Monet contributed to the cathedral's fame in his late nineteenth century paintings that captured the effect of light at different times of the day. Two other major churches, *Église St-Maclou*, begun in 1200, and *Abbatiale St-Ouen*, dating from the fourteenth century, are also located within a few blocks.<sup>20</sup> By 1939, approximately 120,000 civilians lived in Rouen, with about half the population residing in the city's center.<sup>21</sup> In September of that year, France declared war on Germany. The Nazis attacked in May, and, after the British evacuation from Dunkirk, the German 5<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division captured the city on June 9. Two days later, a severe fire broke out, resulting in a large section of the old city – including almost 900 wooden buildings – burning to the ground. There is no clear evidence on the cause of the fire, but it was not a result of fighting or bombing.<sup>22</sup>

In 1939, Rouen was France's premier shipping port and its extensive harbor facilities were an important military concern for both sides. In the early years of the war, it was to have been a principal port of embarkation for German troops during Operation SEA LION, the planned invasion of England. During the occupation, its many factories served as facilities for repairing German naval vessels. The city was at a critical location as two major road bridges crossed the wide Seine at this point, as well

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<sup>18</sup> Note: the French government renamed the department *Seine-Maritime* in 1955.

<sup>19</sup> M.F. A. & A Specialist Officer, "Report on Monuments of Rouen," Papers of Ronald Edmona Balfour (London: Kings College, 1944).

<sup>20</sup> Vincent Renard, *The Cathedral of Rouen*, trans. Véronique Duboc et al. (Bretteville sur Odon, France: Editions le Goubey, 2009); Michelin, *The Green Guide: Normandy* (Clermont-Ferrand (France): Michelin, 2006), pp. 361-78.

<sup>21</sup> United States Strategic Bombing Survey, "Tactical Targets: Rouen (4901E)" (NARA: RG 243, 18, Box 28); Paul Le Trevier, *Objectif Rouen: 1er Raid Américain Sur l'Europe* (Langres: Imprimerie de Champagne, 2005), p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Gontran Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945* (Rouen: H. Defontaine, 1949; reprint, Luneray (France): Editions Bertout "La Mémoire Normande," 1993), pp. 30-41.

as the rail bridge, the *Viaduc d'Euaplet*, on the Paris-Le Havre line. In 1944, these bridges were the westernmost on the river between Paris and the coast and the most direct route between Boulogne and Caen. The rail line between Paris and Rouen was the nation's oldest, with the suburb of Sotteville, having developed into the center of the regional rail traffic. Sotteville proved to be logistically vital with many important railroad factories strung along the tracks, including facilities such as a locomotive depot, rail yards, holding tracks, coal yards and other establishments essential to the operation of a modern rail system. The rail yard was massive, with the triage, or sorting area, consisting of fifty-six track sidings, capable of holding and rearranging up to 4,000 rail wagons.<sup>23</sup> In addition, major French and German communication trunk lines ran through the city, linking Caen and Cherbourg with the rest of the German empire. In the years before wireless and microwave networks, these wire-cable lines were the lifeblood of operational and strategic command, control, and communications.<sup>24</sup>

Rouen was also an important recreation area for German officers and occupation troops looking to get away from their provincial villages and air bases. *Rue des Cordeliers* and *Rue des Charrettes*, near the theater district and *Pont Jeanne d'Arc* were the centers of prostitution and entertainment with many establishments reserved for the occupying forces. The Germans took over hospitals, movie theaters, and restaurants for their exclusive use. The sounds of constant marching, shouts of "Heil Hitler" and the sound of German music floating through the streets reinforced the reality of Rouen as an occupied city.<sup>25</sup> The *Gestapo* contingent enforced the Nazi's power, and this hated arm of German occupation moved into the *Palais de Justice*. For those arrested by German agents or French *Gendarmerie*, this was usually the first stop on the way to torture, execution, or deportment to concentration camps in the east.<sup>26</sup>

The complexity and constant movement of the German armed forces under the Nazi regime makes it extremely difficult to reconstruct the exact number of units and

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Le Trevier and Daniel Rose, *Ce Qui S'est Vraiment Passé Le 19 Avril 1944* (Langres: Imprimerie de Champagne, 2004), 8-19; Antoine Hardy, "La Défense Passive à Rouen Et Dans Son Agglomération" (MA Thesis, Université de Rouen, 2005), p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> United States Strategic Bombing Survey, "Tactical Targets: Rouen;" SHAEF, "Destruction of Telecommunications Targets in Operation 'Neptune'," 1944 (Kew, UK: National Archives).

<sup>25</sup> Guy Pessiot, *Histoire De Rouen 1939-1958: La Guerre 39/45 Et La Reconstruction En 900 Photographies* (Rouen: Editions PTC, 2004), 304-05; Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, pp. 65-70.

<sup>26</sup> — — —, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, pp. 83-85.



organizations stationed in Rouen. As a critical hub for the defense of the Atlantic Wall, as well as a departmental and regional center, the city housed a large administrative and logistics organization. These included *Feldkommandatur 517*, the administrative headquarters for the region, and *Platzkommandatur 11/517*, responsible for governing Rouen. Closely associated with this headquarters were detachments of Nazi security police and two troops of the *Feldgendarmarie*, or German military police. Additionally, the city contained military supply depots, a communications center, a military pay and administrative center, and a cell of railroad administrators who coordinated the integration of the French railroad system (*Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français*, or SNCF) into the German war effort.<sup>27</sup>

Six kilometers west, in the village of Canteleu, General Adolf-Flidrich Kuntzen commanded the LXXXI Army Corps, assigned to the German Fifteenth Army.<sup>28</sup> Primarily an administrative headquarters, it housed his staff as well as a communications and supply center. The corps headquarters provided area support for the 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division located north of the Seine, the 12<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Division located south near Lisieux, and to the several infantry divisions defending the approaches to the river's mouth at Le Havre. This headquarters also housed a large construction headquarters to support mobility operations through the city and across the river. Logistically the Germany military took a great interest in Rouen's bridges, the harbor, and the rail yard. As the Allies began bombing the original bridges, German engineers constructed several pontoon bridges across the Seine to support their cross-river requirements.<sup>29</sup> In the event of an evacuation, these engineers also had the mission of destroying the harbor area and ensuring that Allied shipping could not use it.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Valentin Schneider, "Notes on German Forces in Rouen", E-mail to author, December 29, 2010. Mr. Schneider is a Ph.D. candidate at the Centre de Recherche d'Histoire Quantitative-CNRS, Université de Caen Basse-Normandie, France.

<sup>28</sup> The German Fifteenth Army, Commanded by Generaloberst Hans von Salmuth, defended the coast in the sector the Germans expected the Allied attack, centered on the Pas de Calais.

<sup>29</sup> Pessiot, *Histoire De Rouen*, 82-83; SHAEF, "Destruction of Telecommunications Targets in Operation 'Neptune'." Schneider, December 29, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, "Weekly Intelligence Summaries March 26-July 15, 1944," Beddel Smith Papers (Abeline, KS: Eisenhower Presidential Library).

