

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**‘Après Moi, Le Déluge¹: Redressing the Wartime and
Postwar Mythologization of Operation CHASTISE in
Britain**

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By

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¹ ‘Après Moi, Le Déluge’ (‘After Me, The Flood’) was chosen by King George VI to be 617 Squadron’s official motto after a Royal visit to R.A.F. Scampton on 27 May 1943. This suffix has been chosen to represent both 617 Squadron and the ‘deluge’ of historical material that Operation CHASTISE has inspired.

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List of Abbreviations

A.H.B.	Air Historical Branch
A.R.P.	Air Raid Precautions
E.E.C.	European Economic Community
E.U.	European Union
F.R.G.	Federal Republic of Germany
L.M.F.	Lack of Moral Fibre
M.A.P.	Ministry for Aircraft Production
M.E.W.	Ministry of Economic Warfare
N.A.T.O.	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
P.F.F.	Pathfinder Force
P.o.W.(s)	Prisoner(s) of War
R.A.F.	Royal Air Force
R.W.E.	Rheinisch-Westfälische Elektrizitätswerke
S.P.D	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
T.N.T.	Trinitrotoluene (high explosive)
U.K.I.P.	United Kingdom Independence Party
U.S.A.A.F.	United States Army Air Force
V.H.F.	Very High Frequency (Radio)
W.A.A.F.	Women's Auxiliary Air Force
W.V.S.	Women's Voluntary Service

Introduction

Few wartime tales of British grit, courage and ingenuity rival the sacrosanct story of Operation CHASTISE. On the night between 16-17 May 1943, nineteen Lancaster bombers from 617 Squadron – based at R.A.F. Scampton in Lincolnshire – famously cracked open two major reservoirs located in the heartland of German industry: the Möhne dam in the *Ruhrgebiet* (Ruhr Valley), and the Eder dam on the river Weser. Aiming to starve the *Waffenschmiede des Reiches* ('armoury of the Reich') of the water necessary for industrial and domestic production, the breaching of these two dams constituted a significant military success for Britain.² The damaged wreaked by the 336 million tonnes of water unleashed from both reservoirs combined forced thousands of German *Organization Todt* labour workers to be diverted from constructing the Atlantic Wall – an anti-Allies coastal defence system encircling occupied Europe - to patch up the breaches.³ The 'disaster in the West'⁴, as Adolf Hitler put it, struck a startling, unexpected blow to the underbelly of the Nazi beast (see Appendix A). This was a welcome development for Britain after having endured the draining U-Boat campaign in the Atlantic; engaged in no meaningful European combat with the Wehrmacht; and having sustained immense R.A.F. casualty rates with disappointing results.⁵ The outcome of the Dambusters raid was understandably lauded in the wartime press, but it was the astonishing low-flying prowess of 617 Squadron and Dr. Barnes Wallis' revolutionary UPKEEP bomb (the 'bouncing bomb') which truly captured the hearts and minds of the British.

² R. Blank, 'The Battle of the Ruhr, 1943: Aerial Warfare against an Industrial Region', *Labour History Review*, vol. 77, no.1, (2012), 35 – 42.

³ J. Sweetman, *Dambusters: WW2, 1943*. Kindle edition. (London: Calton, 2014), loc. 943. [Downloaded 2016].

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ D. Dildy, *Dambusters: Operation CHASTISE, 1943* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), loc. 59. [Downloaded 2016].

To this day, the military execution of Operation CHASTISE still elicits an awestruck reverence among British historians and the public alike: indeed, its legendary status rivals that of the miracle of Dunkirk or the 'Blitz spirit'. The Dambusters' glamorization in the wartime media was carried forward into the uncertainty of the Cold War, and much of the content produced at the time consolidated the wartime legend of an overwhelmingly successful and noble raid. The publication of stirring accounts of the raid after the war - such as Gibson's posthumous autobiography *Enemy Coast Ahead* (1946) and Paul Brickhill's lively narrative account *The Dam Busters* (1951) - caught the public's imagination. The latter, of course, inspired Michael Anderson's 1955 film adaptation of the same name. This British blockbuster was one of the most powerful post-war enforcers of the raid's mythology in this country: claiming to tell the raid's story 'as it happened', the film is crammed with historical inaccuracies that nevertheless have not diminished its enduring popularity in this country.⁶ With its iconic 'Dambusters March' turned into a church hymn, chanted by football supporters and included in the London 2012 Olympic opening ceremony, few Britons would not recognise its rousing, patriotic tones. The hype which surrounds the celebrated director Peter Jackson's recent pledge to re-make the Dambusters film signifies the nation's enduring fascination with the theatrics of the film and raid alike.

What is disconcerting, however, is that the CHASTISE legend appears to have distorted the British historiography in several ways. Firstly, the intense public fixation on the raid has arguably pressured many historians towards catering for this demand in their research. As a result, many historical primary sources which document the social, political and cultural impact of the Dams raid

⁶ *The Dam Busters*. Directed by Michael Anderson [DVD] (StudioCanal, 1955).

have been overlooked: stunting the historiographical development of a much-discussed and prominent topic. This insular approach has also led to a chronic understudy of the research conducted by German historians into the raid. Failing to consider the assessments of these historians has starved British historiography of new lines of enquiry, thus perpetuating the same arguments and assessments. Finally, and most troublingly, there seems to be a hesitance on the part of British historians to tackle the raid's less popular aspects. Little has been written, for instance, on the fact that families of certain Dambusters that went missing on the raid were notably distressed by a false rumour that they became the victims of a Nazi war crime.⁷ Moreover, British historians tend to avoid conducting new research into the 1,294 civilians in the Reich – predominantly women, children, foreign workers and prisoners of war– who drowned in the *Blitzflut* (flash flood) that erupted from the breached dams.⁸ Joseph Goebbels' blaming of the Jews for the Dams raid in the midst of the Final Solution, too, receives little attention. The lack of consideration given to these aspects has thus ensured that Operation CHASTISE's repercussions have been grossly simplified in this country.

Historiographical Debate

It is evident, then, that this historiographical imbalance needs to be addressed. The salient debate that CHASTISE evokes revolves around its genuine military effectiveness as a wartime operation. Interestingly, many of its stronger critics are often men of airpower. The official R.A.F. historians Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland - the latter a former Navigator - deemed the operation to be 'neither of

⁷ WO 309/1988. 'Alleged murder of four British airmen, Mulheim (Möhne Dam raid), Germany, 16 - 17 May 1943', British Army of the Rhein War Crimes Group, 01 February 1946 - 30 November 1947. The National Archives (T.N.A), Kew.

⁸ A. W. Cooper, *The Dam Buster Raid: A Reappraisal 70 Years On* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2013), 112.

fundamental importance nor even seriously damaging'.⁹ Their explanation for this pointed to an early lack of faith in Wallis' weapon; a delay in modifying the required Lancasters; the restriction of the bomber force to twenty aircraft; and the dismissal of the Ministry of Economic Warfare (M.E.W.)'s advice to focus on the Sorpe dam.¹⁰ The former navigator James Fyfe agreed with Noble and Frankland that the 'degree of disruption [the Dams raid] caused the German war machine, albeit substantial, was only temporary'¹¹, whilst the retired U.S. Air Force colonel Doug Dildy described the terrible figure of 53 men killed as 'prohibitively high'.¹² Nevertheless, the majority of British historians tend to defend its success. Its most prominent academic historian, John Sweetman, concluded that CHASTISE was military worthwhile, 'contrary to the claims of its latter-day critics'.¹³ The military historian A. W. Cooper noted that upon visiting the dams in the 1980s, telling the local survivors of the ensuing *Blitzflut* that the operation was not a success was 'not an option'.¹⁴

However, much of our nation's primary knowledge of the Dambusters stems from the work of military enthusiasts, journalists and popular TV historians who often staunchly defend its success. Dan Snow recently concluded, somewhat inaccurately, that CHASTISE did fail to stop German war production permanently but that 'nobody had expected it to.'¹⁵ James Holland even claimed that any attempt to critique the significance of CHASTISE is 'absolute nonsense of the first

⁹ C. Webster & N. Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939 - 1945: Volume II: Endeavour* (London: HMSO, 1961), 168.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Webster, 'The Dam Busters Raid: Success or Sideshow?', 21 - 46.

¹² Dildy, *Dambusters: Operation CHASTISE, 1943*, loc. 1663.

¹³ J. Fyfe, *"The Great Ingratitude": Bomber Command in World War 2* (Wigford: G.C. Book Publishers, 1993), 253.

¹⁴ Cooper, *The Dam Buster Raid: A Reappraisal 70 Years On*, 202.

¹⁵ D. Snow, 'The Dambusters raid: how effective was it?', *BBC Magazine*, 15 May 2013. Available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22510300> [Accessed 06/12/16].

order'.¹⁶ Such popular historians must be commended for having sustained public interest in the Dams raid with their engaging writing and passionate research, but the absence of academic moderation has arguably disjointed the raid's historiography. There is, for instance, a strong tendency for popular historians to not explicitly engage with the literature and arguments of their predecessors, most likely due to the specialised requirements to write a public bestseller. Holland vaguely claimed in his work on the Dams raid that there have been 'only two significant works on the Dams Raid in the past thirty years' - without naming which two he considered 'significant' - in a densely populated historiographical field.¹⁷ The issue with this, however, is that it is difficult to navigate through the vast array of existing literature on the raid and to immediately assess the merits and weaknesses of certain perspectives. Another problem is that sifting through the scattered historiography to find opportunities for new research and interpretations is more difficult than if it were summarised within a meaningful and extensive investigation.

What most British historiography on the raid has in common, however, is the myopic picture it has painted of the raid by labouring over the intricate military details. This preoccupation is understandable, given the sensational way in which Wing Commander Guy Gibson and his 617 Squadron burst two seemingly impregnable dams open: for the aircrews to have achieved this at night, flying at only 60 feet above the water and having to contend with enemy flak on the way, was a remarkable feat. Yet as Dildy has argued, an uplifting legend of 'almost Arthurian proportions' has arisen out of an historical event that also evoked much

¹⁶ A. Singh, 'Hay Festival 2012: Stop This Dam Busters Nonsense', *The Telegraph*. 06 June 2012. Available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/9313944/Hay-Festival-2012-stop-this-Dam-Busters-nonsense.html> [Accessed 20/05/2017].

¹⁷ J. Holland, *Dam Busters: The Race to Smash the Dams* (London: Bantam Press, 2012), xi.

sorrow.¹⁸ The psychological impact of the heavy losses – 53 men killed, 3 taken prisoner - on 617 Squadron has arguably been downplayed; the last British Dambuster alive today, Flight Sergeant George “Johnny” Johnson, still thinks about the ‘ghastliness of the numbers’ three-quarters of a century later.¹⁹ Less glamorous or seemingly ‘mundane’ aspects have also been excluded: the fact that Barnes Wallis was awarded £10,000 by the Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors for his UPKEEP mine is well documented, but the patent claim dispute he had been sucked into over the award is rarely mentioned. For British historians to have barely touched on these lesser-considered topics, then, has arguably simplified- and thus mythologised - such a prominent event in our nation’s history. Examining these often-forgotten aspects of CHASTISE would administer historical justice to the raid’s contemporaries by fully considering the emotional difficulties of the both operation they became embroiled in and its complicated aftermath.

Moreover, British historians have also scarcely considered the arguments of their German counterparts, even though the latter’s country took the brunt of the raid: this has come at the expense of the rich and stimulating research conducted by such scholars. Some German historians have ventured into publishing their findings in English, with Ralf Blank raising awareness of the German historians’ disagreement on the number of people who died in the *Blitzflut*: 1,579 according to Blank, 1,069 (and 225 missing) for Helmuth Euler, and 1,300 dead for Jörg Friedrich.²⁰ Euler has also included unpublished photographs, films and diagrams in his work, and provided English translations for newly-released documents from

¹⁸ Dildy, *Dambusters: Operation CHASTISE, 1943*, loc. 39.

¹⁹ N. Tweedie, ‘Dambusters raid survivors: ‘The memory will never leave us’’, *The Telegraph*. 10 May 2013. Available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/10047447/Dambusters-raid-survivors-The-memory-will-never-leave-us.html> [Accessed 10/04/2017].

²⁰ Blank, ‘The Battle of the Ruhr, 1943: Aerial Warfare against an Industrial Region’, 35 – 42.

international archives. Nevertheless, there are still multiple original German sources on the raid's impact - such as original newspaper cuttings, letters, and eye-witness accounts - which are rarely utilized by British historians. Furthermore, Blank has discussed how the raid may have inadvertently contributed to the Nazi justification to keep 'putting [Jews] behind bars'²¹, as Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary, due to the false Reuters story circulated by the British that a German-Jewish refugee had orchestrated the Dams raids. Although noting that many Germans were doubtful of the highly transparent news report, Blank's research into this complication - which, of course, should not be 'blamed' on the Dambusters - far exceeds that of any British scholar.²²

Yet even the German historians have illustrated how the less appealing elements of CHASTISE can be debated whilst still retaining respect for- as even Friedrich, a highly vocal and sometimes controversial critic of Allied bombing, has claimed - 'the most brilliant operation ever executed by an air force'.²³ So what has prevented most British historians from doing the same thing? This thesis does not intend to wade too far into the existing debate over whether the raid was militarily worthwhile, though naturally it will cover it: the fact that the operation remains fondly intertwined within the modern British psyche is testimony to its success as a national morale booster. Albert Speer's claim that his report on the raid 'made a deep impression on the Führer', meanwhile, demonstrates how CHASTISE had certainly lived up to its name militarily.²⁴ Rather, it aims to rectify the obsession of British historians in recounting CHASTISE's operational minutia by providing a cohesive discussion of its political, social and cultural repercussions. The

²¹ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries: 1942 - 1943*, 384.

²² R. Blank, *Ruhrschlacht: Das Ruhrgebiet im Kriegsjahr 1943* (Essen: Klartext, 2013), 183.

²³ J. Friedrich, *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg, 1940 - 1945* (List Verlag, Berlin: 2004), 104.

²⁴ A. Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*. Translated from German by R. Winston & C. Winston (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 280.

overarching purpose of this dissertation, then, is to determine the extent to which Operation CHASTISE has been favourably mythologised in British history; to establish whether historiographical research into the less positive aspects of the raid has been discouraged as a result; and to persuasively assert that it is time to set Britain's selective memory on the matter straight.

Sources & Methodology

This empirical study seeks to analyse contemporary primary sources from both sides on the raid - though leaning further over to the British perception - to determine whether they prove the hypothesis that there is an enduring reluctance of British historians to tackle the raid's less appetising elements. The dissertation's emphasis is on documenting the social, political and cultural impact along with CHASTISE's military roots within British society. Using the German memory and memorialisation of the raid as a comparative backdrop to the British mythology, it also seeks to establish whether Britain's treatment of the operation signifies a perpetual reliance on her wartime identity. It has been divided into three concomitant sections to conduct a study which is sensitive to the raid's fluctuating reputation over the years. The first chapter will analyse tactical dossiers, briefings and de-briefings, maps, reconnaissance photographs, political memoranda and letters to determine how the British leadership initially regarded the raid before exposing it to the wartime press. The second chapter then considers the post-war mythologization of CHASTISE up until the end of the 1980s, in which narrative histories, personal memoirs and the popular film of the raid reasserted Britain's wartime prowess during the Cold War and against the retrospective backlash against Bomber Command. Finally, the third chapter looks at how CHASTISE is currently perceived in Britain during the turn of the twenty-first century, such as

its extensive use in entertainment and how it has been commemorated during the raid's 60th and 70th anniversaries.

