



nearly as hard as we thought we were. We were regaled with lurid descriptions of the damage and devastation which our Wellingtons, Whitleys, and Hampdens were causing. We read of Essen, Dusseldorf, Mannheim, Hanover, and other towns swept by fire, of buildings collapsing under high explosive bombs, of whole areas reduced to rubble, of widespread ruin left in the wake of each attack. The effect of the bombing of the synthetic-oil plants and the refineries was exaggerated in particular. Oil, we were told, was Germany's heel of Achilles, and that was where we were hitting her. Already, by September 21, 1940, a Minister then informed us, 90 per cent. of her synthetic production and 80 per cent. of her refineries had been "hammered with devastating effect." The strange fact was that she still had enough oil to send her armoured columns careering all round Europe.

The sober truth is that the bomb-loads which our aircraft carried at that time could not possibly have had the almost apocalyptic effect that was claimed for them. They were puny loads, judged by present standards. How ideas have changed in this respect is shown by the fact that the dropping of fifteen tons in a night was thought worthy of mention in some of the official reports of the autumn of 1940; indeed, the fact that three tons had been dropped on Boulogne on August 17, 1940, was also specially recorded. It is not surprising that that kind of air attack accomplished less than had been expected from it.

Nevertheless, to conclude that we made a mistake in opening and maintaining the strategic air offensive would be unwarranted. We were right, absolutely right, in what we did. We kept the war alive by it, put heart into the nation here at home, gave our air crews invaluable experience for the great work that was still to come. We were beginning to immobilize a huge army of home defence in the Reich, to divert German man-power from

other essential work to the repair of bomb-damage, to teach the Germans that a war is not invariably fought beyond their own frontiers. Those experimental raids of 1940-41 were profitable from many points of view.

It was only in 1942-43, however, that air power in the true sense came into action in this war. We had too small an Air Force to batter Germany's war potential effectively before that time. The "1,000-bomber" raids of 1942 were a portent of the wrath to come to Germany, but it was only in 1943 that our mighty Lancasters and Halifaxes were available in adequate strength to make the air offensive a major operation of war. The Battle of the Ruhr in the spring of 1943, the Battle of Hamburg that was fought in the last week of July, 1943 (when 75 per cent. of the city was devastated), and the Battle of Berlin which followed in November and December were landmarks on the long road to victory. They were as significant as those epochal events at sea, the sinking of the "Tirpitz" by the two Lancaster squadrons on November 12, 1944, and the brilliant success of the American carrier-borne aircraft against Japanese warships and convoys in a number of encounters in the Far East.

Assuredly the strategic air offensive has always been worthwhile. "That," said General Smuts at Nairobi on December 11, 1943, referring to the bombing of Germany, "is the most important and considerable contribution to victory now being made. I put it second to nothing else." It was, however, a delayed-action contribution. "We must not expect too quick results," Lord Hankey had written in September, 1942. "Like all methods of attrition, bombing takes time." "We should press on with bombing to the utmost," he added, "since this is an indispensable preparation for future campaigns, but it would be premature to count on it to bring about an early decision."

A method of attrition is often a disappointing method. It seems at times to be getting one nowhere. It is in the nature of things that a stage should come when a feeling of frustration, impatience, petulance emerges, when people are inclined