The city's role as a major port made it a natural command center for the German Navy (*Kriegsmarine*). In 1943, the Channel Coast Command (*Kanalküst*) general staff moved to Rouen harbor. This headquarters, like the army corps, included communications units, supply headquarters, and units to direct harbor operations. The airfield at Boos, eleven kilometers east, housed a German *Luftwaffe* airfield unit. Apparently, it was not used as a fighter base and not targeted by the Allies in their preparation for the Normandy landings.<sup>31</sup> More significant for the Allied air campaign, however, were the two anti-aircraft (*FLAK*) battalions in the city. Each battalion had three or four batteries, each with four or six guns. One of the units was the *gemischte Flak-Abteilung 672*, a mixed unit that included the 88-mm anti-aircraft cannon, and was established in stationary locations around the city and the rail yard. The other unit was the *leichte Flak-Abteilung 84 (mot)*, which was a more mobile command that could relocate to provide concentrated firepower around key sites, like the bridges and rail yard. As such, Rouen was truly a command and logistics center that the Allies knew would play an important part in the forthcoming invasion.<sup>32</sup>

Like most French cities, Rouen had an extensive *défense passive*, or civil defense, structure. It was complex with headquarters at the national, departmental, and local levels. The departmental *préfet* (the state's representative) administered the organization according to local needs. In *Seine-Inférieure*, he exercised control through an executive committee, with the day-to-day authority exercised by André Rolls, the departmental passive defense coordinator (*chef du Service Départemental de la Défense Nationale*). Six interrelated sections made up the passive defense system: shelters, alerts, fire services, police surveillance (which included watching for gas attacks), sanitary services, and material protection. Below the departments the smaller cities, towns, and urban areas had their own organizations connecting with senior and adjacent headquarters. At the lowest level was the *chef d'îlot*, or leader of a group of buildings, and Rouen had 667 of these groups. While the *défense passive* organization had many paid employees, volunteers were essential, especially at the local level. In addition, the *préfet* had authority to conscript those in the area of a disaster to assist in time of need. The

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<sup>31</sup> L. F. Pendred, "Bombing Priorities," Appendices to Part VI of Notes of the Planning & Preparation of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force for the Invasion of Northwest France (Northolt: Air Historical Branch, 1944).

<sup>32</sup> Schneider, December 29, 2010.

departmental coordinator worked regularly with a host of supporting organizations. These included a small military contingent, generally composed of men in their fifties who began the war as reservists, who had access to specialized equipment to assist in constructing shelters, medical support and the like. Finally, other complementary organizations worked closely with this organization to provide assistance in time of need. These included the *Corps de Sapeurs-pompiers* (fireman), the Red Cross, the National Equipment organization, and the National Electric Protection Service, as well as a host of smaller agencies. Every time an Allied aircraft attacked the city, this massive department organization sprang into action.<sup>33</sup>

The first two years of the war gave the *Rouennais* little indication of the fury ahead. On several occasions, small flights of British Blenheim bombers attacked local airfields and power plants, causing only minor damage.<sup>34</sup> This would change as American heavy bombers arrived in Great Britain as the Allies prepared to launch their invasion of Europe in the spring of 1944.

### **17 August 1942**

Eight months after the Japanese attack on the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, there was little evidence to American citizens that the United States was at war in Europe. For the advocates of strategic bombing who had, for more than a decade stressed the importance of aviation in winning a war, there was little to show for their efforts. The vaunted B-17 Flying Fortress four-engine heavy bomber had done little to prevent the tactical defeat at Pearl Harbor, and, moreover, the Japanese had destroyed eighteen of these anticipated wonder weapons on the ground at Clarke Field near Manila on December 8.<sup>35</sup> While Americans had been flying with the Royal Air Force in

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<sup>33</sup> Hardy, "La Défense Passive à Rouen Et Dans Son Agglomération," 17-53. As Hardy points out, this organization had its roots before World War II and operated generally without German interference or direction.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries: An Operational Reference Book* (New York: Viking, 1985), pp. 53, 204.

<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to note that the commander of the Far East Air Force on December 8 was also the commander of the Ninth Air Force during its bombing of Rouen during Red Week and the Normandy invasion, Major General Lewis H. Brereton.

Europe and North Africa, no Eighth Air Force bomber unit had yet seen action against a serious target.

By August, Major General Carl “Tooey” Spaatz, commander of the United States Army Air Forces in Europe, had several squadrons of B-17s in England ready for action. His VII Bomber Command, led by another aviation pioneer, Brigadier General Ira C. Eaker, was prepared to carry out the mission. At stake were issues far more important than simply attacking a target. American and British commanders were jousting over the nature of the bombing campaign. The Royal Air Force, bloodied by four years of war, decided that nighttime bombing of German cities and infrastructure was the preferred course of action. The American bombing community, having committed itself to so-called precision bombing with its B-17 Flying Fortress<sup>36</sup> and the Norden Bombsight, argued that daytime precision bombing was the preferred method. At stake were not only American pride and independence, but also the ultimate development of an independent air force.<sup>37</sup>

The command’s first target was the Sotteville rail-marshaling yard. Although British Bomber Command had attacked these rail yards on numerous occasions, Air Marshal Arthur Harris, was not enthusiastic about sending his admittedly inaccurate heavy Halifax and Lancaster<sup>38</sup> bombers against occupied territory. Therefore, other than a few attacks by Blenheims<sup>39</sup> and other smaller aircraft, the rail yard was generally untouched and full of rail cars. It was an enticing target, a reasonable distance from the built-up city to avoid casualties and close enough to the United Kingdom to ensure effective air cover.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress, a four-engine bomber, was one of two heavy bombers used by the United States Army Air Force in the European Theater. All aircraft comments and statistics are from Paul Eden, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Aircraft of World War II* (London: Amber Books, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Craven and Cate, *Plans and Early Operations, January 1942-August 1942*, p. 660.

<sup>38</sup> The Handy Page Halifax bomber was a four-engine heavy bomber entering service in 1940. The four-engine Avro Lancaster bomber, which also entered service in 1940, was Great Britain’s most successful heavy bomber of the war. These aircraft carried larger bomb loads than any other in the European Theater of War. The Royal Air Force configured some Lancasters to carry the 22,000-pound ‘Grand Slam’ bomb.

<sup>39</sup> The Bristol Blenheim was a British two-engine bomber that was the main RAF medium bomber between 1940 and 1942.

<sup>40</sup> Craven and Cate, *Plans and Early Operations, January 1942-August 1942*, 661; Richard G. Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe* (Washington, D. C.: Center for Air Force History, 1993), p. 98.

Shortly after 1530 hours on August 17, 1942, two days before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division attempted its ill-fated landing at Dieppe, twelve Boeing B-17E Flying Fortresses departed Grafton Underwood airfield in Northamptonshire, England on the first United States Army Air Force heavy bomber attack against Europe. Eaker flew in of the lead aircraft while Spaatz watched the mission depart from the runway, along with a host of journalists and politicians.<sup>41</sup> The British were determined to not let the Americans fail and provided four squadrons of Spitfires<sup>42</sup> to intercept German fighters.<sup>43</sup> The formation crossed the English Channel and arrived over Rouen without incident. At 1839 hours, they dropped their bombs and headed back to England. On the way back, they took fire from an anti-aircraft battery and were the object of *Luftwaffe* attempts at interception. A series of intense dogfights occurred and the British lost four Spitfires and the Germans one FW-190<sup>44</sup>. When the bomber crews returned to Grafton-Underwood, without casualties, there was much backslapping and cheering. As the official history notes, "Pilots and mechanics swarmed out to meet the incoming crews like, as one observer put it, the crowds at a football rally."<sup>45</sup>

The official history's report of the bombing is interesting and emblematic of the perceived promise that strategic bombing held in the Allies' imaginations. Out of the 36,900 pounds of bombs dropped that day, it noted, "approximately half fell in the general target area." This lack of accuracy was not severe enough to prevent General Spaatz from cabling General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces, in Washington the next day: "The attack on Rouen far exceeded in accuracy any previous high-altitude bombing in the European Theater by German or Allied aircraft. Moreover, it was my understanding that the results justified 'our belief' in the feasibility of daylight bombing." <sup>46</sup> Thus, with great fanfare, did the new weapon of daylight

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<sup>41</sup> — — —, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, p. 98.

<sup>42</sup> The Supermarine Spitfire was a single engine, single seat, fighter and the most famous British aircraft of the war.