Certain parameters have had to be placed upon the conduct of this research owing to the project's constraints. No oral histories have been personally recorded for this dissertation since most of the raid's protagonists and eyewitnesses have now passed on. Moreover, many of the operation's surviving contemporaries have already imparted their views of CHASTISE to the public on multiple occasions – such as in memoirs or in television, archival and newspaper interviews – and the time restrictions on the Master's project has meant that tracking them down in both countries is somewhat unrealistic and impractical. Thankfully, the plethora of existing oral histories will help the thesis to overcome this restriction, ensuring that contemporary voices will still feature strongly: interviews with the Dambusters by the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC) and with German *Blitzflut* survivors in a variety of German newspapers such as *Derwesten*, *Hessische Niedersächsische Allgemeine* and *Ruhr Nachrichten* have not necessarily been widely shared with the British public.

Studying both the raid's short-term mythology and its long-term legacy, then, will allow for a more cohesive, stimulating and unique account of the CHASTISE mythology to be formulated in several ways. Firstly, this far-reaching approach can explain the national popularity of the Dambusters legend in this country by demonstrating how it became systematically integrated into our national psyche. Scavenging wartime primary sources for clues as to how the legend originated in British popular culture will also mean re-interpreting these contemporary documents to discover how the raid's mythology was initially forged: such resources with a fresher outlook than the historians who have often used them to simply consolidate their own beliefs. Secondly, tracing the CHASTISE

legend in Britain from 1943 to the present day offers the opportunity for a wider array of primary sources to be examined. From post-war literature and satirical cartoons, to television adverts and cinematic portrayals, examining such sources in conjunction with wartime documents is more effective in determining why this elite military operation continues to resonate so strongly with the man on the street. In turn, adopting this more social, political and cultural approach will facilitate the inclusion of these scarcely discussed primary sources: enabling one of the most exhaustive and refreshing new studies into the raid's enduring legacy to be crafted.

Chapter 1 — ‘The English have never really invented anything original’: The Wartime Formation of the CHASTISE Legend

The Dream Team: Wallis & 617 Squadron

Before the less-considered aspects of Operation CHASTISE can be unravelled, however, it is necessary to pinpoint how the mission came about and what made it stand out from the thousands of other wartime raids undertaken by Bomber Command. It was Dr. Barnes Wallis and his UPKEEP bomb that made the prospect of attacking German dams truly possible by 1943, though only after the heavy bomber capable of delivering it had entered service in 1942: the Avro Lancaster. During the war, Wallis - an aeronautical engineer at Vickers-Armstrong - dreamt of devising a weapon able to sock a knockout blow to German industry. His first paper, 'A Note on a Method of Attacking the Axis Powers' (1941), pondered the possibility of depriving Germany of electricity via the deployment of a 'big bomb' against her industry.²⁵ Following the Air Staff's rejection of the proposal, Wallis' initial prototype evolved into 'UPKEEP' and a smaller version, 'HIGHBALL', with the former being more suited to breaching dams. Using a specially fitted hydraulic motor and belt drive, Wallis' cylindrical UPKEEP bomb needed to be spun backwards at exactly 500 revolutions per minute (r.p.m.) under a Lancaster bomber to generate the necessary backspin for the bomb to skim across the water on release (see Appendix B). Once it reached the Möhne and Eder dams, it was to sink 30 feet until it hit the water bed before detonating at the base of the dam wall. Wallis theorised that the underwater shockwave would crack the dams open and consequently wreak aqueous havoc on nearby industries and dwellings.

Despite Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris – the Commander-in-Chief of Bomber

²⁵ B483. B. Wallis, 'A Note on a Method of Attacking the Axis Powers' (April 1941). The R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.

Command - branding Wallis' proposals as 'tripe beyond the wildest description'²⁶, Wallis' plans received much official support. Both Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister for Aircraft Production between May 1940-41, and the Ministry for Aircraft Production (M.A.P.)'s scientific adviser Sir Henry Tizard, were early allies of Wallis' first paper.²⁷ James Holland rightfully pointed out that Wing Commander Frederick Winterbotham was also crucial to the development of CHASTISE, doing 'all he could to place copies [of Wallis' work] in the hands of the right people'.²⁸ Harris' criticisms of the proposals would later be overridden by Air Chief Marshal Sir Ralph Cochrane and Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, with the latter requesting Harris form a 'special' squadron to deliver the UPKEEP bomb. Yet Wallis has not only been championed by British history because, as Tobin Jones has described, attacking German dams with a so-called 'bouncing bomb' was an admirably 'mad-cap'²⁹ plan; it was also because of the lasting impression that Wallis had waded through endless tides of bureaucracy to realise his ambitions. Certainly, his proposal to strike at German dams was initially resisted: Sir Charles Craven, his superior at Vickers-Armstrong, had even implored the scientist to drop the project after Air Marshal Francis John Linnell ordered Craven to 'stop this silly nonsense about destruction of the dams'.³⁰ Winterbotham's disapproval that Wallis 'should be baulked so consistently by a Civil Service mind', too, has helped to solidify the notion that Wallis' plans were horrendously obstructed.³¹

²⁶ Arthur, *Dambusters: A Landmark Oral History*, 48.

²⁷ AC 72/23/2. 'Letter by F. Winterbotham to Sam Jones, 'Notes on the Work of Mr. B. N. Wallis'. Winterbotham Papers: Correspondence re. BNW, 1941 – 1943. The R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.

²⁸ Holland, *Dam Busters*, 91.

²⁹ T. Jones, *617 Squadron: The Operational Record Book, 1943 – 1945* (Bicester: Binx Publishing, n.d.), 4.

³⁰ J. E. Morpurgo, *Barnes Wallis: A Biography* (London: Longman, 1972), 249.

³¹ AC 72/23/2. 'Letter by F. Winterbotham to G. M. Garro Jones, Esq., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Production.' Winterbotham Papers: Correspondence re. BNW, 1941 – 1943. The R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.

For the eccentric scientist to have ended up securing a custom-made squadron to carry out his outrageous plan, then, signified a triumph of the underdog against the establishment: a virtue historically prized in British identity and, as Lord Macmillan once emphasised, particularly within wartime propaganda.³² Wallis' appearance as a gentle, plodding professor – described by Holland as having thick and whitening hair which 'seemed to rise off his head with an obvious lack of vanity'³³ – also resonated with the traditional British love of eccentrics. John Sweetman, however, has redressed the enduring notion that Wallis had prevailed virtually single-handedly over 'reluctant senior officers and obstructive civil servants'.³⁴ For instance, he corrected the popular myth that Wallis independently targeted German industry in the Ruhr Valley, considering that this intention had been listed as early as October 1937 in the Air Ministry's Western Air (WA) Plan No. 5.³⁵ Moreover, the valid wartime concerns of CHASTISE's 'non-believers' have often been retrospectively dismissed owing to the success of the Dams raid: as Charles Webster and Noble Frankland argued, it was little wonder that Wallis 'had much difficulty in enlisting official belief in his bomb'³⁶, given that it required a diversion of vital Lancaster bombers from the war front for a hypothetical and improbable scheme. Nevertheless, it can be said that the Möhne and Eder dams may not have been breached so spectacularly if it had not been for his invention, as little progress had been made in destroying Germany's great dams until UPKEEP came along.

Yet Operation CHASTISE in itself was never really a 'myth'. Unlike the

³² J. Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 85.

³³ Holland, *Dam Busters*, 80.

³⁴ J. Sweetman, *Operation CHASTISE. The Dams Raid: Epic or Myth* (London: Jane's Publishing Company, 1982), xi.

³⁵ Webster, 'The Dam Busters Raid: Success or Sideshow?', 21 – 46.

³⁶ Webster & Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939 – 1945: Volume II*, 169.

retreat at Dunkirk – long dressed up as an inspired tactical withdrawal of Allied troops - or the Battle of Britain, often represented as a resounding R.A.F. victory, CHASTISE truly was a sizeable achievement for both Bomber Command and Britain. However, it must be stressed that the squadron's personnel were already unusual before the raid was executed. Guy Gibson's *Enemy Coast Ahead* –planned before the raid had even taken place, illustrating its propaganda intentions³⁷ – notably overstated the accolades of the squadron. Implying that the men were all hand-picked, the crews were in fact required to have only completed 'one or two operational tours' and have experience in a Lancaster.³⁸ Nevertheless, the arrival of several decorated airmen to the secretive 'Squadron X' elicited much gossip. Squadron 'X' also stood out in Bomber Command because, in Chris Ward's words, it was 'never part of the nightly grind'³⁹: 57 Squadron even indulged in some light-hearted swipes at their 'armchair' neighbours due to their lack of ops.⁴⁰ The earmarking of special equipment and weapons for the squadron's Lancasters, such as using Very High Frequency (V.H.F.) radio to co-ordinate the raids on the Möhne and Eder Dams⁴¹, and equipping the planes with UPKEEP, ensured that CHASTISE was a cutting-edge operation: setting the precedent for 617 Squadron's elite reputation, particularly as UPKEEP was Wallis' 'one-off' weapon.⁴² It can be argued, then, that the Dams raid was made even more remarkable by the fact that its protagonists and their tools were already extraordinary.

The gruelling conditions that the soon-to-be Dambusters had to fly within,

³⁷ Webster, 'The Dam Busters Raid: Success or Sideshow?', 21 – 46.

³⁸ AIR 14/2087, 'Formation of 617 Squadron', Operation Chastise: May – June 1943. T.N.A., Kew.

³⁹ C. Ward & A. Lee, *Dambusters: The Forging of a Legend: 617 Squadron in WWII* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2009), 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ AIR 14/2087, 'Captains' Reports', Operation Chastise: May – June 1943. T.N.A., Kew.

⁴² Jones, *617 Squadron: Operation Record Book*, 4.

too, added to the incomprehensible difficulty of the raid. Some crew members had struggled with airsickness during their practice owing to the bulky Lancasters not having been originally designed for such swift precision bombing, and concerns were raised that flying them so low was having a detrimental effect on the aircraft's integrity.⁴³ Harassed by enemy flak and the threat of German fighters, the Lancasters then needed to maintain an unnerving height of 60 feet above the water's surface on their runs to the dams. UPKEEP was only to be released once the twin towers of the Möhne and Eder dams converged with the bomb aimer's hand-held triangulation bombsight.⁴⁴ A second wave of bombers were to attack the nearby Sorpe dam as well, although this reservoir necessitated a direct hit on top of its parapet: being an earth-based dam, rather than masonry like the other two, rendered it less susceptible to UPKEEP. Contending with the electric pylons, trees and other low-level obstacles, the technical ability shown of the soon-to-be 'Dambusters' is still highly impressive. The more human elements of the raid have also understandably added to the operation's legend. Gibson, for instance, flew alongside each plane's run to draw the German anti-aircraft fire away from his comrades, whilst Flight-Lieutenant John "Hoppy" Hopgood - the pilot of Lancaster AJ-M ED925/G "M for Mother" - was killed saving Fraser and Burcher's lives by gaining enough height to allow them to parachute from their bullet-ridden plane.

British Ambitions

The daring exploits of 617 Squadron, combined with Wallis' hard-hitting weapon, were a match made in heaven for the wartime press and a weary Britain. What needs to be addressed, however, is the resulting mythology which has overexaggerated its success - the embellishments made about the mission; the

⁴³ Webster, 'The Dam Busters Raid: Success or Sideshow?', 21 - 46.

⁴⁴ Dildy, *Dambusters: Operation CHASTISE, 1943*, loc. 1001.

alterations of conflicting evidence to suit the nation's agenda; and the disregarding of any less positive aspects which do not conform to the raid's legendary status. Given that both Bomber Command and the Air Ministry's original intentions of the raid were later distorted by some contemporaries to give the impression that it had been particularly successful, it is important to detail what CHASTISE was meant to achieve. By targeting the great dams of the *Ruhrgebiet* – the Möhne, Sorpe and Eder, and the reserve targets of the Ennepe and Lister- it was hoped that the potential deluge would hinder Nazi Germany's industrial output; lower the morale of the industrial workers; dislocate the transportation systems; and serve as a massive blow to the confidence of the Nazi leadership. Even though most British historians have mentioned the Ministry of Economic Warfare (M.E.W.)'s strong advice to destroy the Sorpe dam over the Eder, rarely have they examined either why this was the case, or emphasised the extent to which it was preferred. It is true that the Eder, like the Möhne, was a gravity-type dam, and thus more receptive to Wallis' UPKEEP mine: its targeting, in this respect, was completely understandable.

Notwithstanding, Holland's description of the Sorpe as 'essentially complementary to the Möhne' is arguably misleading.⁴⁵ This implies that its breaching was considered desirable but not vital, yet multiple dossiers rated its relationship to the Möhne as being of greater importance than this: both dams together held over 75% of the total reservoir capacity within the Ruhr catchment area.⁴⁶ Whilst he rightfully points out that Bottomley considered the Sorpe to be in second place of importance in a handwritten note to Portal from 5 April 1943, the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ AIR 8/1238. 'Destruction of Dams: Economic Effects', Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Department of the Chief of Air Staff, 01 March 1943 – 30 April 1943. T.N.A., Kew.

letters also stated that attacks on the Eder were only to be undertaken 'if circumstances allow', and were to *follow* the simultaneous attacks on the Möhne and Sorpe: thus implying that the Sorpe had not yet been downgraded.⁴⁷ Moreover, No. 5 Group's Operation Order for the raid implies that the Sorpe was still highly valued at the last moment. On this document, TARGET Z (the Sorpe) was 'next in importance' after TARGET X (the Möhne), with TARGET Y (the Eder) being mentioned separately later on.⁴⁸ Yet the document then states that the order of priority is as follows: 'a) Target X (GO 939), b) Target Y (GO 934), c) Target Z (GO 960).'⁴⁹ The disappointing result on the Sorpe was able to be dismissed as having been an impossible task in the first place, but this is not to say that Bomber Command did not still place great importance on it; the fact that a quarter of the force was assigned to destroy it demonstrated this.

To qualify the successes of the raid is not to detract from its overall value as a military operation: the blow on the Eder dam was just as impressive as that on the Möhne, perhaps made even more so by the tricky topography of hills and trees. Yet it can be argued that the importance of hitting the Eder was soon overstated by Bomber Command, considering that most pre-raid reports were often uncomplimentary about its worth. It was observed early on that the Eder dam was not related to the Sorpe and Möhne dams, and so its destruction would not 'in any way supplement or reinforce the effects of the destruction of the Ruhr dams'⁵⁰; Speer would later corroborate this assessment by claiming that the Eder had 'nothing whatsoever to do with the supply of water to the Ruhr'.⁵¹ Admittedly, it

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ AIR 14/2088. 'No. 5 Group Operation Order No. B. 976', Report on Operation Chastise, 16/17th May 1943. T.N.A., Kew.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ AIR 8/1238. 'Destruction of Dams: Economic Effects', T.N.A., Kew.