<sup>43</sup> Le Trévier, *Objectif Rouen: 1er Raid Américain Sur l'Europe*, "Chronologie".

<sup>44</sup> The Focke-Wulf 190 was a German single engine, single pilot, interceptor designed for air to air combat.

<sup>45</sup> Craven and Cate, *Plans and Early Operations, January 1942-August 1942*, 662; Le Trévier, *Objectif Rouen: 1er Raid Américain Sur l'Europe*, "Chronologie".

<sup>46</sup> Craven and Cate, *Plans and Early Operations, January 1942-August 1942*, 663. He was not overstating his case. The British War Cabinet Secretariat, Mr. D. M. Butt, examined bombing accuracy in 1941. His report, published in September, indicated that only one out of every three actually landed within five miles of

bombing enter the Allied arsenal against the Nazis. There is no comment in the Air Force's official history as to what happened to the rest of the bombs or resulting damage to civilian structures and facilities.<sup>47</sup>

French sources, however, fundamentally complicate this narrative as they note that the attack killed fifty-two civilians and injured another 120.<sup>48</sup> In one instance, a man rushed home to look for his family after the bombing began. He quickly discovered they were not there. After searching around his demolished home, the authorities directed him to the morgue. In one room, he found bodies stored awaiting identification. He moved into another room where, on a large table, about twenty bodies lay side to side. Up front were the corpses of his parents and his little boy. They were naked, still bleeding, and wearing only socks. There was no trace of his daughter.<sup>49</sup> It was just one of many civilian experiences. Clearly, the French description of that day's bombing was far different from the American.

A few weeks later, on September 5, American bombers again attacked the marshaling yards near Rouen, and thirty-one B-17 bombers dropped their bombs with less than twenty percent of them landing within the target area. Most fell outside the rail yard and burst within the city, killing as many as one hundred and forty civilians and wounding another two hundred.<sup>50</sup> Over the next year, Allied bombers would continue to plague Rouen and its harbor and rail yard. Attacks ranged from only a few Mosquito bombers<sup>51</sup> to as many as sixty or seventy at a time. A botched attack on March 8, 1943, resulting from efficient German fighter tactics, scattered the thirteen bombers that then dropped their bombs without any targets in sight, in the process the bombs

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the target. See Randall T. Wakelam, *The Science of Bombing: Operational Research in RAF Bomber Command* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Kit Carter and Robert Mueller, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II: Combat Chronology* (Washington, DC: Air Force Historical Studies, 1973), 33; Craven and Cate, *Plans and Early Operations, January 1942-August 1942*, pp. 655-68; Eddy Florentin and Claude Archambault, *Quand Les Alliés Bombardaient La France* (Paris: Perrin, 1997), p. 64.

<sup>49</sup> Le Trévier, *Objectif Rouen: 1er Raid Américain Sur l'Europe*, p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> Carter and Mueller, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II: Combat Chronology*, p. 38; Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, pp. 132-33.

<sup>51</sup> The de Havilland DH. 98 Mosquito was the RAF's most versatile aircraft. With two crew members, it was constructed generally from wood and performed in the roles of medium bomber, night fighter, and reconnaissance



killed sixty civilians and wounded another forty-seven civilians in Rouen and Sotteville.<sup>52</sup>

By now, the Allied command was encountering a situation for which it was generally unprepared. It was assembling bomber forces that had the capability to strike at and destroy factories, rail yards, and airfields that supported the German war effort. The problem was that these targets were also near civilians who, in theory, were friendly. As early as October 1942, the Allies, using British Broadcasting Corporation transmitters, began urging French citizens living within two kilometers of German factories and other strategic facilities to leave their homes. In reality, this option was not open to most and they simply had to hope they would not be hit. By the fall of 1942, Free French leaders, who the Allies would need to govern post-war France, were angry over the bombing of French cities and towns and the growing toll of civilian casualties. The British Air Ministry issued a directive on October 29 attempting to limit the political effects of these attacks. Among other points, it directed: "The attack must be made with reasonable care to avoid undue loss of civilian life in the vicinity of the target, and if any doubt exists as to the possibility of accurate bombing or if a large error would involve the risk of serious damage to a populated area no attack is to be made."<sup>53</sup>

As the bombing attacks continued, Rouen's citizens watched the tide turn against the Germans. Allied victories at Stalingrad and in North Africa began shaking the confidence of many Vichy supporters. The coerced conscription of young men for the German forced labor service, called *le Service du Travail Obligatoire*, or STO, was, in the words of noted historian Julian Jackson, turning "law abiding citizens into outlaws."<sup>54</sup> Civilian resistance to the occupation authorities, which up to now had been extremely limited, began to develop. The nature of the occupation changed as the occupiers changed. The nice young men who arrived in 1940 headed to the eastern front to replace soldiers lost in combat against the resurgent Red Army and in their place came former prisoners of war now wearing German uniforms, the *Osttruppen*. A new panzer

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<sup>52</sup> Carter and Mueller, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II: Combat Chronology*, p. 104; Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, 151; Hardy, "La Défense Passive à Rouen Et Dans Son Agglomération", p. 99.

<sup>53</sup> Craven and Cate, *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942-December 1943*, 240.

<sup>54</sup> Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944*, p. 480.

unit stationed near Rouen was the 12<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Division *Hiliterjugend* (Hitler Youth), which began forming in anticipation of the Allied invasion. Made up of fanatical young men and commanded by veterans of the horrors in Russia, they changed the character of the Franco-German relationship for the worse.<sup>55</sup> As such, by late June 1943, many of the people of Rouen who had been either acquiescent to the occupation or supporters of the Vichy regime, were wishing for the victory of the Anglo-Americans.<sup>56</sup> The Rouen Gendarmerie, who maintained detailed records of their organization's activities and were responsible for maintaining law and order within the city, was now totally opposed to actively collaborating with the Germans. Yet, the *gendarmes* remained attached to Pétain, who they saw as representing their service to the country. The individual officer would continue to follow orders, but it was becoming more difficult to carry out German demands.<sup>57</sup> However, the Allied bombing campaign in 1944 would sow confusion in the minds of many *Rouennais* as to who their enemy actually was.<sup>58</sup>

### A Victim of the Transportation Plan: 19 April 1944

In many ways, Rouen's suffering had its roots in the Mediterranean Theater of War and the new commanding general's exposure to battle. General Dwight David Eisenhower arrived in London with a profound respect for his Nazi opponent. The American defeat at Kasserine Pass in central Tunisia in February 1943 was Eisenhower's first exposure to the operational implications of an armored counter-offensive.<sup>59</sup> Five

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<sup>55</sup> Richard Hargreaves, *The Germans in Normandy* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire (UK): Pen & Sword, 2006), pp. 13-16.

<sup>56</sup> One of the many American myths is that the French were passively awaiting their liberation by the Allies. See Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French*, for a more recent discussion of French attitudes towards their German occupiers.

<sup>57</sup> Légion de Normandie Gendarmerie Nationale, Compagnie de la Seine-Inférieure, Section de Rouen, "Registres De Correspondance Confidentielle Au Départ (R/4), 20 Septembre 1940 Au 21 Décembre 1946," Gendarmerie Archives (Château de Vincennes: Service Historique de la Défense).

<sup>58</sup> The best and only comprehensive survey of the British policy and conduct of the air war in France is Dodd and Knapp, "'How Many Frenchmen Did You Kill?' British Bombing Policy Towards France (1940-1945)."

<sup>59</sup> Martin Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, 30 January-22 February 1943," in *America's First Battles, 1776-1965*, ed. Charles E. Heller and William A. Stoff, *Modern War Studies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986); Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944*, vol. 2, *The Liberation Trilogy* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2007), 339-82; George F. Howe, *The Mediterranean Theater of*

months later, the Allied forces executed Operation HUSKY, the invasion of Sicily. Within twenty-four hours of the Allied landing on July 10, the lone German unit, the re-organized Herman Göring Panzer Division, accompanied by several weak Italian divisions attacked the 1<sup>st</sup> US Infantry Division near Gela and almost drove it into the sea.<sup>60</sup> General Eisenhower was also personally shaken as he realized the panzers might actually drive his forces into the sea. One important weapon that was going to prevent such a catastrophe, in his view, was the effort of his air force to disorganize the enemy attacks.<sup>61</sup> More dangerous was the German counterattack at Salerno, during Operation AVALANCHE south of Naples in mid-September, where stopping the counterattack was extremely difficult.<sup>62</sup> The dangers of a weak bridgehead, in the face of proficient *panzer* forces, became evident again during the landing at Anzio in January 1944. Eisenhower, who had been in command during the planning process, watched from London as vicious Nazi counterattacks in mid-February came close to throwing the Allies back into the sea and resulted in the relief of the ground force commander.<sup>63</sup> British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, Commander of 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group and the overall OVERLORD ground force, had an even more personal view of the upcoming struggle. This concern can be summed up in one word: *Rommel*. For more than three years, German General Erwin Rommel and his fellow generals had terrorized British and American ground forces. The “Desert Fox’s” story in North Africa is well known, and Montgomery arrived in Egypt soon after the Eighth Army’s defeat in the summer of 1942. The new commander faced Rommel for the first time at Alam Halfa in August and September, and Montgomery’s victory at El Alamein in October was characterized by the employment of overwhelming force against the over-stretched

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*Operations: Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield, United States Army in World War II (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1957), pp. 401-81.

<sup>60</sup> Albert N. Garland, Howard McGaw Smyth, and Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, vol. CMH Pub 6-2-1, United States Army in World War II (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1986 (1965)), 163-74; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944*, pp. 94-104.

<sup>61</sup> Chandler and Ambrose, eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, pp. 1411-27.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, United States Army in World War II (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1969), pp. 112-29; Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944*, pp. 201-36.

<sup>63</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944*, pp. 356-432; Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, pp. 352-60, 85-94, 419-29.

German forces. The German field marshal was never far from his mind and Rommel's portrait hung in his tactical command post to remind him of his opponent's characteristics.<sup>64</sup>

To add weight to Eisenhower and Montgomery's fears, Rommel was now in France and in command of German Army Group B, with the specific task of crushing the Allied invasion.<sup>65</sup> By early April, Montgomery noticed the improvement the feared German commander had brought to the Atlantic Wall.<sup>66</sup> The Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) G2's "Intelligence Summary" for April 29 contained a profile of Rommel, and reminded Allied ground commanders that he could be expected to act offensively, concentrate his mobile forces and strike at the enemy's flank. Like a "caged tiger," he "may be expected to employ them with vigor and decision." According to that same summary, the German commander appeared to have three *panzer*, one *panzer grenadier*, and seven infantry divisions close enough to attack the Allied landings in the first few days.<sup>67</sup>

Before Eisenhower arrived in London, the invasion's planning team had evaluated the situation and concluded that the first two weeks of the invasion would be critical. "COSSAC Staff Study 6, Delay of Enemy Reserves," (December 30, 1943), argued that it was essential to delay these forces as far away from the bridgehead as possible.<sup>68</sup> Simultaneously, the Mediterranean Allied Air Force scientific advisor, Professor Solly Zuckerman, (who had recently assumed a similar role in the upcoming invasion) presented a study that argued the best way to delay enemy forces was to

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<sup>64</sup> Correlli. Barnett, *The Desert Generals* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982), 262-92; Alistair Horne and David Montgomery, *The Lonely Leader: Monty, 1944-1945* (London: Pan Books, 1995), p. 113.

<sup>65</sup> Gordon A. Harrison, *The European Theater of Operations: Cross-Channel Attack, United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1951; reprint, U. S. Army Center of Military History, 1993), pp. 244-50.

<sup>66</sup> Stephen Brooks, ed. *Montgomery and the Battle of Normandy: A Selection from the Diaries, Correspondence and Other Papers of Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, January to August, 1944* (London: The History Press for the Army Records Society, 2008), Montgomery's notes for 'Brief Summary of Operation "OVERLORD" as affecting the Army, 7 April.

<sup>67</sup> Force, "Weekly Intelligence Summaries March 26-July 15, 1944."; Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: Master of the Battlefield 1942-1944* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), pp. 560-62.

<sup>68</sup> Joint Planning Staff, "Study No. 6, Delay of Enemy Reserves," (Northolt: RAF Center for Air Research Cener, 1943).

destroy enemy railroad “rolling-stock and repair facilities.”<sup>69</sup> With Zuckerman’s former boss, Air Marshal Arthur W. Tedder, now Eisenhower’s deputy commander, this report became the focus of the debate concerning how to use the Allied air superiority to disable the defending forces. Unfortunately, what should have been a straight-forward staff analysis of the means to achieve the end of keeping heavy armor away from the beaches turned into as heated and angry a debate as ever took place in the Allied command.<sup>70</sup>

To begin with, Air Chief Marshal Trevor Leigh-Mallory was not well-regarded by many of the key leaders. While a distinguished aviator and decorated veteran of the Great War, he did not like or respect many senior leaders. The strategic bombing commanders, Air Marshal Arthur Harris of Bomber Command, Lieutenant General Carl Spaatz of the United States Strategic Air Forces, and Lieutenant General James Doolittle of the Eighth Air Force, were personally hostile to Leigh-Mallory’s effort to integrate heavy bombers into the overall OVERLORD campaign plan.<sup>71</sup> They found support from General Arnold, in Washington, and none of them wanted to trust Leigh-Mallory with their bombers.<sup>72</sup> Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the British chiefs of staff were also opposed to a unified air chain of command and also did not wish to hand Leigh-Mallory the heavy bombers, further damaging the OVERLORD air commander’s attempt to streamline the organization.<sup>73</sup> Even Eisenhower was somewhat perturbed to find him, rather than Tedder, as his air commander.<sup>74</sup> Montgomery considered Leigh-Mallory to be working “above his ceiling” and incapable of giving

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<sup>69</sup> Solly Zuckerman, “Air Attacks on Rail and Road Communications,” (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1943). Zuckerman and his ideas were controversial, and remained so after the war. See Henry D. Lytton, “Bombing Policy in the Rome and Pre-Normandy Invasion Aerial Campaigns of World War II,” *Military Affairs*, no. April (1983); W. W. Rostow, *Pre-Invasion Bombing Strategy: General Eisenhower’s Decision of March 25, 1944*, Ideas and Action (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>70</sup> Forrest C. Pogue devotes an entire chapter of his *The Supreme Command* to “SHAEF’s Air Problems.” See Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, pp. 125-137.

<sup>71</sup> Air Vice-Marshal E.J. Kingston-McCloughry, “The Transportation Plan,” (London: Imperial War Museum, 1946).

<sup>72</sup> Brooks, ed. *Montgomery and the Battle of Normandy*, Diary Entry for 7 March.

<sup>73</sup> “RAF Narrative, Planning and Preparation.”

<sup>74</sup> Alfred D. Chandler Jr. and Stephen E. Ambrose, eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, vol. III (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 1648.

orders to either of the strategic bombing commanders.<sup>75</sup> Personalities affected these decisions as much as military requirements.