⁵¹ Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 281.

did supply a portion of the feed water in the Mittelland Canal and was flanked by electricity generating stations and a pumped storage station for power load equalisation.⁵² However, these were all judged to be only 'subsidiary functions' by the British.⁵³ The Sorpe was located nearer to factory workers who would take the brunt of the onslaught from the breached dam; the original Air Ministry papers noted that this side effect would be minimised at the Eder dam owing to its isolated nature.⁵⁴ It can be concluded that the Eder Dam was chosen more out of convenience than effectiveness, but that its results were soon exaggerated to compensate for this choice.

The fact that the raid also sought to strike at the morale of Germany's civilians has arguably been downplayed by our scholars. As Tim Webster has explained, high civilian casualties were 'part and parcel of the strategic bombing offensive', and this specific mission was undeniably focussed on legitimate industrial targets.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the 1,294 civilians who drowned in the ensuing *Blitzflut* have often been considered tragic 'collateral damage' in Britain. One of the main objectives within the overall campaign in the *Ruhrgebiet*, however, was to 'create such despondency as will eventually break the [German people's] spirit'.⁵⁶ Starving the locals of drinking water became a consideration, with targets around the Wupper, Emacher and Lippe rivers being dismissed due to them not being suitable for drinking purposes: illustrating the R.A.F.'s awareness of the danger to civilians was greater than is often acknowledged.⁵⁷ Moreover, destroying the Möhne and Sorpe dams would render the *Ruhrgebiet* prone to 'every variety of

⁵² AIR 20/ 5820. 'Electric Power Objectives. The Ruhr Area- Possibilities of Attack'. T.N.A., Kew.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ AIR 8/1238. 'Destruction of Dams: Economic Effects', T.N.A., Kew.

⁵⁵ Webster, 'The Dam Busters Raid: Success or Sideshow?', 21 – 46.

⁵⁶ AIR 20/ 5820. 'Electric Power Objectives. The Ruhr Area- Possibilities of Attack', T. N. A., Kew.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

alarmist rumour...the possibility of a shortage of drinking water [and] the risk of disease' in an opportunity to wage 'political warfare'.⁵⁸ The Allies quickly capitalised on this after the raid by dropping a grotesque Allied Forces Head Quarters [A.F.H.Q.] cartoon over Germany of the civilians dying in the *Blitzflut*, urging them to think of 'these poor devils who...perished in the deluge of water'(see Appendix C).⁵⁹ For British historians to have not pointed out the extent that this 'collateral' damage was quietly intentional, then, demonstrates a reluctance to face the harsh and gritty reality of the Allied bombing campaign by 1943.

The Battle of the Ruhr

To determine why hopes rested so heavily on the Dams raid, however, one needs to trace Bomber Command's wartime fortunes immediately preceding it. The dams of the Ruhr had become crucial targets by May 1943 due to an overarching air battle that the raid is rarely contextualised in by its historians: The Battle of the Ruhr. Although Chris Everitt and Martin Middlebrook accurately noted that Operation CHASTISE was 'quite independent of the main Battle of the Ruhr operations', failing to consider the raid within this ongoing conflict is to underappreciate why CHASTISE was a particularly stunning victory for the R.A.F.⁶⁰ The Ruhr, which produced 70% of the nation's raw steel and coal tar, 67% of its pig-iron and over 60% of its heavy engineering capacity, had long been identified as a vital target, but many of its cities had been outside of the capabilities of British heavy bombers until the Avro Lancaster and Handley-Page Halifax became the

⁵⁸ AIR 8/1238. 'Destruction of Dams: Economic Effects', T.N.A., Kew.

⁵⁹ G/20. 'The destruction of the German war industry continues', P.W.B./A.F.H.Q. [Leaflet]. May 1943. PsyWar Archive. Original: 'Die Vernichtung der deutsche Kriegsindustrie geht weiter'. Available online: https://www.psywar.org/product_PWBAFHQG020.php [Accessed 22/08/17].

⁶⁰ M. Middlebrook & C. Everett, *The Bomber Command War Diaries: An Operational Reference Book, 1939 - 1945*. (Surrey: Midland Publishing, 2011), 364.

mainstay of Bomber Command.⁶¹ The sustained bombing campaign against industrial targets within the *Ruhrgebiet* by the R.A.F. and the United States Army Air Force (U.S.A.A.F.) stretched from its first heavy air raid on Essen between 5 – 6 March 1943 to the July of 1943. It was, as Ralf Blank has argued, the ‘decisive turn in the way aerial warfare against Germany was conducted’: strong advances in deploying radar to aid British aircraft in locating their targets were made and Allied bombing finally began to hit home for the Germans.⁶²

Throughout the inter-war beyond and in to the conflict, however, the R.A.F. had found itself defending its status as a separate branch of the armed forces. Criticisms of Bomber Command’s effectiveness in particular hardened further when economist David Miles Bensusan-Butt’s infamous ‘Butt Report’ of 1941 recorded that only one in ten bombs were on target over the Ruhr.⁶³ In 1942, the Welsh Labour MP James Griffiths echoed popular sentiments on whether maintaining an air force independent from the army and navy ‘conform[ed] with the needs evidenced by recent operations’.⁶⁴ The results of the bombs that were now being showered on the *Ruhrgebiet* in 1943 did not symbolise the much-needed progress in the accuracy of Allied bombing. Several raids during the Battle of the Ruhr were often foiled by adverse weather conditions and the unforgiving environment. Attacking Stuttgart, located on the Neckar river in Baden-Württemberg, proved especially difficult: 3.5% of the bombing force was lost on its first raid (11/12 March) with the majority of the bombs being dropped in the open

⁶¹ AIR 20/300. ‘Germany Ruhr Industries Air Intelligence Paper: Industrial Water Supplies’, 1937 – 1939. T.N.A., Kew.

⁶² Blank, ‘The Battle of the Ruhr, 1943’, 35 – 42.

⁶³ D. Butt, ‘The Butt Report’ (1941), as reproduced in C. Webster & N. Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939 – 1945: Volume IV: Annexes and Appendices* (London: HMSO, 1961), 205-213.

⁶⁴ J. Griffiths, ‘Address to the House of Commons: Ministerial Changes’, the House of Commons. 24 February 1942. [Transcript] Hansard Parliamentary Archive, vol. 378, cc27-176.

countryside.⁶⁵ On a second raid (14/15 April), only a few bombs hit the city centre: a disappointing result which epitomised the problem of 'creepback', where the Main Force or the Pathfinder Force (P.F.F.) crews were unable to push through to the target.⁶⁶ April 1943 had proved a particularly difficult month, with many raids having to be conducted outside of the range of *OBOE*: a radio navigational aid used by the Pathfinders to locate targets for their heavy bomber colleagues.⁶⁷ The inconsistency of the aerial campaign over the Ruhr, then, had put pressure on Bomber Command to assert its value.

By the spring of 1943, however, it was not just the R.A.F. which needed to justify its position. Britain's war effort was placed under immense scrutiny following the Casablanca conference of January 1943, and the military expectations of the United States of America and the Soviet Union were beginning to press upon Churchill. Having agreed with Joseph Stalin on diverting Arctic supply convoys to prepare for the invasion of Sicily, Churchill's side of the bargain with the 'Man of Steel' was to ensure that the bombing campaign over Germany was conducted with greater accuracy.⁶⁸ The Russians, eager to overstretch their Nazi foes, wanted the strategic bombing offensive over Germany to split the war into an Eastern and 'second front'. The Americans were wary of British leadership, strategy and technology after their ally had been bogged down in three years of indecisive warfare, and their investment in the Battle of the Ruhr needed to be validated by Bomber Command's effectiveness.⁶⁹ A great British victory had been secured after the Second Battle of El Alamein in November 1942, but an irrefutable success in the European theatre would be the ideal way of sending a message to the Russians

⁶⁵ Middlebrook & Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 368.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Dildy, *Dambusters: Operation CHASTISE, 1943*, loc. 1599.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

and Americans to not discount the British. Harris was left with an open opportunity to pummel the industrial heart of the Reich, and an opportunity to present a method of warfare which was both unique and effective was desperately needed for the Allies to break the deadlock against the Axis.

Triumph and Tragedy

Britain's growing knowledge of the Ruhr's intricacies meant that the target was ripe for a raid like CHASTISE. The promise of victory over the *Ruhrgebiet* appeared tantalisingly close, with Bomber Command even declaring on 24 March 1943 that 'the Battle of the Ruhr is already over – and Germany have lost it'.⁷⁰ It can be argued that insufficient credit has been attributed to this concurrent conflict in explaining why the Dambusters raid was particularly lauded by the R.A.F and, in turn, the British public. The Battle of the Ruhr had become, in Bishop's words, an 'exhausting and bloody slog'.⁷¹ Goebbels had even sneered at the predictability of the British air raids over the Ruhr, claiming that the English 'never really invented anything original'.⁷² Yet, as Bishop pointed out, CHASTISE stood out amid this 'grim catalogue of demolition and loss' above the *Ruhrgebiet*.⁷³ Here was an operation that would come to epitomise innovation, accuracy and progress after several months of changeable results and deadly monotony. CHASTISE proved to be an important breakthrough amid the Battle of the Ruhr, with the smashing of the Möhne and Eder dams disorientating the German leadership and the *Blitzflut* engulfing the surrounding cities, towns, industries and communities in water and panic. This was particularly significant given that, as Adam Tooze has pointed out,

⁷⁰ R. Overy, *The Bombing War*. (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 397.

⁷¹ P. Bishop, *Bomber Boys: Fighting Back 1940 – 1945*. (London: HarperPress, 2011), 106.

⁷² L. P. Lochner (ed.), *The Goebbels Diaries: 1942 – 1943*. Translated from German by L. P. Lochner. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1948), 308.

⁷³ Bishop, *Bomber Boys*, 106.

Hitler, Speer and the Rheinisch-Westfälische Elektrizitätswerke (R.W.E.) were hoping to 'energize armaments production' there.⁷⁴ The thunderous blow illustrated perfectly how effective Bomber Command could be when applied properly.

The raid also immediately commanded the attention and respect of the other two-thirds of the 'Big Three': Admiral William D. Leahy, representing all U.S. Chiefs of Staff, quickly congratulated Portal on the successful raid⁷⁵, whilst the Russians requested more information regarding the equipment and method used due to them 'possibly contemplating something similar'.⁷⁶ When news of the Dams raid broke, Churchill had been undertaking a fortuitous visit to America, and he enthusiastically referred to the 'gallant operation' during his address to the House of Representatives on 19 May 1943.⁷⁷ CHASTISE also aimed to boost morale in countries already under the thumb of Nazi rule. The R.A.F. soon dropped propaganda leaflets across occupied territories, appearing in the form of *De Vliegende Hollander* in the Netherlands. *Le Courier de l'Air Illustré*, 'brought by your R.A.F. friends'⁷⁸, was distributed over France, and both papers described the Dams raid as 'one of the greatest successes of the RAF'.⁷⁹ It was even claimed that the raid had brought the occupied countries closer to being emancipated from Nazi hegemony: the Air Minister, Sir Archibald Sinclair, deemed CHASTISE a 'trenchant blow for victory' during a speech in the Albert Hall at the Norwegian National Day Celebrations, and said it was crucial to eventually securing 'the freedom and

⁷⁴ A. Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*. (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 598.

⁷⁵ Sweetman, *Epic or Myth*, 173.

⁷⁶ AIR 8/1239. "Upkeep" Russian Request for Information—Secretary's Standard File, July – August 1943. T.N.A., Kew.

⁷⁷ W. Churchill, 'Address to Congress On The Allied Struggle', House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. National Broadcasting Company [Speech] 19 May 1943.

⁷⁸ Sweetman, *Epic or Myth*, 174.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

independence of Norway'.⁸⁰ It comes as no surprise, then, that Britain and the R.A.F. quickly trumpeted the results of CHASTISE across the Empire and beyond.

Yet there were other, more negative repercussions of the raid which are perhaps not considered to their full extent. Although elation broke out in the control room once it transpired that the Möhne and Eder dams had been breached, it is often repeated that Wallis cried at the deaths of such young men trying to deliver his invention. He would later ask himself 'was it worthwhile?'⁸¹, and he regretted the loss of lives on both sides. Nevertheless, little is often said on just how badly shaken the 617 Squadron aircrew and its personnel were at the loss of so many men in one night. Almost 40% of the force- 53 out of the 133 men who took part in the mission – were killed and three captured, a number described by Dildy as 'prohibitively high', and a figure which has often provoked considerable debate.⁸² Cooper has claimed that had these men, along with eight aircraft, not been lost on the Dams raid, they could well have been lost when 'risking their lives on normal bombing operations'.⁸³ Whilst this could have been true, Cooper's assessment perhaps does not consider the fact that a slower trickle of casualties – with the last five raids over the Ruhr (Bochum; two raids on Duisburg; Dortmund and Essen) preceding the mission having averaged a loss of only 4.6% of the bomber forces sent out per mission – was easier to cope with.⁸⁴

For 617 Squadron to have lost so many colleagues in one fell swoop was highly demoralising. Aircraftwoman Morfydd Brooks noted how the dinner tables that the 'W.A.A.F.s' – the women who served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force -

⁸⁰ AC 72/23/4. A. Sinclair, 'Speech at the Norwegian National Day Celebrations', The Royal Albert Hall, London [Speech] 18 May 1943. R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.

⁸¹ Sweetman, *Dambusters: WW2, 1943*, loc. 1063.

⁸² Dildy, *Dambusters: Operation Chastise, 1943*, loc. 1663.

⁸³ Cooper, *The Dam Buster Raid: A Reappraisal 70 Years On*, 201.

⁸⁴ Middlebrook & Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 381 – 385.

had prepared 'looked empty and pathetic', and they all burst into tears after they were told of the heavy Dams raid losses.⁸⁵ It affected morale to the point that they were later posted to different squadrons after it was felt they had become too emotionally involved with the aircrews to function properly, and Brooks noted that 'things would never ever be the same again' for the squadron.⁸⁶ Some of the Dams raid's protagonists, too, struggled to come to terms with its harsh realities for many different reasons. Gibson's father noted that his son 'was never happy about the carnage he caused that night', particularly for all the animals drowned in the *Blitzflut*.⁸⁷ Wallis later admitted in 1969 that 'the most regrettable matter of the whole project was the fact that a large number of women and children drowned in the valleys', as well as the painful loss of the airmen.⁸⁸ Some even began to question their own role in the raid: Munro would later comment that he 'felt embarrassed that [he] had been present during the celebrations' in the mess as his raid on the Sorpe had not resulted in the same success of the Möhne and Eder.⁸⁹

Operational Mishaps

In addition, little has been said on some of the more glaring operational mishaps of CHASTISE. In a mission so valued for its secrecy, the accidental reveal of the UPKEEP weapon to the Germans was a risky development. An intact UPKEEP mine had been retrieved from the wreckage of Flight Lieutenant Barlow's AJ-E ED927/G "E for Easy" Lancaster after having not detonated due to it still being attached to

⁸⁵ B3940. M. Brooks, 'A WAAF's Tale', July 1993. R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ J. Ramsden, *The 'Dam Busters': A British Film Guide* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 23.