Since the Casablanca Conference of 1943, the strategic bombers' goal was the "destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial, and economic system." They wished to take the war to Germany, defeat the German Air Force, and destroy the enemy's means to make war."<sup>76</sup> The strategic bombing commanders would fight any interruption in this enterprise, called Operation POINTBLANK. Spaatz and Harris both believed that diverting the bombers from their primary mission would actually prolong the war. In addition, the Americans were dreaming of an independent Air Force, and the subordination of their bomber fleet to the Army ground forces was anathema to serious aviators. Therefore, both leaders refused to allow Leigh-Mallory to take command of their bombers.<sup>77</sup> However, after extended debate involving the British and American chiefs of staff, Eisenhower received authority to direct, not command, the Eighth Air Force and Bomber Command. His agent for this direction was his senior airman and deputy commander, Air Marshal Tedder. The meeting on March 25 was the culminating event after weeks of intense debate among the senior leadership. Although presented other options, including a course of action presented by Spaatz that focused on attacking oil targets, Eisenhower liked the idea of interdicting the German rail lines best. While not perfect, it was the best concept presented by his commanders and staffs. The resulting directive has come to be called the Transportation Plan, and it set the stage for the subsequent bombing of Rouen and other cities in France.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Horne and Montgomery, *The Lonely Leader: Monty, 1944-1945*.

<sup>76</sup> Kingston-McCloughry, "The Transportation Plan," p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> "RAF Narrative, Planning and Preparation," 146-47; Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe*, pp. 336-37; Max Hastings, *Bomber Command: The Myths and Reality of the Strategic Bombing Offensive 1939-45* (New York: The Dial Press, 1979), pp. 271-77; Interview, General Carl A. Spaatz, Commander, United States Strategic Air Forces, Europe, in *Transcript*, Interviewed by Noel F. Parrish and Alfred Goldberg (Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, 1962).

<sup>78</sup> Dodd and Knapp, "'How Many Frenchmen Did You Kill?' British Bombing Policy Towards France (1940-1945)," pp. 481-82; General Carl A. Spaatz, "Minutes of Meeting 25 March 1944: Plan for the Employment of the Strategic Bomber Force Prior to Overlord" (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency). The details of his debate are discussed in detail in a number of after-action reports and books. These include Pogue, *The European Theater of Operations: The Supreme Command*, pp. 123-37; "RAF Narrative, Planning and Preparation," pp. 141-75; Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany, 1939-1945*, vol. III, Victory: Part V, The Culmination of the Offensive: The Results of Air Superiority, March 1944-1945 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office,



The Transportation Plan, at its basic level, focused on the heavy bombing of main railway servicing and repair centers. Air Commodore E. J. Kingston-McCloughry, Leigh-Mallory's principal planner, prepared a list of seventy-four centers in France and Belgium, and another six in the German border area. Its focus was straight-forward:

- a. The maximum destruction of motive power potential anywhere in France, Belgium or West Germany.
- b. The maximum dislocation of all the other elements in the rail system in the areas concerned with OVERLORD.<sup>79</sup>

At the practical level, British and American strategic air commanders wanted no part in the use of their aircraft against areas occupied by friendly non-combatants, something not covered in Douhet's theory of war.<sup>80</sup> They understood just how imprecise their weapons were and expected the French civilian casualties resulting from the transportation plan bombings to cost tens of thousands of French lives and the destruction of a great deal of private property. The air commanders argued that what was being asked was not appropriate for strategic bombers and the results would be politically unacceptable. Preparing for the March 25 meeting, General Spaatz, confronted by the specter of French casualties, compounded by the fact that they were bombing during daylight, feared the Eighth Air Force would get the blame. He vented to his staff in frustration: "I won't do it! I won't take the responsibility. This (expletive deleted) invasion can't succeed, and I don't want any part of the blame."<sup>81</sup>

Their concerns convinced Prime Minister Churchill, who began to challenge the need for the deliberate bombing of French cities. By April, these discussions were becoming heated and, especially within the British Cabinet, debates over the scale and consequences of excessive French casualties raged for weeks.<sup>82</sup> At a meeting of the British War Cabinet Defense Committee on April 5, Churchill argued: "the estimate of

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1961), 10-35; Arthur William Tedder, *With Prejudice: The War Memoirs of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Tedder*, G. C. B. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), pp. 516-25; Rostow, *Pre-Invasion Bombing Strategy: General Eisenhower's Decision of March 25, 1944*.

<sup>79</sup> Kingston-McCloughry, "The Transportation Plan," p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari (New York: Coward-McCann, 1942).

<sup>81</sup> Rostow, *Pre-Invasion Bombing Strategy: General Eisenhower's Decision of March 25, 1944*, p. 45.

<sup>82</sup> Kingston-McCloughry, "The Transportation Plan," pp. 28-36.

the number of civilians likely to be slaughtered in these attacks were exaggerated; but even if the casualties were not so great as was estimated, they might well be sufficient to cause an unhealable breach between France and Great Britain and the U.S.A.”<sup>83</sup> Churchill followed up with a letter to Eisenhower noting the concerns of the British government regarding the killing of French civilians. Eisenhower replied to the prime minister on May 2, 1944, explaining the purpose and importance of bombing the transportation nodes. Eisenhower closed his letter to Churchill with the comment: “The OVERLORD concept was based on the assumption that our overwhelming air power would be able to prepare the way for the assault. If our hands are to be tied as is now suggested, the perils of an already hazardous undertaking will be greatly enhanced.”<sup>84</sup>

Encountering determined resistance from Eisenhower and his planners, Churchill appealed directly to President Franklin D. Roosevelt on May 7. In an impassioned letter, written in his flamboyant and effective prose, he questioned the long-term benefit to the Allied cause of killing an estimated 20,000 French civilians and wounding another 80,000, who might resent the Allied liberation in the post-war world. Roosevelt responded several days later, essentially ending the discussion: “However regrettable the attendant loss of civilian lives is, I am not prepared to impose, from this distance, any restriction on military action by the responsible commanders that in their opinion might militate against the success of OVERLORD or cause additional loss of life to our Allied Forces of Invasion.”<sup>85</sup> The supreme commander had won the debate with both the bomber barons and the British government. Now he intended to use all of his weapons to ensure that his forthcoming landings would be secure from Rommel’s assaults.

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<sup>83</sup> Tedder, *With Prejudice: The War Memoirs of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Tedder*, G. C. B; Air Historical Branch Royal Air Force, “RAF Narrative (First Draft): The Liberation of North West Europe; Volume II: Administrative Preparations,” (London: Air Historical Branch, 1946); Winston S. Churchill, “Letter to Eisenhower Re: Concern over French Civilian Casualties. April 29, 1944,” RG 331 (College Park, MD: NARA,).

<sup>84</sup> Chandler and Ambrose, eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, Letter, Eisenhower to Churchill, May 2, 1944, pp. 842-843; “RAF Narrative, Administrative Preparations,” pp. 163-66; Dodd and Knapp, “‘How Many Frenchmen Did You Kill?’ British Bombing Policy Towards France (1940-1945),” pp. 482-83.

<sup>85</sup> Churchill to Roosevelt, May 7, 1944 (C-669) and Roosevelt to Churchill, May 11, 1944, (R537) in Warren F. Kimball, ed. *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence, Volume III. Alliance Declining, February 1944-April 1945*, vol. III (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 669-127.

On April 15 1944, Eisenhower assumed the direction of Spaatz's and Harris's bombers for use in the assault on Normandy. That same day Air Marshal Arthur Tedder, now responsible for providing direction to the bomber commanders, issued the formal instructions for the execution of the Transportation Plan.<sup>86</sup> Three days later Harris, knowing he had no choice, complied energetically with Eisenhower's instructions and launched over 800 bombers against transportation centers at Noisy-le-sec, Tergnier, Juvisy and Rouen.<sup>87</sup>

Since the first American mission in August 1942, Allied aircraft had repeatedly attacked the area around Rouen. These assaults ranged from individual fighter-bomber strikes against road traffic to light bombing of the rail yards. In general, the citizens became accustomed to the attacks and learned how to take precautions.<sup>88</sup> They went to bed on April 18, however, with little anticipation of what was to follow. Shortly after midnight, sixteen two-engine RAF DeHavilland Mosquito bombers arrived over the city and the Sotteville rail yard. Their job was to evade detection, locate the targets, and drop small illuminating munitions that would mark the bombers' objectives. The mission planners identified two aiming points. Target A was the central tower that controlled rail traffic and its movement across different tracks, Target B was the locomotive repair depot at the northern end of the rail yard.<sup>89</sup>

Behind the Mosquitoes, in two waves flying approximately 10-15,000 feet above the ground, came 273 Avro Lancaster bombers, each capable of carrying approximately 8,000 pounds of bombs. They emptied their massive loads in only fifteen minutes. Those bombers attacking Target A, the center of the rail yard, were relatively accurate. Approximately half of the munitions fell inside the target area and effectively put it out of action. The Lancasters vectoring on the northern Target B were not accurate and most

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<sup>86</sup> "RAF Narrative, Planning and Preparation," 162; Air Historical Branch Royal Air Force, "RAF Narrative (First Draft): The Liberation of North West Europe; Volume III: The Landings in Normandy," (London Air Historical Branch, 1945).

<sup>87</sup> Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries: An Operational Reference Book*, pp. 495-96. Florentin and Archambault, *Quand Les Alliés Bombardaient La France*, pp. 287-92.

<sup>88</sup> Pessiot, *Histoire De Rouen*, p. 108.

<sup>89</sup> Le Trévier and Rose, *Ce Qui S'est Vraiment Passé Le 19 Avril 1944*, illustrations.

of their bombs missed the rail yard and fell short, in either the center of Sotteville, or long, in the heart of Rouen. The results were disastrous.<sup>90</sup>

Sleeping in their beds, tucked away in centuries-old wooden structures, many citizens never had a chance. Several high-explosive bombs hit *Cathédrale Notre-Dame*, demolishing part of the structure. Other bombs hit the *Palais de Justice*, penetrating the roof and destroying the interior.<sup>91</sup> As soon as the bombers left, the passive defense forces moved to their stations. The casualties quickly inundated the hospital. Firefighters moved to save the structures, especially those that were most valuable, such as *Le Gros Horloge*, a large clock tower from the sixteenth century, and the old market, not yet destroyed. They concentrated on fighting the fires at nine important locations across the burning area. The task was daunting with no telephonic communications to coordinate operations and limited water to use in fighting the flames. The flames digested the old wooden houses. The city requested firefighting support from as far away as Le Havre and Dieppe.<sup>92</sup>

The French use the word *patrimoine*, or inheritance, to describe their historical treasures. Much of this treasure dissolved into ash into the burning sky that night. In Sotteville authorities identified where more than 4,600 bombs had exploded, destroying more than 2,200 buildings and damaging another 1,200. Many of these were schools, hospitals, and churches. In Rouen the cathedral, the *Palais de Justice*, and the surrounding area were severely damaged. Whole streets and places lay in ruins. The compendium of the damage was extensive, from little streets that contained homes of the local citizens to ancient treasures.<sup>93</sup> To those in the English-speaking world this accounting has little meaning, just an aspect of modern war. However, to the citizens of Rouen, it was their inheritance. The local resistance leaders sent a message to the Allies warning them that the bombing was hurting the morale of the citizens and confirming the worst of the German propaganda.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. Hardy, "La Défense Passive à Rouen Et Dans Son Agglomération," p. 108.

<sup>91</sup> Officer, "Report on Monuments of Rouen."

<sup>92</sup> Hardy, "La Défense Passive à Rouen Et Dans Son Agglomération," pp. 108-09.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 109. Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, pp. 198-204. André Maurois, *Rouen Dévasté* (Paris: Les Editions Nagel, 1948), pp. 52-58.

<sup>94</sup> André Maurois, *Rouen Dévasté*, pp. 52-58.

*The London Times* reported the next day that one thousand Royal Air Force bombers pounded four railway yards with 4,000 tons of bombs. It informed its readers that the bombing techniques they used “were designed to keep the bombs within the comparatively small areas occupied by the yards and workshops. Every possible check was made to ensure containment of bombing well within the target.”<sup>95</sup> *The New York Times* report from the same day paints a similar picture of successful, almost surgical, air strikes, with bombs falling within the target area. It labeled as “propaganda” reports from “the enemy” that Rouen and other cities had suffered serious damage. It noted that Vichy radio had “caustically” commented: “If German bombers had performed last night’s massacre, Frenchmen would have clamored for revenge.”<sup>96</sup> Other reports were reaching Eisenhower that let him know the bombing was eliciting a reaction. For example, a British War Cabinet note sent to him by Churchill contained an intelligence report indicating that the attacks on April 19 were “catastrophic” for French morale and Rouen’s municipal council passed a resolution of protest and adjourned.<sup>97</sup>

The French may not have clamored for revenge, but they have not forgotten that night’s horror. Today, the center of the old city near the *Palais de Justice* has been rebuilt. Although the interior of the building has been restored, the outside still displays dramatic damage from the bombing. A few hundred meters away, in a nearby square, the survivors reconstructed the buildings destroyed by the attack. Casual diners in the quaint cafés have little knowledge of the events that took place here that spring. Yet, if they look, they will note that this square is the *Place du 19 Avril 1944*. In the middle is a statue of a mother kissing her young child, as the father and older son look skyward. (Photograph 3) This poignant monument pays homage to the 900-plus civilians who perished in the fires, the 2,000 more wounded, and the more than 20,000 homeless

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<sup>95</sup> “4,000 Tons Dropped at Night” *London Times*, April 20, 1944.

<sup>96</sup> “Allies Step Up Record Bombing, Dropping 8,000 Tons in 36 Hours,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 1944.

<sup>97</sup> Office of the War Cabinet, “Reactions to Allied Air Raids on W. Seaboard of Europe, 29 April 1944,” RG331 Records of Allied Operational and Occupation headquarters, World War II SHAEF (College Park, MD: NARA, 1944).

citizens whose lives changed forever that night. More than any other event, the citizens of Rouen remember it as the day the war came to their city.<sup>98</sup>

### **Pre-Invasion: Red Week**

On May 24, Eisenhower's air commander, Trevor Leigh-Mallory, issued a pre-invasion directive for the destruction of seven bridges over the Seine River. The purpose was to help seal the invasion zone off from the German defenders in the north. Two days later, he added rail bridges to the list, giving them top priority over all other targets.<sup>99</sup> Three of those bridges, two motor and one rail, were in Rouen. Lieutenant General Lewis Brereton's Ninth Air Force had the responsibility for destroying them. Unlike the heavy bombers that Eisenhower was essentially borrowing for a few months, Brereton's command was a component element of the Allied Expeditionary Force, providing it medium bomber, fighter, fighter-bomber and transport support. Its primary weapon was the Martin B-26 Marauder, a two-engine aircraft capable of carrying approximately 4,000 pounds of bombs. Other aircraft included the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, a single-seat fighter used primarily for close-air support, and the multi-purpose North American P-51 Mustang fighter. In general, these aircraft could attack targets at lower altitude levels, ostensibly with greater accuracy thus causing less collateral damage to the surrounding structures. However, the pilots flew these aircraft under difficult conditions, including low-level smoke obscuring the targets and often ground-based anti-aircraft guns firing at them.<sup>100</sup>

Since the British bombing of April 19, small-scale air attacks had continued in the Rouen area. The pace picked up at mid-day on May 25, when fifty-two P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers hit one of the bridges with ninety-nine 500-pound bombs in three separate attacks. The local *gendarme* station recorded that these attacks also hit