⁸⁸ Euler, *The Dambuster Raid*, 34.

⁸⁹ VMunro L151605. L. Munro, *Interview with I.B.C.C.* [Interview] Interviewed by N. Barr for the International Bomber Command Centre, 4 June 2015, Tauranga, N.Z. IBCC Digital Archive.

the aircraft.⁹⁰ Under the pressure of German interrogation after his capture, Fraser was forced to let slip some details of the operation: a significant blow to a mission having been so valued for its secrecy, shown by its continued classification by the British for nineteen years afterwards.⁹¹ He revealed to the Reich Minister of Aviation & Chief Warden of the Luftwaffe that the pilot 'had to pay attention to height and horizontal flying'; that the speed of the Lancaster had been at 260 m.p.h., and its height maintained at 60 feet; and he wrote down how many revolutions of the weapon were required.⁹² His confession was detailed enough to even include observations of how the oil engine connected to the rotation drive 'must be started up slowly 5-6 minutes before [reaching] the target'.⁹³ It can be said that less coverage was given to the development owing to the fact that nothing ever significantly came of it: Germany never attacked Britain's dams during the war.

Yet the unintentional revealing of the UPKEEP mine to German scientists is not an unimportant afterthought: the lack of attention given to this potentially dangerous development by most British historians signifies a tendency to leave out material which does not correspond to the successful story. German scientists quickly established the nature of the weapon, with Dr. Prüss - the Supt. Of Works and of the Ruhr Valley Dam Association - already noting in September 1943 that there is 'no need to refer to them again on [his] report'.⁹⁴ Crucial details within the formation of UPKEEP remained undiscovered by the Germans - such as

⁹⁰ Sweetman, *Dambusters: WW2, 1943*, loc. 1015.

⁹¹ F. M. Simpson, 'Der Talsperrenangriffe der Royal Air Force im Zweiten Weltkrieg - Erfolg oder Mißerfolg?', Lehrgangsarbeit, *Führungsakademie des Bundeswehr*, Hamburg, Germany (1993), 68.

⁹² B4175. 'Gefangenenaussage/Nachvernehmung von Flight Sergeant Fraser an den Reichminister der Luftfahrt u. Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe' ('Prisoner's Statement/After Interrogation'), 24 June 1943. R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Sweetman, *Epic or Myth*, 165.

misunderstanding how the backspin generated was needed to propel the weapon forward – and a German version was unrealised after taking eighteen months to re-examining the known information.⁹⁵ If a German version of UPKEEP had been devised, however, the Reich had long had its eye on British reservoirs such as the Howden and Derwent dams near Sheffield.⁹⁶ This was more disturbing considering the incomplete tests carried out during the Obernach Programme of 1942, which examined the possibility of breaching earth dykes and masonry dams with Trinitrotoluene (T.N.T.)⁹⁷ The additional danger of this German knowledge was that the British had potentially envisioned using the weapon again. As Flight Lieutenant Frank Instone wrote in a letter to his friend Shakeshaft on 19 May 1943, the British could not afford to blab too loudly about the Dams raid as ‘we certainly don’t want to prejudice any Lives or Operations in the future’.⁹⁸

Another disappointing affair was the raid on the Ennepe/Bever dam. Sweetman has argued that Lancaster AJ-O ED886/G “O for Orange” attacked the Bever dam - 5 miles south of the Ennepe dam - by mistake, citing the azimuth and altitude of the moon as being more consistent with this. This is more feasible given that “O for Orange” reported that ‘the island shown in the centre of the lake on target map [was] actually joined to the spit’: showing that the wrong target had been attacked.⁹⁹ Dildy has asserted that the Air Ministry changed the target’s name to the ‘Schwelme’ dam to ‘[conceal] the fact that the wrong target was hit’, claiming that ‘Schwelme’ is a town sandwiched between the Ennepe and Bever Dams without its own reservoir.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, he has made the highly valid point that

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ X003 – 8879. F. Instone, ‘Letter to Shakeshaft’, 19 May 1943. RAF Museum, Hendon.

⁹⁹ AIR 14/2087, ‘Captains’ Reports’, Operation Chastise: May – June 1943. T.N.A., Kew.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

the term 'Schwelme' was only used in the post-raid documentation.¹⁰¹ In reality, the town is actually known as 'Schwelm', which takes its name from its 'Schwelme' brook.¹⁰² Linked to the Wupper, which flows to its tributary, the Bever, it is possible that the R.A.F. actually got the Bever dam's name wrong owing to its close proximity with the Schwelme brook. The fact that the de-briefing reports on the raid reference the Schwelm/Schwelme Dam could suggest that its name was changed to be more accurate about the unknown target they had attacked. If Dildy's assertion is believed, however, this is possibly another example of how the raid's results were manipulated by the British to appear more favourable.

Repercussions in the Reich

Unfortunately, assessing the effects of the raid from a truly German perspective is rare in British historiography. Most British research conducted into the German viewpoint, except for that of Sweetman and Cooper, often focusses on using the devastation of the *Blitzflut* as a crude means of illustrating the military value of the raid for the British. Exploring German experiences, however, can ultimately serve as a point of comparison against how the raid was later reported as an overwhelming victory in Britain, and can demonstrate how it became suitably packaged for public consumption. Firstly, it is imperative to determine how the war had been progressing for Germany immediately prior to the Dams raid. The Reich was left reeling after Operation Barbarossa dragged Germany into exactly what it had hoped to avoid: sparring with the Western allies and concurrently being locked in battle with the Soviet Union. Chinks within the Nazi war machine's seemingly invulnerable armour were starting to show by May 1943, demonstrated

¹⁰¹ Dildy, *Dambusters: Operation Chastise, 1943*, loc. 1579.

¹⁰² A. Gruber, 'Schwelme wird von ihren Hürden befreit', *Westfalen Post*. 18 August 2015. Available online: <https://www.wp.de/staedte/ennepetal-gevelsberg-schwelm/schwelme-wird-von-ihren-huerden-befreit-id11001582.html> [Accessed 08/07/17].

by the bloodbath of Stalingrad, Germany's slackening grip on submarine warfare and the surrender of the German *Afrika Korps* and Italian soldiers in North Africa.¹⁰³ Her fellow Axis powers, Italy and Japan, were also struggling: Italy's Benito Mussolini had even met with Hitler in Salzburg to discuss their African losses, whilst the Japanese had lost control of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands to the Americans.

These international misfortunes came in conjunction with the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F.'s relentless bombing campaign over Germany, which brought 'total war' to the doorsteps of ordinary Germans in a way that they had never experienced. Goebbels noted tersely in his diary that 'our flak guns are not sufficient'¹⁰⁴: such was the desperation in some cases that from February 1943, 15-to-16-year-old students were stationed as *Flakhelfer* ('flak helpers' – anti-aircraft guards) in German A.A.-batteries.¹⁰⁵ Within the Luftwaffe, Hermann Goering was becoming more discredited owing to the widespread perception that the air force was not doing a sufficient job to halt the frequent air attacks.¹⁰⁶ It was as evident to the Nazi regime as it was to her Allied enemies that the momentum of war was starting to turn against Germany; this national floundering made the blow of the Dams raid appear even more devastating. As soon as the Möhne and Eder dams were breached, utter chaos streamed onto the communities below. The deluge roared across roads, engulfed industrial plants and domestic dwellings, and drowned the livestock and cattle where they stood. Though some British historians and

¹⁰³ J. Grötecke, 'Gedenken an die Bombardierung der Edertalsperre– und wo bleiben die ehemaligen Zwangsarbeiter?', *Rundbrief des Vereins zur Förderung der Gedenkstätte und des Archivs Breitenau e.V.*, Number 27. (Kassel: Gedenkstätte Breitenau, 2008), 51 -55.

¹⁰⁴ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries: 1942 – 1943*, 277.

¹⁰⁵ R. Blank, "'Heimatfront' Westfalen - zwischen Bombenkrieg und 'Endkampf'", *Westfälische Geschichte*. Available online: <http://www.westfaelische-geschichte.de/web41> [Accessed 24/06/2017]

¹⁰⁶ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries: 1942 – 1943*, 279.

journalists have come to place more emphasis on the suffering *Blitzflut* victims in their work, rarely have they conducted their own research into this aspect – often borrowing heavily from Helmuth Euler’s *Wasserkrieg* (2007) instead – or acknowledged the grimmer implications of the deluge: a potential reflection of Britain’s uncomfortable post-war relationship with its role in the strategic bombing campaign over Germany.

Herbert Nockelmann, then a 15-year-old boy living in the *Altstadt* (old town) region of Schwerte, recalled how the filthy deluge from the nearby Möhne, up to his navel, contained many animal cadavers, and he remembered that ‘the stench lay in the streets and gardens for months’.¹⁰⁷ Adolf Hankel remembered how people had clambered onto roofs in the hope of avoiding the rising water¹⁰⁸, whilst 7-year-old Werner Jacob was traumatised by seeing a driver ‘being seized by the flood in his car’¹⁰⁹ in Witten. For the prisoners of war and foreign labour workers located in camps near the dams, attempts to escape often proved futile. Particularly heavy losses were sustained at the Wohn- und Verpflegungslager eGmbH armaments factory in Neheim, where 1,200 female foreign labour workers – mainly from Poland, Russian and Ukraine – had worked. 17-year-old Günter Mussman recalled how he can ‘still hear the screams for help’ from the trapped

¹⁰⁷ H. Nockelmann, ‘Ein Schwerter erinnert sich an die Möhnekatastrophe’. Interviewed by A. Theobald, *Ruhr Nachrichten*, 17 May 2012. Available online: <http://www.ruhrnachrichten.de/staedte/schwerte/Ein-Schwerter-erinnert-sich-an-die-Moehnekatastrophe;art937,1648232> [Accessed 28/10/2016].

¹⁰⁸ A. Hankel, ‘Ein Zeitzeuge erinnert sich: Vor 71 Jahren traf eine Rollbombe die Sperrmauer’, *Hessische Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, 17/05/14. Available online: <https://www.hna.de/lokales/korbach-waldeck/edersee-ort101460/heute-jahren-traf-eine-rollbombe-sperrmauer-dramatischen-folgen-3564310.html> [Accessed 28/10/2016].

¹⁰⁹ W. Jacob, ‘Der Tag, als die Dämme von Möhne & Eder brachen. Zerstörerische Flutwelle erreichte auch die Ruhrstadt’. Interviewed by A. Möller, *Lokal Kompass*, 17 May 2013. Available online: <http://www.lokalkompass.de/witten/kultur/der-tag-als-die-daemme-von-moehne-und-eder-brachen-zerstorerische-flutwelle-erreichte-auch-die-ruhrstadt-d297137.html> [Accessed 28/10/2016].

female Russian workers to this day.¹¹⁰ André Guillon, a French prisoner of war from Poitiers, worked at the F. W. Brökelmann Company in Neheim: he recalled how he 'saw my dead comrades hanging stuck between the heating pipes and the ceiling where they had fled in their need for air'.¹¹¹ Antonia Ivanova, a Russian forced labourer, remembered how they kept finding bodies for two to three months after the raid, 'fat and swollen with the water'.¹¹² The *Blitzflut*, then, had an even more horrific impact on the helpless victims below than some British historians have acknowledged.

'Geheime Katastrophen'?

The idea that German reservoirs could be attacked was nothing new: as early as March 1930, a letter was sent to the editor of *Der Nationalsozialist* in protest at the building of the Bleiloch reservoir, which warned that foreign bombing raids on the dams would lead to a scenario where 'whole cities and villages are swept away from the earth and many thousands would lose their lives and everything they have.'¹¹³ With regards to German morale, however, Euler has asserted that the destruction of the Möhne and Eder dams remained '*geheime Katastrophen*', or 'secret catastrophes', given that the raid occurred in a nation shawled by a totalitarian regime.¹¹⁴ This would imply that the British had actually overexaggerated the raid's achievements.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the reporting of the raid in the Reich was tightly controlled by Goebbels: having noted that 'we reveal too much

¹¹⁰ G. Mussman, 'Ich kann die Hilfeschreie noch heute hören', *Der Spiegel*, 16 May 2008. Available online: <http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/staudamm-katastrophe-vor-65-jahren-a-949285.html> [Accessed 28/10/2016].

¹¹¹Euler, *The Dambuster Raid*, 148.

¹¹² G. Watson, 'Dambusters: Death and Glory', *BBC News*. 17 May 2013. Available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-22481152> [Accessed 28/06/17].

¹¹³ Dr.-Ing. M., 'Letter to the editor of *Der Nationalsozialist*', issue 11, March 1930, as cited in Euler, *The Dambuster Raid: A German View*, 31..

¹¹⁴ H. Euler, *Als Deutschlands Dämme brachen: Die Wahrheit über die Bombardierung der Möhne-Eder-Sorpe-Staudämme 1943* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1975), 8.

¹¹⁵ AIR 20/ 5820. 'Electric Power Objectives. The Ruhr Area- Possibilities of Attack'. T.N.A., Kew

and thereby encourage the English to continue their attacks from the air', the articles covering the raid in both local and national German newspapers were virtually identical.¹¹⁶ Against this, however, Ralf Blank has noted that the German authorities were only able to hide the disaster to a certain extent. The fact that the Reich had released accurate figures of the victims, and that Goebbels was compelled to issue a statement in the Reich's newspapers – 'especially in the areas affected by the disaster'¹¹⁷ – demonstrated that the raid perhaps was not quite so much of a *geheime Katastrophe* as Euler has made out.

One of the groups that may have suffered indirectly from the raid, however, was Germany's Jewish population. A false English Reuters story credited a German-Jewish engineer as the inspiration behind the raids. Declaring him to have suggested the attack –having conveniently 'remembered that the Mohne and Eder dams were key factors in Germany's war potential'¹¹⁸ – to Reuter's former British correspondent to Berlin, this story proved to be an excellent justification for Goebbels to continue 'putting [Jews] behind bars'.¹¹⁹ It seems risky, and perhaps even reckless, for the British to have circulated such a story considering their suspicions of the Jews' mistreatment following the Bermuda Conference of April 1943. The German newspapers quickly contextualised the raids within other apparently "Jewish" atrocities, like the 'slaughter of Polish officers in the forests of Katyn', to reflect the Nazi ideology that the Jews were trying to realise their 'bloody imagination' of a Jewish-dominated world.¹²⁰ Whilst Sweetman has pointed out

¹¹⁶ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries: 1942 – 1943*, 296.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ AC 72/23/4. 'Raid Suggested by Exile – Delight at News', *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 1943, 1. RAF Museum, Hendon.

¹¹⁹ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries: 1942 – 1943*, 384.

¹²⁰ 'Jüdischer Urheber des Talsperren-Anschlags', *Neue Vetschauer Zeitung*, Wednesday 19 May 1943. Staatsbibliothek, Berlin. Available online: http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/dfg-viewer/?no_cache=1&set%5Bmets%5D=http%3A%2F%2Fzefys.staatsbibliothek-

that Goebbels' Jewish explanation for the raid was deemed 'a clumsy manoeuvre' by a *Sicherheitsdienst* (S.D.) report and widely disregarded, it has to be pointed out that it does illustrate how the British press' coverage of the Dams raid could depart alarmingly far from reality.¹²¹ To recognise the scapegoating of the Jews for the raid is not to downplay its significance, nor to detract from the Dambusters' stunning achievements. It is to display the squeamishness of certain British scholars –excluding Sweetman, Owen and Cooper - over tackling the unintended, yet ugly, repercussions of this historic raid alongside its successes.

CHASTISE in the Wartime Press

As T. M. Webster has argued, such wartime propaganda in Britain 'may have led to overstatement of its success'.¹²² 5 Group's newspaper supplemented their account of the raid with political cartoons – with one depicting Hitler and Mussolini caught up comically in the *Blitzflut* that was 'dam'ping their ardour' – and poetry calling for the men and women of the R.A.F. to 'lead the way for the whole country' in the war: naturally, it came with its own agenda in boosting morale among the aircrews.¹²³ Nevertheless, the actual recounting of the raid was overwhelmingly accurate owing to its air force audience and confidential nature: more emphasis, for instance, was given to the raid on the Sorpe dam, noting that the aim there was 'to create a seepage sufficient to cause the Germans to empty the reservoir'.¹²⁴ Even as soon as it had come out in May 1943, concerns over the extent to which the British press was mythologizing the raid were unambiguously stated in "5

berlin.de%2Foai%2F%3Ftx_zefysoai_pi1%255Bidentifer%255D%3Dd3cdc60e-a33b-4189-b72a-f3a8f78623fb [Accessed 24/10/16].

¹²¹ Sweetman, *Epic or Myth*, 162.

¹²² Webster, 'The Dam Busters Raid: Success or Sideshow?', 21 – 46.

¹²³ AIR 14/2088. '5 Group News', No. 10. May, 1943. Operation Chastise: Möhne and Eder Dams. T.N.A., Kew.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Group News”: after first reporting that the raid had excited ‘a degree of attention in the press and films’, it claimed that its own accurate portrayal of the raid had been provided ‘in the belief that the well-merited clouds of glory may have misted over and obscured the events themselves’.¹²⁵ This clearly demonstrates how even the R.A.F. had grown increasingly uncomfortable with how the British press had begun to embellish the raid, though this may also be attributed to the air force’s tendency to be self-deprecating and modest.

Indeed, the Air Ministry quickly found itself trying to rectify the ‘misleading statements’ about the German-Jewish engineer allegedly behind the raids.¹²⁶ On 19 May, the Ministry denied that the raid had been undertaken ‘on the chance suggestion by a private individual’ in the nation’s newspapers and instead confirmed that the Dams had ‘long since been methodically examined by the intelligence and planning authorities’.¹²⁷ Many newspapers began to tout the vastly exaggerated number of 10,000 victims of the *Blitzflut* and claim that the civilian population was in irrevocable disarray, with the *Nottingham Evening Post* speaking of ‘rioting in Duisburg’¹²⁸ and the *Hull Daily Mail* claiming that in Kassel, ‘their only desire is that the war should end’.¹²⁹ This demonstrates how even if official expectations of the raid to shorten or end the war were not unanimous, the post-raid newspapers indicated that this may well be the case: a message received with utter excitement on behalf of the nation, thus contributing to the growing mythology surrounding the raid. Given the top secrecy surrounding CHASTISE, . too, there was not the same transparency of debate that would later follow as post-

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ ‘Origins of Ruhr Dam Raid – Planned by Air Authorities’, *Glasgow Herald*, 20 May 1943. R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ ‘Riots Follow Destruction of Nazi Dams’, *Nottingham Evening Post*. 18 May 1943, 1. The British Newspaper Archive (B.N.A.), London.

¹²⁹ ‘Flooded Nazi Town Wants Peace’, *Hull Daily Mail*. 27 May 1943, 1. B.N.A., London.

war historians sunk their teeth into the topic. The British wartime public, living in an age of censorship and propaganda, had to rely predominantly on what they were being told: the perception of CHASTISE that they were receiving had stemmed from, as Tobin Jones had written, the exaggerated newspaper reports which brought 'a drop of hope in a largely hopeless sea' to the nation.¹³⁰

Given the fact that the British newspapers lacked the same official uniformity of the press in the Reich, numerous myths could formulate about the raid as each newspaper came with its own agendas and inside scoops. The *Birmingham Gazette* was rather unusual in discussing the German casualties at a greater length, noting rather shrewdly that the drowned German women and children 'would have excited in this country the liveliest of sympathy' from Britons before the war, but that the nation had 'no time for tears' owing to the fresh memory of the Blitz.¹³¹ *The Spectator* also gave a rather measured response, noting that this latest victory should be 'seen in perspective as one only of a series of shattering blows which have been recently delivered by the R.A.F'.¹³² Most newspapers, however, were understandably one-sided: the *Western Daily Press*, for instance, was quick to report that no British P.O.W.s had perished in the floods.¹³³ Other newspapers reports were almost reminiscent of modern day celebrity gossip, with the *Daily Express* circulating an article about Evelyn Gibson, Guy's glamorous actress wife, praised for '[making] camouflage nets all day and [doing] the cooking too'.¹³⁴ She also revealing interesting titbits about her hero husband, such as the St. Christopher's charm he kept in his tunic pocket.¹³⁵ It is evident,

¹³⁰ Jones, *617 Squadron: The Operational Record Book*, 4.

¹³¹ 'Bomber Command's Terrible Victory', *Birmingham Gazette*, 18 May 1943, 1. B.N.A., London.

¹³² 'Destruction in the Ruhr', *The Spectator*, 21 May 1943. R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.

¹³³ 'No British Prisoners Killed By Dams', *Western Daily Press*, 25 May 1943, 1. B.N.A., London.

¹³⁴ 'VC's wife makes camouflage nets all day; does cooking too', *Daily Express*, 29 May 1943. R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

therefore, that while there was much to celebrate of the Dams raid, the need for wartime triumphs ensured that this mission became mythologised from the very beginning.

Beyond the Dams Raid

The Dambusters legend became more firmly established within British society following 617 Squadron's growing reputation as an elite and charismatic force. The Royal visit paid by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to R.A.F. Scampton in the aftermath of the raid brought much publicity to the squadron, particularly after the sovereign personally chose 617's official motto – 'Après Moi, Le Déluge' – and accompanying badge.¹³⁶ Later, the newspapers lavished attention on Gibson being awarded the Victoria Cross and the other thirty-two members of the squadron who were granted awards in the summer of 1943. The newly-christened 'Dambusters' soon rubbed shoulders with royalty yet again by being invited to Buckingham Palace, where the first ever investiture held by a Queen since the Victorian Era took place: a prestigious event that no doubt added even more glamour to the Dambuster name at the time.¹³⁷ The fact that Gibson's untimely death in 1944 - accidentally shot down in his Mosquito over Steenbergen in Holland - was quickly hidden from the British public for fear of a drop in national morale illustrated strongly how the squadron and its story were now becoming a national legend. In time, Gibson's sad death would come to strengthen the raid's mythology in seeing the young Wing Commander - having acted with great leadership and courage during the Dams raid and beyond - cut down prematurely.

Of course, success for 617 Squadron did not cease with the Dams raid. The

¹³⁶ Ramsden, *The Dambusters: A British Film Guide*, 13.

¹³⁷ 'Dam Busters Decorated', *Aberdeen Press & Journal*, 23 June 1943, 1. B.N.A., London.

squadron would go on to reinforce its reputation for precision after successfully bombing the notorious German battleship *Tirpitz* on November 12, 1944. The *Tirpitz's* presence in Kaa Fiord had goaded the British into keeping a force stationed in Scapa Flow in case she was transferred to the North Atlantic.¹³⁸ Maintaining convoy protection in the area was draining the Royal Navy, Fleet Air Arm and Coastal Command of valuable resources and time. Following Wallis' development of the *TALLBOY* earthquake bomb in 1944, however, her potential destruction was becoming more and more attractive.¹³⁹ After an unsuccessful preliminary attack on 15 September 1944, 9 Squadron and 617 Squadron succeeded in destroying the seemingly impregnable *Tirpitz* on 12 November 1944 – and it was yet another mission that required the brilliant mind of Wallis to pull off, as it was his *TALLBOY* bomb which had succeeded in sinking the target. The wartime newspapers again clamoured all over the success of 617 Squadron and now mentioned Wallis: the Daily Record declared that 'His Bomb Sank [The] *Tirpitz*', but the scientist told them upon being asked to comment on the 12,000lb bomb that 'even if he wished to do so he would not be allowed to'.¹⁴⁰ This proved that such a partnership had not achieved a lucky fluke with the Dambusters raid, and this glowing success would later consolidate Wallis' and 617 Squadron's national reputations.

The wartime legend of CHASTISE, then, was now firmly established. Reinvigorating Allied confidence and depleting that of the Axis, the sizeable achievement of the Dams raid was simply too memorable for it to have been forgotten any time soon. The high casualty rates among the aircrews accentuated

¹³⁸ R. Owen, (2014), 'Considered policy or haphazard evolution? No. 617 Squadron RAF 1943 – 45', PhD Thesis, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, 173.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ 'His Bomb Sank *Tirpitz*', *Daily Record*, 14 November 1944, 8. B.N.A., London.

the raid's dramatic and tragic nature, and the squadron forged an elite reputation for itself with its subsequent wartime exploits. Having already been extraordinary individuals before CHASTISE was even fully executed, all the makings of a wartime legend rested with Wallis' innovative ideas and 617 Squadron's raw skill. On closer inspection, however, it is apparent that the wartime propaganda machine was already beginning to churn into overdrive almost as soon as the returning Lancasters' wheels touched back down. The press' glamorisation of the Dambusters elevated the story into the public eye and thus embedded a national legend into myth-making minds. Embellishing the CHASTISE story would come at the expense of so many others that were repressed in the fact of patriotic triumphalism. Tragedies on both sides were downplayed; achievements were buffed up for the British public; ulterior motives were hidden and mistakes were covered up. Yet if the Dambusters signified anything, it was the value of British tenacity and resilience during the nation's darkest times. Faced with the complex aftermath of the identity-altering conflict after the cessation of hostilities in 1945, it was a motif that would continue to give the nation comfort in the uncertainty of post-war Britain.

Chapter 2: 'An inspiration to us, now and in the future': CHASTISE in Cold-War Britain

Britain initially emerged from the Second World War with pride at having clinched victory in the 'noble crusade' of the 'Good War'¹⁴¹: subduing the fascist villainy that had destabilised European peace and liberating the poor souls swept up in the prejudices and ambitions of a militaristic Axis. Yet after the immediate glow of victory had faded, the challenges of constructing a post-war world quickly revealed themselves. Bankrupt and war-weary, the nation needed to rebuild itself economically, architecturally and spiritually. Pressing questions over class divides, housing, healthcare and welfare dogged British debates in the post-war world, precipitated by a landslide Labour victory in July 1945. Geopolitical tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union caused a tangible diplomatic shift from unlikely wartime allies to hostile competitors, and Britain would find herself once again at the tipping point of war by backing the Americans. Concurrent to such a precarious situation, the 'winds of change' in the 1960s signified the decline of British imperialism, and the flourishing economies of the nation's former nemeses – with Britons watching the *Wirtschaftswunder* in West Germany and the similar economic miracle in Japan with wide eyes – seemed to confirm that Britain had 'lost the peace'.¹⁴² Thus British memory, as Toby Haggith has argued, turned back to the triumph of the Second World War as a means of bringing 'some solace and sense of security' to the restless nation¹⁴³: this, in turn, enabled the legendary Dams raid to retain its popularity in post-war Britain.

¹⁴¹ T. Haggith, 'Remembering a Just War: 1945 – 1950', in L. Kettenacker & T. Rioette (eds.), *The Legacies of Two World Wars: European Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 225 – 256.

¹⁴² R. Wittlinger, 'Perceptions of Germany and the Germans in Post-war Britain', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, Vol. 2, Iss. 5-6 (2004), 453-465.

¹⁴³ Haggith, 'Remembering a Just War: 1945 – 1950', 225 – 256.

The R.A.F. & the CHASTISE Legend in Postwar Britain

During the Second World War, CHASTISE's exaggerated elements had mostly stemmed from the pens of the wartime press; Bomber Command needed to avoid dwelling too much on a singular event to maintain a pragmatic approach to the air war. In the post-war era, however, the R.A.F. became more hands-on in perpetuating the raid's wartime mythology owing to the difficult circumstances it often found itself in. Following the cessation of hostilities in 1945, the air force struggled with standing down from its wartime operations. The R.A.F. was downsized considerably to reflect 'peacetime' demands, but had to contend with the rising costs of equipping the air force with Cold War jet fighters and atomic weapons, along with funding the training required to operate them.¹⁴⁴ It was the intention of successive governments to drop Britain's expenditure on defence from 7% in the 1960s to around 5% in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴⁵ Despite these cutbacks, however, enough room was still made for a particularly special squadron that had often been blessed with cutting-edge technology: 617. Though the squadron would disband twice in the Decembers of 1955 and 1981 – reflecting the changing technological requirements during the Cold War – it appears the R.A.F. could not bear to part from it for long. Following its initial 1955 disbandment, the squadron was reformed in May 1958 and was the third squadron to be armed with the Avro Vulcan, a nuclear bomber then at the forefront of Britain's Cold War arsenal.

The reputations of 617 Squadron and CHASTISE were more notably enforced by the emergence of wartime memoirs and oral histories during the post-war period. Immediately following the war, however, most of its participants did

¹⁴⁴ The Royal Air Force, 'Chapter 4: Post-War Era', *Royal Air Force*, 191 – 226. Available online: https://www.raf.mod.uk/rafcms/mediafiles/F21DD8AC_AEC6_1944_67719C4BD473804E.pdf [Accessed 07/08/2017].

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

not publicly discuss their wartime experiences. Many aspects of CHASTISE remained strictly classified and throughout the nation, there was a tangible reluctance for the wartime generation to recount their traumatic stories. As Toby Haggith pointed out, the Imperial War Museum's personal collection only held 172 memoirs published between 1945 and 1950: he has attributed this lack of initial discussion to not wishing to remember the previous war in the dawn of a nuclear age where 'peace was not secure'.¹⁴⁶ The nation's first major literary engagement with someone who had participated in the raid, then, stemmed from a book written independently from this post-war uncertainty: Wing Commander Guy Gibson's *Enemy Coast Ahead* (1946). Produced whilst the war was still on, the book naturally contains much wartime rhetoric and exudes the sentiment that the raid was a 'hard case of having the best and nothing but the best'¹⁴⁷, even though he only personally chose the pilots for the mission.¹⁴⁸ Surviving Dambusters would later demonstrate that this feeling did not necessarily extend to all the crews. Flight Sergeant Ken Brown, for instance, recalled how his wireless operator said to him, 'Skip, if we're the backbone of this squadron, we must be damn close to the ass end'¹⁴⁹: showing how such distinctions were not applicable to the entire squadron.