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<sup>98</sup> Hardy, "La Défense Passive à Rouen Et Dans Son Agglomération," 131; Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries: An Operational Reference Book*, 495; Amouroux, *La Grande Histoire Des Français*, pp. 314-21; Le Trevier and Rose, *Ce Qui S'est Vraiment Passé Le 19 Avril 1944*, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> Ninth Air Force Headquarters, "Ninth Air Force Invasion Activities: April-June 1944," Series VI: Air Force Operational Unit, Box 49 (Abeline, KS: Eisenhower Presidential Library).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid; Paul Eden, *The Encyclopedia of Aircraft of WWII* (London: Amber Books, 2004). Thomas Alexander Hughes, *Over Lord : General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), pp. 130-31.



the rail station, a number of other buildings, and killed at least three civilians. German air defense guns destroyed one of the American fighter-bombers. Gontran Palihès, a prominent citizen of Rouen, maintained a diary throughout the occupation and noted that these attacks and indicated they were not very effective.<sup>101</sup>

The American assault against the local bridges and transportation complex began on May 27, when twenty-nine P-47 Thunderbolts dive-bombed the three bridges at 1330 hours. Two hours later, another flight of fifty-one planes returned and repeated the assault. Cumulatively, these aircraft dropped approximately ninety-eight 1,000-pound bombs on and around the bridge sites. To the civilians on the ground, there was no doubt these were American aircraft.<sup>102</sup> An attack the next day on the *Viaduc d'Euuplet*, the railroad bridge across the Seine, brought the dangers of this war home to the average civilian. This attack hit the express train from Paris that waited on the track. The small bombs and machine-gun bullets, in the words of the aforementioned chronicler Palihès, "carbonized" forty-eight passengers and badly burnt another thirty-four.<sup>103</sup>

Rouen commemorates May 30, 1944, as the beginning of *La Semaine Rouge*, or Red Week, an event remembered far more than the invasion a week later. At 1100 hours, thirty-eight B-26 Marauder bombers attacked the *Viaduc d'Euuplet*, which connected Sotteville with the Seine's right bank, with seventy-one two-thousand pound bombs and badly damaged the bridge. Fifteen minutes later, another thirty-five B-26 bombers attacked the rail line again, dropping another seventy thousand pounds of bombs on the damaged structure. Finally, fifteen minutes later, a third flight of B-26 bombers arrived on the scene. By now, smoke filled the sky and identifying targets was difficult. The bombers attacked the other two bridges across the river and the port area to the

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<sup>101</sup> Gendarmerie Nationale, "Registres De Correspondance Confidentielle Au Départ (R/4), 20 Septembre 1940 Au 21 Décembre 1946," 268; Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, 207. Allied Expeditionary Air Force, "Daily Int/Ops Summary No 109, 25 May 1944," Papers of Air Vice-Marshal E. J. Kingston-McCloughry (London: Imperial War Museum, 1944).

<sup>102</sup> Amouroux, *La Grande Histoire Des Français*, p. 321.

<sup>103</sup> Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, p. 208;

west, but they were not very accurate, as bombs hit the nearby residential areas and structures in the city along the river's edge.<sup>104</sup>

With the bombers gone, the people began to assess the damage. The *Palais des Consuls* (built in 1734), the customs house, and much of the area near the bridges were in flames. At the *Crédit Lyonnais*, a bank near the river, a bomb penetrated a shelter and rescuers discovered more than a dozen bodies of employees and customers in the wreckage. The old market (*Vieux-Marché*), where the English executed Joan of Arc in 1431, was in shambles with most buildings either burning or severely damaged. That was the scene in much of the old city. More than forty fire units from Rouen and the suburbs spent the afternoon and evening fighting fires and trying to save the city.<sup>105</sup>

All night the fires burned. The next morning, May 31, while firefighting and rescue efforts continued throughout the city, the *défense passive* members watched the skies. Shortly after 1209 hours, the watch officer's log noted that the sky was quiet. At almost that exact moment, forty-one medium bombers from the Ninth Air Force came out of the sky heading for the city's second major bridge, *Pont Boieldieu*, and dropped sixty-eight 2,000-pound bombs. The attack was extremely inaccurate as explosions erupted across the city, killing and wounding many citizens, in addition to destroying a number of major buildings and cratering the bridge. Among other buildings, the attackers destroyed the *L'Eden Cinéma* and the impressive sixteenth-century church, *Saint Vincente*, containing the finest stained-glass windows in Rouen. Authorities discovered more than fifty people dead in the shelter near the Catherine Graindor School.<sup>106</sup>

At 0940 the next morning, June 1, police sounded the air raid alert. Panic ensued as citizens scurried around seeking shelter. However, the bombers did not come and the city called "all clear." The authorities called another alert, this time without the siren, at 1530 hours, and the nervous inhabitants once again rushed to their shelters. At 1730, the alarms went off yet again, and people rushed to cover. However the bombers did not

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<sup>104</sup> Florentin and Archambault, *Quand Les Alliés Bombardaient La France*, pp. 330-31.

<sup>105</sup> Hardy, "La Défense Passive à Rouen Et Dans Son Agglomération," pp. 118-22.

<sup>106</sup> Allied Expeditionary Air Force, "Daily Int/Ops Summary No 119, 30 May 194," Papers of Air Vice-Marshal E.J. Kingston-McCloughry (London: Imperial War Museum, 1944); Officer, "Report on Monuments of Rouen;" Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, pp. 211-13.

come. Suddenly, the twelfth-century *Cathédrale Notre-Dame* burst into flames. Most evidence indicates that the heat of nearby fires set off an unexploded bomb. The roof on the front tower (*Saint Romain*) went up in flames and began spreading through the entirety of the old church, full of ancient treasures. All night and into the next day the citizens, helped by German soldiers, fought to save the cathedral. By the afternoon, the fire was out; the church was full of holes and missing its belfry. However, it was still standing.<sup>107</sup>

It was a small victory. That evening, June 2, P-51 Mustang fighters again visited the railway bridge, dropping 500-pound bombs. They damaged the bridge but also managed to destroy *Rue des Charrettes*, its “cafes, taverns, bars, and brothels,” so familiar to Flaubert,<sup>108</sup> and *la Tour Saint André*, a relic of a fifteenth century church, and the fountain of Joan of Arc, at *Place de la Purcelle*.<sup>109</sup> The reconnaissance mission that evening reported that the road bridge to the east (*Pont Boieldieu*) was cut and its approaches severely damaged. The western bridge (*Pont Jeanne D’Arc*) had suffered only minor damage. The railroad bridge (*Viaduct d’Eauplet*) remained cut and unusable. The report’s accounting of the damage to the city was brutally honest: “*Gare d’Orleans* demolished and wide areas surrounding devastated.”<sup>110</sup>

On Saturday morning, June 3, the dive-bombers returned, then again on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. There can be no question as to what happened as bombs hit, and severely damaged, the sixteenth-century Gothic *église Saint-Maclou*. From the citizen’s perspective, the Allied pilots were seeking to destroy each of their ancient places.<sup>111</sup> The bombs also ripped through *Boulevard des Belges*, a shopping district on the

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<sup>107</sup> Florentin and Archambault, *Quand Les Alliés Bombardaient La France*, 331; Michelin, *The Green Guide: Normandy*, pp. 291-96; Pessiot, *Histoire De Rouen*, p. 315; Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, pp. 214-15; Officer, “Report on Monuments of Rouen.”

<sup>108</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans., Margaret Mauldon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 325.

<sup>109</sup> Florentin and Archambault, *Quand Les Alliés Bombardaient La France*, 331; Pessiot, *Histoire De Rouen*, p. 315; Allied Expeditionary Air Force, “Daily Int/Ops Summary No. 127, 3 June 1944,” Papers of Air Vice-Marshal E.J. Kingston-McCloughry (London: Imperial War Museum, 1944); Pailhès, *Rouen Et Sa Région Pendant La Guerre, 1939-1945*, pp. 214-16.