Some of Gibson's contemporaries had felt as though the almost poetic narrative of *Enemy Coast Ahead* did not correspond to the schoolboy and commander they had known.¹⁵⁰ Despite these doubts, Richard Morris has illustrated that the work certainly originated with him by referring to certain

¹⁴⁶ Haggith, 'Remembering a Just War: 1945 - 1950', 225 - 256.

¹⁴⁷ G. Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead - Uncensored*. 1946. (Manchester: Crécy Publishing, 2003), 218.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ M. Arthur, *Dambusters: A Landmark Oral History* (London: Virgin Books, 2008), 11.

¹⁵⁰ R. Morris, *Guy Gibson* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 222.

acerbic comments and his sometimes distasteful humour in the original drafts.¹⁵¹ The removal of its more controversial elements from the final draft arguably disguised Gibson's more salient personality flaws until the original drafts were consulted at the turn of the twenty-first century. However, it is noticeable that there were cutting asides from Gibson that appeared in the original drafts which are noticeably absent in Crécy Publishing's 'uncensored' version of *Enemy Coast Ahead* (2003), despite the latter's claim that it finally presented his true story 'as he wanted to tell it.'¹⁵² For instance, his sanitized description of Lincoln and its county, where the 'city [was] full of homely people'¹⁵³, remains in place in the 'uncensored' version: a far cry from his initial dismissal of the locals as 'yokels' and 'dull, unimaginative people', as Morris pointed out from the original draft.¹⁵⁴ Yet Gibson was still, in Harris' words, 'as great a warrior as these Islands ever bred', and, as Max Arthur has argued, a 'model of efficiency and patriotism' for the nation.¹⁵⁵ Such is the power of the continual aura surrounding Gibson that mythology still clings to his name. Even Churchill had to personally warn Gibson to watch his tongue on a publicity tour of the raid and his book after he said that CHASTISE had caused 'a great many casualties – and a good job too!' ¹⁵⁶, illustrating just how controversial he could be.

617 Squadron's frequent reincarnation during the Cold War partially hinged upon the historical aura surrounding Operation CHASTISE. Using the 'Après Moi, Le Déluge' motto, emblem and the 'Dambusters' name, the famed heritage of the squadron was never stated implicitly. A newsreel from 1963 claimed that the

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, 17.

¹⁵⁴ Morris, *Guy Gibson*, 258.

¹⁵⁵ Arthur, *Dambusters: A Landmark Oral History*, 27.

¹⁵⁶ Ramsden, *The Dam Busters*, 13.

squadron's Vulcans were the first to be fitted with BLUE STEEL missiles, 'as up-to-date in the sixties as the weapons carried by Dam Busting Lancasters in the 1940s.'¹⁵⁷ Grappling with the newest aircraft– such as the English Electric Canberra and, later, the Panavia Tornado GR1 – further consolidated 617 Squadron's elite reputation. The monochromatic, peppy narrative style of sixties' newsreels had differed little from wartime ones, thus evoking such memories of the Dambusters even more powerfully. The 1963 film concludes that 'the ultimate extension of the "Bouncing Bomb" idea is "BLUE STEEL", and the name which unites them, "Dam Busters"', as if to demonstrate the natural evolution of 617 Squadron's legacy.¹⁵⁸ This was most visibly echoed during the raid's 40th anniversary celebrations in 1983, in which a Vulcan flew over the Derwent dam where Wallis' UPKEEP prototypes had been tested. Wing Commander Tony Harrison, then of 617 Squadron, commented that 'we like to think in fact that we are the direct descendants of the Dambusters because their role was to go out at night, at low level, to hit a pin-point target...we can do the same with our Tornados...and we can bomb with absolute accuracy'.¹⁵⁹

'The Great Ingratitude': Backlash Against Bomber Command

Yet Bomber Command, once admired for hitting parts of the enemy the other armed forces could not reach, found itself relegated to the side-lines in the end-of-war victory parades by the wartime coalition: this was due to the horrific firestorms in Germany it had wreaked during the final years of war. As Connelly observed, the 'hideousness of Dresden' – Saxony's picturesque *Elbflorenz*, razed to

¹⁵⁷86057. 'Meet The Dam Busters', 18 February 1963 [Newsreel]. The Associated Press Archive, London.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ 'Dambusters 40th Anniversary', 17 May 1983 [Radio Report]. London Broadcasting Company / Independent Radio News (L.B.C. / I.R.N.) Digitisation Archive, Global Radio U.K.

the ground between 13 -14 February 1945 – had particularly ‘scarred and scared’ the government.¹⁶⁰ The Allied raid on Dresden was a glaring lacuna in many post-war reflections, with Churchill and prominent American figures such as General Dwight Eisenhower and the USAAF Commander-in-Chief, General Henry H. Arnold, skipping the episode entirely in their memoirs.¹⁶¹ Harris quickly came under fire from all angles for his firm belief in targeting the cities. His 1947 account of the bombing offensive acknowledged that there were ‘a good many people’ who felt the destruction of ‘so large and splendid a city’ was unnecessary and distasteful, despite pointing out that the raid had been requested by ‘much more important people than myself’.¹⁶² In his 1947 review of Harris’ memoirs, Arthur Bryant of the *Illustrated London News* outlined the more stinging barbs that had been hurled at Harris. One had insinuated that Harris had ‘taken to print because he had not been created Lord Harris of Hamburg!’¹⁶³; another, in response to his claims that the men of Bomber Command had not been properly recognised, claimed that British taxpayers would consider the £80,000,000 a year sent to the British zone of occupied Germany as ‘a generous enough testimony to the thoroughness with which Sir Arthur did his work’.¹⁶⁴

As Patrick Finney has written, the fiery bombing offensive ‘sat slightly uneasily within the British “good war” mythology’.¹⁶⁵ Reviving the memory of a popular and seemingly virtuous bombing raid, then, was beneficial to the R.A.F. as

¹⁶⁰ M. Connelly, ‘Britain and the Debate over RAF Bomber Command’s role in the Second World War’, *Historische Literatur*. Vol. 2, Issue 2 (2004) Available online: http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/histlit/2004-2/PDF/SP_2004-2.pdf [Accessed 24/05/2017], 6 – 17.

¹⁶¹ R. Overy, ‘The Post-War Debate’, in P. Addison & J. Crang (eds.), *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden, 1945* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 123 – 142.

¹⁶² A. Harris, *Bomber Offensive*. 1947. Kindle edition. (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005), 4226 [Downloaded 2017].

¹⁶³ A. Bryant, ‘Our Notebook’, *Illustrated London News*. 01 February 1947, 130. B.N.A., London.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ P. Finney, ‘Isaac Fadoyebo’s Journey: Remembering the British Empire’s Second World War’, in P. Finney (ed.), *Remembering the Second World War* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 82.

a means of deflecting these growing post-war criticisms. Doubts over the strategic bombing offensive had circulated before Dresden was even destroyed: asserting that there are 'recognized limits to what is permissible'¹⁶⁶, Bishop George Bell's remarks in the House of Lords in February 1944 illustrated the discontentment with area bombing over German cities among a small but vocal minority. Yet as the bishop clarified in the same address, no doubts lingered over 'the legitimacy of concentrated attack on industrial and military objectives'.¹⁶⁷ CHASTISE, having been delivered with pinpoint accuracy to the *Waffenschmiede des Reiches*, exemplified such an attack. Morris has suggested that Gibson's book constituted an 'exercise in propaganda' for the R.A.F. owing to its development during Bishop Bell's criticisms.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, a conscious effort was made to separate 617 Squadron's operations from such heavy carpet bombing conducted by their colleagues. Group Captain Leonard Cheshire emphasised in an interview during the 40th anniversary of the raid that 'our role was to hit targets and not kill civilians'.¹⁶⁹ This sentiment, however, perpetuated the perception of the raid as having been overwhelmingly virtuous and noble: as demonstrated by the early documentation on Ruhr targets discussed in the first chapter, the deaths and suffering of civilians below was not as 'accidental' as is often presumed.

However, this 'Great Ingratitude' contributed inadvertently to the post-war mythologization of Operation CHASTISE, as it garnered public sympathy for the bombing force and kept its national exposure high. Though thirty-three Dambusters were quickly honoured for the raid, the slowness of government

¹⁶⁶ G. Bell, *Address to the House of Lords on Bombing Policy*, Vol. 130, cc737-55. The House of Lords, London.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Morris, *Guy Gibson*, 223.

¹⁶⁹ L. Cheshire, interviewed by P. Maurice, 'Dambusters 40th Anniversary', 17 May 1983 [Radio Report]. LBC / IRN Digitisation Archive, Global Radio U.K.

officials to recognise Bomber Command's personal contribution to the war effort illustrated a political distancing from its controversy. Following Dresden, Churchill had now criticised bombing German cities 'simply for the sake of increasing the terror'.¹⁷⁰ Connelly has noted that 'as if to force Bomber Command back onto the agenda', the *Daily Telegraph* published Air Commodore E. L. Howard Williams' article - entitled 'Without Air Mastery There Could Have Been No Victory' - the next day.¹⁷¹ Harris' snide remark that 'every clerk, butcher or baker in the rear of the armies overseas had a "campaign" medal', and not a "defence" medal like Bomber Command, highlighted this injustice.¹⁷² Peter Gray has pointed out that Harris kept quiet about the wartime issuing of the Aircrew Europe Star, a medal for aerial campaigns undertaken abroad, to many Bomber Command aircrews: an omission which arguably strengthened the victimisation of the force.¹⁷³ Yet the fact that the ground crews were not eligible to receive the subsequent 'Bomber Command Clasp' generated hostility from veterans and the public alike, and sparked a precedent of public campaigns to recognise the achievements of Bomber Command as a whole.¹⁷⁴ The legacy of this was seen most recently in 2016 with the public disgust at George "Johnny" Johnson not having received a knighthood.

Historians of the Raid: Brickhill

Given the immense wartime buzz surrounding CHASTISE, it was inevitable that the subject would soon be approached by post-war historians. The most iconic historical depiction of the Dams raid in this period, however, came not from a historian but a fighter pilot: Paul Brickhill. Having been instilled with British

¹⁷⁰ CAB 120/303. 'Prime Minister's Personal Telegram to General Ismay for C.O.S. Committee.' Serial no d.83/5. 28 March 1945. T.N.A., Kew.

¹⁷¹ Connelly, 'Britain and the Debate over RAF Bomber Command's role', 6 - 17.

¹⁷² Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, 4674.

¹⁷³ P. Gray, *Air Warfare: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 35.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

imperial rhetoric as a child - particularly through the Boy Scout movement - the young journalist signed up in 1939 to the Royal Australian Air Force and eventually served with the R.A.F.'s 92 Squadron at London Colney.¹⁷⁵ He drew upon his experiences as a prisoner of war in Stalag Luft III for his best-selling 1950 work *The Great Escape* (1950) and found further success with his biography of Douglas Bader in *Reach For The Sky* (1954). With *The Dam Busters* (1951), however, a vivid and stirring recollection of the raid that showcased Brickhill's journalistic flair- and also provided an unprecedented insight into the operation's realisation - was achieved. Brickhill's work demonstrated a small departure from the stricter censorship in Gibson's account, such as using Wallis' real name (and not 'Professor Jeff', as Gibson had called him).¹⁷⁶ *The Dam Busters* significantly documented 617 Squadron's achievements post-CHASTISE, which Gibson had not covered owing to his untimely death. From sinking the *Tirpitz* with TALLBOY to the squadron's use of Wallis' GRAND SLAM earthquake bomb, Brickhill's account has proven even more vital considering that many British historians – barring Cooper, John Nichol and, more recently, Robert Owen – have devoted less material to 617's other wartime exploits.

However, as *The Times* reported in Brickhill's obituary in 1991, *The Dam Busters* 'endowed a single air raid with a mythological status it has never lost'.¹⁷⁷ Some of this came from the work's untold human tales, such as the amusing story of the air men who went into the W.A.A.F.'s officers room, sticking tennis balls up their tunics and calling for 'all girls together' to join the post-raid festivities.¹⁷⁸ Much of its content, however, strengthened the mythology of CHASTISE: he

¹⁷⁵ J. Ramsland, *Flying into Danger: The Paul Brickhill Story* (Melbourne: Brolga, 2017), 71.

¹⁷⁶ Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, 225.

¹⁷⁷ Ramsden, *The Dambusters: A British Film Guide*, 19.

¹⁷⁸ Brickhill, *The Dam Busters*, 110.

explained, for instance, that the account took much inspiration from *Enemy Coast Ahead*, as the only other major work on the Dams raid, and so Gibson's own inaccuracies are replicated in Brickhill's work. Focussing only on the men the Wing Commander had chosen again gave the impression that they had all been handpicked.¹⁷⁹ More problematic was the classification of the raid's more sensitive elements until the files were released in the 1960s. This meant relying on what anecdotes, photographs and existing R.A.F. records available to Brickhill at the time. What is more concerning, however, is that there were elements in *The Dam Busters* which Brickhill had 'made up' to compensate for this.¹⁸⁰ Following a request by Churchill to find documentary evidence of his original support for the Dams raid, Sir Norman Brook informed him that Brickhill's assertion in the book that Churchill was 'enthusiastic about it' was 'based on hearsay...[and that] he had never any firm evidence to support it'.¹⁸¹

Brickhill's account of the raid, then, was not a master course in academic rigour, and nor did it purport to be. However, his work was a best-seller and resonated with a broad audience, consequently proving to be very influential in shaping public perceptions of the raid; arguably setting the precedent for the success of popular histories depicting the raid. Its more mythological aspects were corroborated by both Gibson's *Enemy Coast Ahead* and by the work's subsequent film; and, unlike lengthy academic tomes, Brickhill's work could be enjoyed by adults and children alike. That it emerged very much aware of and in line with the post-war zeitgeist of national insecurity, too, contributed to its popularity among

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Cooper, *The Dambusters Raid*, 163.

¹⁸¹ CAB 21/3886. 'Letter from Sir Norman Brook to the Prime Minister', 18 October 1955. The Dambusters Operation, 1943: Sir Winston Churchill's support for the operation, May 1955 – October 1955 [Memoranda]. T.N.A., Kew.

the British public. Brickhill notes in the briefing of the book, for instance, that 'perhaps this story will reassure those who are dismayed by the fact that the British and her allies are outnumbered in this not too amicable world'¹⁸²: a clear indication of how the story of CHASTISE was used in *The Dam Busters* to buff up the nation's self-confidence during the Cold War. Further evidence of how the Dambusters tale was used to detract from the post-war criticisms of the Allied bombing offensive against Germany can also be seen in how Brickhill emphasised the precise nature of CHASTISE, noting that one of its more important aspects was that it possibly signalled an end to 'that dreadfully inescapable feature of recent war': the carpet bombing of cities.¹⁸³

The 'Official' History: Webster & Frankland

Yet with Bomber Command having 'slipped into the shadows' during the fifties, in Connelly's words, the sixties were a 'decade of questioning, and a period of action and reaction'.¹⁸⁴ With the emergence of more harrowing details from the firestorms that had raged across Germany at the hands of the British and Americans, rising questions against the air force's conduct of the Second World War became sharper in this period.¹⁸⁵ As part of this movement, even legendary wartime operations like CHASTISE were not immune to criticism. The repercussions of the soul-searching sixties could be seen in the popular and highly acclaimed documentary series *World At War* (1973 – 74): a tiny snippet on the Dams raid stood out by describing it as being 'only partially successful', citing the sky-high casualty rate and claiming that 'Ruhr arms production was unaffected'.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Brickhill, *The Dam Busters*, 9.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Connelly, 'Britain and the Debate over RAF Bomber Command's role', 6 – 17.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ 'Whirlwind: Bombing Germany, September 1939 – April 1944', *The World At War*, Series 1, Episode 12 [T.V. Programme]. (BBC: 23 January 1974).

Questions about the historical reality of the raid, then, were beginning to permeate the British public, but no other British academic work until Sweetman's *Operation CHASTISE: The Dams Raid: Epic or Myth* (1982) had reconsidered the raid so thoroughly as volume II ('Endeavour') of Webster and Frankland's *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany* (1961). As an 'official' history commissioned by the Cabinet Office, the duo could draw on unseen documents from the Cabinet Office, the Air Ministry, Bomber Command and the restricted Air Historical Branch (A.H.B.) Collection.¹⁸⁷ This resulted in an unprecedented and authoritative enquiry into the Allied air war against Germany which devoted an important section to the true success of CHASTISE.

Frankland, having just completed his doctoral thesis on the pre-war formation of Bomber Command at Oxford University, was both technically and literarily minded: qualities which would prove useful in supplementing Webster's lack of operational experience and military comprehension. Nevertheless, the latter was an expert in diplomatic history; determined to work through any gaps in his operational knowledge; and was more academically qualified to write the historical work than many ex-airmen would have been. Frankland, for instance, recalled how Air-Vice Marshal S. E. Toomer even said to him once, 'I say Frankland...what *is* a footnote?'.¹⁸⁸ Frankland was careful to not overexaggerate his own experiences of serving with the R.A.F. and Bomber Command during the war, noting firmly that 'I did not put my life on the line in Bomber Command to sustain a myth.'¹⁸⁹ Both men were keen to avoid endorsing any overarching concepts – following Sir Walter Raleigh and H. A. Jones' reiteration of Trenchardian doctrine,

¹⁸⁷ Gray, *Air Warfare: History, Theory and Practice*, 21.

¹⁸⁸ N. Frankland, *History At War* (London: Giles de la Mare, 1998), 55.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

condoning strategic bombing, in their accounts of airpower in the First World War – and thus sought to pen a work which portrayed the triumphs and mishaps of the strategic bombing offensive as accurately as possible.¹⁹⁰ The resulting volumes retained a heartfelt respect for Bomber Command also defied expectations in its unapologetic assessment of its wartime conduct. In the words of Lord Tedder, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany* was a ‘masterly and courageous’ tome among much war-trumpeting literature of the fifties: thus redressing some of the wartime mythology surrounding the offensive.¹⁹¹

Regarding the Dams raid, the work stated that the its physical repercussions were ‘[neither] of fundamental importance nor seriously damaging’, and noted that the lack of emphasis placed on attacking the Sorpe dam, the ‘painful’ fatality rate and the limitation of the force to twenty bombers meant that the damage inflicted was ‘local, temporary and largely agricultural’.¹⁹² It is noticeable that the duo did not particularly mention that the damage inflicted was mainly effective due to its psychological effect on both the British and the Germans rather than its physical achievements, but perhaps this aspect was either so evident that they did not feel the need to express it, or they wished to discuss an element of the raid which could be debated more readily. Nevertheless, Webster and Frankland did also identify some positives to come out of the raid which subsequent historians have not always given sufficient credit to: not what was achieved at the dams *per se*, but what 617 Squadron’s attack on the dams represented in terms of illustrating new ‘operational possibilities which were open to the force’.¹⁹³ The refining of precision missions during the Cold War-

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Webster & Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive*, 168.

¹⁹³ Ibid

epitomised in Operation 'BLACK BUCK' during the Falklands War, in which Vulcan bombers destroyed the islands' only runway at Port Stanley to handicap the Argentinian forces - would later corroborate Noble and Frankland's perceptions. The evolution of stand-off missiles during the Cold War, too, illustrated lessons learnt in deploying accurate weapons with lesser costs to the airmen.

Webster and Frankland's claim that the Dams raid was still 'a most brilliant victory' demonstrated how it could be historically critiqued and admired at the same time.¹⁹⁴ Yet Bomber Command and the Air Ministry – wielding the key to many crucial primary sources – quickly objected to the unflinching criticisms, and Sir Edward Hale called for sections to be 'toned down'.¹⁹⁵ This meant that the authors were somewhat at the mercy of the very organisations they were trying to write objectively about. Existing restrictions already forbade the use of any conversations from Cabinet meetings: a minute detailing Churchill discussing Dresden, for instance, was withdrawn.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, Harris was uneasy about the inclusion of appendices detailing his and Portal's disagreement in 1944 of targeting cities over oil, and his assistance soon dried up. Frankland later claimed that the Air Ministry tried to destroy the work with their obstruction, but Sebastian Cox has argued that this was an exaggeration, citing the civil servant Sir Maurice Dean's protests at suggesting to Brook that the book should be scrapped to support this.¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the rough ride the authors received showed that, in Christina Goulter's words, assessing the strategic bombing offensive proved to be a 'poison

¹⁹⁴ Frankland, *History At War*, 104.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ S. Cox, 'Setting the Historical Agenda: Webster and Frankland and the Debate over the Strategic Bombing Offensive against Germany, 1939 – 1945', in J. Grey (ed.), *The Last Word?: Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 147 - 173.

chalice' for any historian brave enough to touch it.¹⁹⁸ Appearing in the form of an 'official' history only amplified its lethality owing to its greater importance: as Goulter has rightfully pointed out, such texts serve to educate the military men of the future and thus needed to be factual, judicious and inclusive.¹⁹⁹

Yet Gray has recognised a couple of relevant omissions in the work such as the use of *ULTRA*: an Allied intelligence project at Bletchley Park that tapped into German communications within the *Wehrmacht*.²⁰⁰ Sebastian Cox felt the work's specific focus on Germany 'unconsciously established an artificially narrow set of parameters' which drew the attention of later historians from Bomber Command's operations further afield.²⁰¹ It can be argued, however, that with the contemporary post-war debate focussing specifically on the British response over the Reich's cities, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany's* singular approach can perhaps be forgiven. Producing a work which jumped around the bombing offensive over different continents would have arguably resulted in a jack-of-all-trades account that would not have resulted in the focussed, exhaustive study that Webster and Frankland produced. Moreover, the unpleasant backlash that the book received may have resulted in Frankland and Webster washing their hands of writing further histories had the latter not died shortly after publication. *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany* evoked a lot of press attention because its revelatory content shocked a nation that had placed its faith in the bombing offensive. Consequently, the press launched several *ad hominem* attacks against the authors themselves, with one *Daily Express* journalist vehemently trying to 'prove' that

¹⁹⁸ C. Goulter, 'British Official Histories of the Air War', in J. Grey (ed.), *The Last Word?: Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 133 - 146.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Gray, *Air Warfare: History, Theory and Practice*, 22.

²⁰¹ Cox, 'Setting the Historical Agenda', 147 - 173.

Frankland was an embittered, injured ex-airmen with a Lack of Moral Fibre (L.M.F.) to explain his blunt assessments.²⁰² Such an unpleasant backlash illustrates just how unpopular historians can be when tackling the less palatable aspects of wartime legends.

The British Public & Post-War Adjustment

The veterans of the air war and their successors, and the emerging historians of the raid have thus been identified as having perpetuated the mythologization of CHASTISE during the immediate post-war and Cold War period. Yet the embellishment of certain achievements, the defensiveness encircling such a unique raid, and the simplification of its repercussions arguably stemmed from the British public the most. The term 'public' in this instance encompasses the 'laymen' interest in this raid: neither scholars nor airmen or women of the bombing war, but rather the British men, women and children who eagerly delved into the Dambusters' story after the war. Following the miracle of Dunkirk and the brazen Battle of Britain, the British came to perceive the recent conflict as the 'People's War'.²⁰³ Such total war, they felt, was just as close on their doorstep as to the men they sent off to battle. With unprecedented participation in the war effort, from despatch riders and munitions workers to volunteer organisations like the Women's Voluntary Service (W.V.S) and Air Raid Precaution (A.R.P.) wardens, every man, woman and child had experienced the war and its hardships to some degree. Inclusive wartime rhetoric emphasised the need for every Briton to contribute to the final victory, with Churchill's iconic 'We Shall Fight Them on the Beaches' speech on 1 June 1940 epitomising this: 'if all do their duty...we shall

²⁰² Frankland, *History at War*, 118.

²⁰³ S. Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939 - 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.

prove ourselves once again able to defend our Island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny.’²⁰⁴

This war had affected the British so deeply that it had become a personal history actively shared by the entire nation. Yet the grand victory that the nation had been pushing for had begun to feel hollow after the initial surge of vitality and triumph. Geopolitical tensions had hardened between the Soviet Union and the U.S. just a couple of years after the end of the war, exacerbated by the former’s backing of North Korea during the Korean War (1950-53) with South Korea over the peninsula’s unity. Such threats were alarming in themselves to a war-weary nation, but particularly so to one in the process of decolonization. By the 1960s, much of the remaining British Empire – once so vast that it had been the land upon which ‘the sun never set’ - had caved to the calls for independence in India, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Malaya and Cyprus. With the Empire long used as a physical confirmation for British power, the ‘Winds of Change’ – particularly the Suez crisis of 1956 - signalled the nation’s post-war plummet from grace as it was left trailing in the wake of the United States and the Soviet Union’s superpower tussle.²⁰⁵ Witnessing the post-war blossoming of West Germany and Japan- particularly in an increasingly globalized world - meant that Britain’s sluggish industry also paled by comparison to her wartime foes.²⁰⁶ Unable to rely on its imperial greatness for national security, the British increasingly turned towards their role in the last great military victory: The Second World War.

²⁰⁴ W. Churchill, *We Shall Fight on the Beaches* [Speech], The House of Commons (London, June 4, 1940).

²⁰⁵ H. Macmillan, *The Winds of Change* [Speech], Parliament of South Africa (Cape Town, February 3, 1960).

²⁰⁶ K. Kumar, ‘English and British National Identity’, *History Compass*, Vol. 4, Iss. 3. (2006) Available online: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2006.00331.x/full> [Accessed 11/07/17], 428 – 447.

Valerie Krips has argued that the nation was not immediately aware of this imperial decline, asserting that the 'illusion of great power status lingered into the late 1950s'²⁰⁷. It was only in 1958, for instance, that Empire Day – held every year on the 24th of May to celebrate the British Empire - was rebranded as 'British Commonwealth Day', which in turn was only replaced by 'Commonwealth Day' in 1966. So what is to explain the emergence of, in Michael Paris' words, the 'pleasure-culture of war'²⁰⁸ during the fifties – a fixation with stirring tales of the Second World War - if Britain's greatness did not need to be reasserted? The answer partially lies in this specific illusion flagged up by Krips: given the public's lack of awareness regarding the nation's imperial decline in the fifties, the memory of the 'Good War' arguably remained popular owing to the public's existing belief in the might of the Empire and reaffirmed the pre-war social notion of British supremacy. This is perhaps illustrated most strongly by the fact that the fifties saw a switch from remembering the 'People's War' to, as Wendy Webster has pointed out, the 'Heroes' War'²⁰⁹: celebrating those who had come to Britain's aid in her darkest hours, and taking such remarkable historical events as inspirational tales for their own lives. A quotation from Lord Tedder, in his forward to Brickhill's *The Dam Busters*, illustrated this sentiment perfectly: 'may [the Dambusters'] example be an inspiration to us, now and in the future'.²¹⁰

The Dam Busters on Film

Murphy, however, has argued that the emergence of this 'pleasure culture of war' owes more to the fact that it offered a means of catharsis for the nation: 'an

²⁰⁷ V. Krips, *The Presence of the Past: Memory, Heritage and Childhood in Postwar Britain* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 2.

²⁰⁸ M. Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850 – 2000* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 26.

²⁰⁹ W. Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939 – 1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55.

²¹⁰ Brickhill, *The Dam Busters*, 8.

opportunity of reliving and coming to terms with [the war].'²¹¹ This appeared most notably in the form of war films, the highest-grossing cinema genre during the mid-to-late fifties.²¹² The remarkable story of the Dambusters was a natural candidate for cinematic adaptation: not only did Gibson, Wallis and 617 Squadron fit in neatly with the public fervour surrounding wartime idols, but Brickhill had now provided a flattering and dramatic narrative easily translatable to the big screen. The impact of Michael Anderson's *The Dam Busters* (1955) on the reaffirmation of CHASTISE's wartime mythology cannot be understated. There are many historical inaccuracies in the film which resulted in an airbrushed version of the raid. For instance, Gibson (Richard Todd) is hit with inspiration in the film for using converging spotlights to ensure that the Lancasters maintain a height of 60 feet after watching 'Let's Face It' at the Hippodrome theatre: the CHASTISE spotlights were in fact developed by Ben Lockspeiser, the Director of Scientific Research at the Ministry of Aircraft Production.²¹³ Falconer has also shown that the film is misleading in its reference to the Möhne, Sorpe and Eder as being Ruhr Dams – the latter being entirely unconnected – and the second wave on the Sorpe dam is not shown in the film as 'defeat for the R.A.F. was something the film-makers did not wish to include'.²¹⁴

Indeed, the R.A.F.'s influence on the film certainly contributed to its sanitized version of events: after all, it provided a sorely-needed opportunity for the air force to rehabilitate the reputation of Bomber Command in post-war

²¹¹ R. Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2000), 204.

²¹² J. Ramsden, 'Refocussing 'The People's War': British War Films of the 1950s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 1, January 1998. Available online: http://www.jstor.org/stable/260996?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=dam&searchText=busters&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Ddam%2Bbusters%26amp%3Bacc%3Don%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3Bfc%3Doff%26amp%3Bgroup%3Dtest&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents [Accessed 28/10/2016], 35 – 63.

²¹³ Cooper, *The Dambusters Raid: A Reappraisal 70 Years On*, 52.

²¹⁴ Falconer, *Filming the Dam Busters*, 43.