<sup>110</sup> Force, “Daily Int/Ops Summary No 127, 3 June 1944.”

<sup>111</sup> Allied records (to date) list no attacks on Rouen on Sunday. However, the French on the ground are certain they took place.

west side of the city, destroying the main post office.<sup>112</sup> The next day, June 4, was relatively quiet as the city struggled to regain control of the fires and locate the dead and wounded. The Thunderbolts returned on June 5. In spite of the horrible Channel weather, forty-six fighter-bombers found the city's bridges one more time and dropped eighty-three 1,000-pound bombs on the ravaged city.<sup>113</sup> Red Week had finally ended. Seven day's worth of constant bombardment and the progressive destruction of their *patrimoine* had scarred the city's citizens. All three of the bridges were now in the river and, for the time being, useless. There is no agreement among officials and historians as to the civilian casualty list for Red Week. Bomber Command had already destroyed much of the targeted area; so most inhabitants were living in other parts of the city. Nevertheless, between 160 and 400 more residents of Rouen perished in the week's bombardment, and countless hundreds more were wounded. As the Allies landed on the Normandy beaches to the west, the air attacks shifted to preventing German reinforcements from reaching the coast. Far from celebrating the Allied landing, as most Anglo-Americans believe, Rouen's citizens mourned their losses – in lives and history and culture – brought about by the Allies-inflicted *Semaine Rouge* during the early days of June 1944.<sup>114</sup>

### **Conclusions: What does it mean?**

For Rouen's civilians the war did not end on June 6. For more than two months, the city continued to see both the movement of German forces to the front and the continuation of attacks by fighter-bombers. Finally, in late July, the Allies emerged from their enclave on the Norman coast. The United States First Army followed an intensive air bombardment at St. Lô and headed south and east. The German counterattack near Mortain on August 3, failed to slow the torrent of American forces and the Allies encircled much of the German army in the Falaise Pocket. In mid-August the Germans began to withdraw across the Seine. Thousands of trucks, tanks, and other

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<sup>112</sup> Pessiot, *Histoire De Rouen*, 315; Allied Expeditionary Air Force, "Daily Int/Ops Summary No. 113, p. 27 May 1944," Papers of Air Vice-Marshal E.J. Kingston-McCloughry (London: Imperial War Museum, 1944); Florentin and Archambault, *Quand Les Alliés Bombardaient La France*, p. 332.

<sup>113</sup> Allied Expeditionary Air Force, "Daily Int/Ops Summary No. 129, 5 June 1944," Papers of Air Vice-Marshal E-J Kingston-McCloughry (London: Imperial War Museum, 1944).

<sup>114</sup> Amouroux, *La Grande Histoire Des Français*, 321; Officer, "Report on Monuments of Rouen."

vehicles converged on the destroyed bridge sites and were ferried across the river. The retreating Germans simply piled up unusable and less important equipment on the riverbank and left it behind. The *Wehrmacht* continued to defend the crossing sites, and its 559<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Regiment fought a sharp battle with the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division just west of the city at the *Forêt de La Londe*. However, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions crossed the Seine near Elbeuf and began to envelop Rouen from the east. After destroying the train station on August 30, the Germans departed and the Canadians moved into the city, thus ending Rouen's long and horrible nightmare.<sup>115</sup>

Today, after decades of reconstruction, Rouen is a thriving, vibrant city. It has a beautiful riverfront, great shopping and wonderful cafés and restaurants. Tourists, following the trail of Joan of Arc, head for the historic *Vieux Marché* and the site of her execution. From there, they can wander up *Rue de Gros Horloge*, now a pedestrian way, past the shops to the restored *Cathédrale de Notre Dame* that still dominates the city. However, if they look carefully as they walk the narrow streets, evidence of the wartime destruction is obvious: damage to the front of the *Palace de Justice*, the remains of burnt-out buildings, and the noticeable differences in the architecture of buildings constructed before and after the war. Periodically, they will see monuments and plaques that commemorate events that provide a narrative different from the Anglo-American story of the European Campaign.

In 2007, more than six decades later, the city erected a monument at the end of the *Halle aux Toiles* on the *Place de Gaillardbois*. This plaza is in the city area destroyed during the original German invasion. The memorial is simple, with just the numerals 1940 and 1944 placed in the center of the original medieval fabric market's entrance. (Photograph 4) A small inscription honors those from Rouen and its suburbs who died during the bombardments. Tour guides often fail to identify these monuments to visitors. This author's searches of other guide books and the Internet turned up little to identify how this city remembered the citizens who perished under the American and Commonwealth bombers. Nevertheless, the presence and recent construction of such

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<sup>115</sup> Pessiot, *Histoire De Rouen*, pp.148-49; Florentin and Archambault, *Quand Les Alliés Bombardaient La France*, pp. 332-33; Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945*, pp. 287-95; Terry Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 31-34.

monuments reinforces the impression of a different narrative that underscores modern French society.

Was there any lingering animosity towards the Allies in the post-war era? Certainly, this author grew up with stories about how the French did not like Americans and were ungrateful for being “liberated.” Perhaps much of this anger was lost in the drama of settling post-war scores and establishing a new government, and reconstruction supported by the Marshal Plan, the Cold War, the Indo-China and Algerian wars, and the flood of American tourists in the post-war era. Perhaps France was too busy and too chagrined by its own recent history to be angry. As in other occupied states, the war’s “dark years,” to cite historian Julian Jackson, were not to be discussed or belabored.<sup>116</sup> However, the host of French publications now appearing in the scholarly and popular press indicates the conduct of the Allies during the war will continue to inform the future leaders of France and the rest of Europe. They bring to political and military operations a different perspective on “collateral damage,” to use the modern euphemism for destroying civilian settlements.

Finally, while Churchill’s alleged quote, “it is the victors that write history,” may be true for the short term, it is becoming increasingly inadequate at best, and triumphalist at worst. In the modern era, social and political groups strive to understand events as they relate to their culture. Traditionally, historians - and especially military historians - have been too accepting of the standard narrative of battle. Those who live in the battle zone need to be equally represented at the historical table. The effectiveness of the Allied bombing campaign has been a matter of contention since the end of the war. Certainly, any analysis of German movement to the front lines indicates that it was a difficult journey. Other historians and commentators have made a convincing case that this bombing kept the German armor away from the beaches long enough for Eisenhower and Montgomery to build up sufficient ground combat power to defeat Rommel’s counterattacks and, ultimately, break out from Normandy.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944*. A good discussion of the social and cultural ramifications of the war are found in Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965*.

<sup>117</sup> AAF Evaluation Board in the European Theater of Operations, “Effectiveness of Air Attack Against Rail Transportation in the Battle of France,” (AAF Historical Office, 1945); Kingston-McCloughry, “The



This delay, in the minds of most commentators, has been sufficient justification for the intensive air campaign that wreaked destruction along the Seine and Loire rivers. However, continuing that debate is not the historian's only job. What is missing from this discussion is an accurate accounting of the damage done to French society and culture. Justified or not, the devastation of Rouen in 1944 is part of the Second World War's sordid history. It is certainly a narrative worthy of understanding when evaluating the war's effect on politics and society in the latter half of the twentieth century.

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Transportation Plan;" Craven and Cate, *Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944-May 1945*, pp. 158-62; Hughes, *Over Lord : General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II*, pp. 130-31.



Photograph 1: Monument to Railroad Workers. (Author)



Photograph 2: Rouen before the war. Archives Seine-Maritime



Photograph 3: Monument Place 19 April (Author)



Photograph 4: Monument in Memory of the Civilian Victims (Author)