Britain. The immense attention to detail, from the low-flying skill shown by R.A.F. pilots of the on-screen Lancasters to the authentic uniforms, demonstrated how important the backing of the air force was to the film. To receive such crucial assistance, the film crews had to ensure that the operation – and, by association, the R.A.F. – was depicted in a flattering way. This concern was even more evident in the film than in Brickhill’s version of events in *The Dam Busters*. Though the film does depict the water from the breached dams flowing into the valleys below, no mention is made of the *Blitzflut* victims, even though Brickhill had referred to this ‘moral price to pay’ in his work.²¹⁵ He even reported accurately that 1,294 German & foreign citizens had died in the floods (among them, according to him, ‘749 slaves and prisoners’).²¹⁶ It is also noticeable that the firm-but-fair portrayal of Harris (Basil Sydney) in the film is vastly different to his abrasive – and, in many ways, more accurate – character in Brickhill’s work. Rather than shouting at Wallis ‘what the hell do you damn inventors want?’²¹⁷ upon meeting him, as Brickhill wrote, the film Harris asks, ‘what do you want?’ more curiously, and does not take much persuading to view the films of Wallis’ weapon’s trials.

Such changes illustrate the R.A.F.’s agenda in attempting to steer public attention away from Bomber Command’s more questionable exploits to a heroic operation. The flattering cinematic portrayal also benefited Bomber Command because it had long been in the shadows of the more ‘glamorous’ Fighter Command. As Gibson – who wielded an unusual distinction of having commanded both fighter and bomber squadrons – wrote in *Enemy Coast Ahead*, there had been some animosity of the latter towards the ‘the flying-booted, scarf-flapping glamour

²¹⁵ Brickhill, *The Dams Raid*, 113.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

boys'.²¹⁸ Harris later claimed that some of the criticism Bomber Command came in for was because the fighter pilot was always 'the blue-eyed boy', yet no one liked the 'bomber who drops things on people'.²¹⁹ Fighter Command had been recently depicted in *Angels One Five* (1952), the ninth most popular film of that year. *Appointment in London* (1953), meanwhile, offered a more realistic and gritty portrayal of Bomber Command's workload, from showing the strain of multiple tours on the fictitious Wing Commander Tim Mason – rumoured to have been based on the disciplinarian and dedicated Gibson²²⁰ - to the complexity of maintaining wartime relationships.²²¹ However, as Connelly has argued, this film was not greeted with box office success as it appeared that the British public 'far preferred the cosy myths of the war and did not want to be reminded of uglier realities'.²²² The cinematic adaption of a rose-tinted wartime tale like the *Dambusters*, then, was instantly appealing to the public audiences owing to its seemingly less brutal repercussions on the enemy.

The Dam Busters, however, was arguably not just successful in Britain and the Commonwealth just because of its triumphant wartime story: it was also a fine piece of cinematography. Bringing its 1950s audience, as the original American film posters claimed, alongside the *Dambusters* 'at breakneck speed'²²³, the film's dramatic air attack sequences were uniquely involved, and much more interactive than previous films. The strong influence of the film's cinematography on other blockbuster hits, particularly *Star Wars- Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977), has not

²¹⁸ Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*. 112.

²¹⁹ 000931/01. A. T. Harris. Interviewed by T. Mason. Recorded by M. Andrews, British Fines Broadcasting Service, 1977. The Imperial War Museum (I.W.M.), London.

²²⁰ R. Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War*, 261.

²²¹ J. Falconer, *Bomber Command in Fact, Film & Fiction* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996), 91.

²²² Connelly, 'Britain and the Debate over RAF Bomber Command's role' 6 – 17.

²²³ Warner Brothers, "The Dam Busters" [Theatrical Poster], 1955. Available online: <https://dambusters.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/page-6.jpg> [Accessed 03/08/17].

gone unmissed. Nevertheless, the fact that *The Dam Busters* did not fare well with the American market – who were rubbed up the wrong way with the British and Commonwealth pilots ‘acting as if they were saving the world’²²⁴ – demonstrates how its message ultimately resonated with the British post-war need for heroes and greatness. More glamour encircled the raid with the film premieres, which were to ‘concentrate on the R.A.F. aspect of this rather than film stars’: illustrating where they believed the most press attention was merited.²²⁵ The arrival of the popular Princess Margaret to the premiere on May 16, 1955 also contributed an air of glamour to the event. Pilot Officer William Townsend later commented in the eighties that ‘until that film was made, it was just another operation, wasn’t it?’²²⁶: whilst Townsend characteristically downplayed the significance of the raid’s story, it is true that the film certainly solidified CHASTISE’s fond spot in British history and sustained the wartime mythology of a clear-cut and glamorous raid.

The ‘Pleasure-Culture of War’ in Post- and Cold War Britain

Yet in his paper presented to the Royal Society of the Arts on 26 February 1964, the renowned British film director and producer Herbert Wilcox declared the ordinary British film, with its stereotypical plot and cast, had become ‘as dead as a doornail’²²⁷: the classic war films’ popularity had begun to peter out. So how were the mythological aspects of CHASTISE sustained in this country during the Cold War, other than through the 1955 film? The answer lies in almost every form of

²²⁴ Ramsden, ‘Refocussing ‘The People’s War’, 35 – 63.

²²⁵ 55/40. From H. Thomas to G. T. Cumins, ‘Princess Attends Charity Premiere’, 19 May 1955 [Assignment Sheet]. Pathé News. Available online: http://media.bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen2/Pathé/106464/NoS_106464_assignment.pdf [Accessed 03/08/17].

²²⁶ 8341. W. C. Townsend, *Oral History: British NCO served as pilot with 617 Sqdn during Dambusters Raid, 16/5/1943-17/5/1943* [Interview] 24/10/1984. I.W.M., London.

²²⁷ H. Wilcox, ‘British Films – Past and Future’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Col 112, No. 5095 (1964) Available online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41369388> [Accessed 19/07/17], 514 – 522.

media and entertainment imaginable: television, radio, advertising, games, toys and literature. Given that National Service was only abolished in 1960 – and, of course, that the nation had war looming over its head once more – Britain remained a war-minded society even in the decades following the Second World War. Paris has defined the nation’s fixation with its wartime experience as a ‘pleasure-culture of war’²²⁸: actively seeking out and relishing the glories of the past war, often because many who indulged in it had no direct experience of the fighting themselves. This was particularly notable in the case of children, who in the fifties grew up surrounded by bombed-out sites and memories of the war.²²⁹ In Murphy’s words, the war ‘was an endless subject of excitement and adventure’ for the baby-boomers brought up within the great mystique of the war.²³⁰ It is no surprise, then, that the impressive tale of CHASTISE would resonate with the post-war youth and maintain its mythological status among new generations.

The baby boomers, as Ramsden has observed, were ‘voracious readers [who] could read dozens of books a year about prisoner of war camps, combat and espionage’²³¹. Brickhill’s *The Dam Busters* featured highly in this list, with Falconer claiming the work instilled ‘a passion for the exploits of Guy Gibson and his dam busters’ within him and many other boys of his generation.²³² Others learnt of wartime escapades through comics such as *The Victor* (1961 – 1992), with the Dams raid described as the ‘the most spectacular raid of the war’²³³, and its associated annual *The Victor Book For Boys* (1964 – 1994). ‘Cadet’ versions of war

²²⁸ Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture*, 26.

²²⁹ Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War*, 204.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ramsden, ‘Refocussing ‘The People’s War’: British War Films of the 1950s’, 35 – 63.

²³² J. Falconer, *The Dam Busters: Breaking the Great Dams of Germany, 16-17 May 1943*. (Yeovil: Haynes Publishing, 2010), xiii.

²³³ Victor, ‘The Dam Busters’, *The Victor*. No. 91, 17 November 1962, 1. Available online: <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/victor-91-the-dam-busters/4000-484076/> [Accessed 05/08/17]

comics were also produced, illustrating the unique appeal of such war-minded material to the post-war generations.²³⁴ Many young British boys also got to grips with the nation's military past through the Airfix model kits of military transportation: the Christmas 1960 version of *Airfix Magazine*, for instance, explained how to convert the Series 5 Lancaster kit into the Dambusters' version – complete with a cotton reel 'bouncing bomb'!²³⁵ Airfix has even been cited by many present-day historians as having nurtured their interest in history. Gray confessed that himself and many of his students can 'probably plead guilty' to studying airpower after 'their fascination was caught with childhood comics and plastic model aeroplane kits'²³⁶, whilst Connelly has similarly admitted that he 'never knew the war 'first hand', but that [he had] always felt very close to it' owing to his upbringing with Airfix, comics and war films.²³⁷

In the eighties and early nineties, long past the peak of the 'pleasure-culture of war', the raid had inspired several video games, from the GAT arcade console game *Dambusters* (1981) – one of only very few games to be written by a U.K. company at the time²³⁸ - to PC games such as South West Research's *Dambusters* (1981) and Sydney Development's *The Dam Busters* (1985). Public interest in the raid also spiked with the 40th anniversary celebrations, the reporting of which - though interspersed with misleading clips of the 1955 film as if they constituted part of the mission²³⁹ - thrust CHASTISE back into the public spotlight.²⁴⁰ One of the most enduring depictions of the raid, however, was in the Carling Black Label

²³⁴ Ramsden, 'Refocussing 'The People's War': British War Films of the 1950s', 35 – 63.

²³⁵ J. May, *James Mays' Toy Stories* (London: Conway, 2009), 146.

²³⁶ Gray, *Air Warfare: History, Theory and Practice*, 3.

²³⁷ Connelly, *We Can Take It!: Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 2014), 16.

²³⁸ International Arcade Museum, 'Dambusters', *The International Arcade Museum*. Available online: https://www.arcade-museum.com/game_detail.php?game_id=7488 [Accessed 10/08/17].

²³⁹ Ramsden, 'Refocussing 'The People's War': British War Films of the 1950s', 38.

²⁴⁰ Connelly, 'Britain and the Debate over RAF Bomber Command's role', 6 – 17.

advertisements from 1989 and 1990. The first, a most blatant pastiche of the 1955 film, re-imagined the Dams raid as an England vs. Germany football match; the dams' towers representing goal-posts, the 'bouncing bomb' footballs. The second advert, which depicts the Germans as fat, ageing, sun lounger-obsessed holidaymakers, shows a handsome, suave bronzed Briton hurling his Union Jack towel across the pool like a bouncing bomb to the 1955 film's 'Dambuster March' before enjoying a pint of Carling Black Label in his reserved seat. Despite both adverts evoking complaints of being anti-German²⁴¹, the advert was ranked among the all-time greatest British adverts in a national poll from 2003: thus illustrating how the story of the Dambusters became further embellished and even trivialised by the British public in the post-war period.

Anti-German Feeling in Post-War Britain

Yet the polishing of CHASTISE into a much-loved pinnacle of British greatness symbolises more than just a fondness for the Dambusters: if celebrating the operation's military achievements alone, it is possible that the operation would have only significantly concerned airpower historians after the war. The legend was arguably consolidated in this country due to the pockets of anti-German feeling that cropped up intermittently during the Cold War. After the decimated Reich was divided into four zones – American, French, Russian and British – following the end of the Second World War, Britain and her western allies were tasked with lifting the Federal Republic of Germany, founded in 1949, onto its feet. In the 1950s, the gross British expenditure on defence within its zone had originally been supplemented by contributions from the West German

²⁴¹ The Independent, 'Dambuster beer advert leaves a bad taste', *The Independent*. 18 February 1994. Available online: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/dambuster-beer-advert-leaves-a-bad-taste-1394789.html> [Accessed 01/08/17].

government, but these payments began to dwindle in the 1960s.²⁴² Meanwhile, Britain's annual military payments overseas – much of which went towards overseeing West Germany – had risen from £238 million in 1952 to £400 million in 1962, even though the nation had subdued the emergencies in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus.²⁴³ This was in spite of the fact that its additional payments to N.A.T.O. infrastructure and other defence projects had dropped following the Suez crisis and relinquishment of military bases in Egypt.²⁴⁴ Yet in 1950s West Germany, a *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) – the sustaining of 'unexpected, rapid and long-lasting economic growth'²⁴⁵ - was beginning to take hold at the time when Britain was also suffering with running both herself and her empire.

There had initially been a wave of sympathy for the bombed-out Germans among British people at the end of the war, whilst the latter's attitude towards Germany softened further during the Berlin *Luftbrücke* ('Air-Lift') from 1948-49. Assisting the Berliners who had protested in the face of Soviet 'tyranny' was particularly important given that the Soviet Union was now Britain's Cold War foe.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, 'Germanophobia' ebbed and flowed in post-war Britain depending on changes in Anglo-German relations, and was strongest among those who had survived Nazi cruelty. In a May 1945 newspaper interview, for instance, a British prisoner-of-war claimed that he was heading back home to Aberdeen 'with a very real hate for the Germans and all they stand for': he had witnessed a captured American airman being shot in the stomach after walking towards a

²⁴² W. Beckermann et. al, *The British Economy in 1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 124.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ D. Imkamp, *Das Deutsche Wirtschaftswunder - Wunder oder logische Folge?* (Norderstedt: Grin Publishing, 2014), 3.

²⁴⁶ I. Weber-Newth & J. D. Steinert, *German Migrants in Post-War Britain: An Enemy Embrace* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 16.

compound by the same German guard who had permitted it.²⁴⁷ This anti-German feeling was conveyed to the British post-war youth, both through their parents' wartime memories and even their education. Keith Crawford has illustrated some examples of British school textbooks between 1930 and 1960 which pushed the 'British heroic narrative' and the 'negative German stereotype': one descriptive writing exercise called for students to 'mention four ways in which the people of the occupied countries showed their hatred of the Germans', select 'any examples of the evil things against which Mr. Chamberlain said we were fighting' and to 'give for examples which illustrate the spirit of the British people in 1940'.²⁴⁸

Despite the initial rehabilitation of Anglo-German relations during the 1970s – illustrated by a Gallup poll in 1983, which placed the percentage of Britons who 'like them' (the Germans) at 75% compared to 66% in 1968²⁴⁹ - the fledging relationship was interrupted by a new wave of British 'German-bashing'. The further growth of the West German economy during this period – particularly noticeable whilst Britain struggled to make sense of her recent admission to the European Economic Community (E.E.C.) in 1973 – again irked the nation. It was, however, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the momentous reunification of East and West Germany in the late 1980s that alarmed Britain the most. Insult to injury came in the form of President George Bush's call for Germany and the United States to 'share the fruits of our friendship' and work together as 'partners in leadership' after the former's reunification.²⁵⁰ As Ruth Wittlinger has argued, this proposal

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ K. A. Crawford, 'A Vicious and Barbarous Enemy: Germans and Germany in British History Textbooks, 1930 – 1960', *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2008), 515 – 534.

²⁴⁹ Weber-Newth & Steinert, *German Migrants in Post-War Britain*, 18.

²⁵⁰ G. Bush, *Address to the German People on the Reunification of Germany* [Speech], The Oval Office (Washington, D.C., October 2, 1990). Available online: <https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/ga6-901002.htm> [Accessed 01/08/17].

threatened Britain's 'special relationship' with America, and the fact that Germany were their rivals for America's attention, as Wittlinger points out, 'must have been a particularly distressing threat to Margaret Thatcher'.²⁵¹ Wartime tales of having once smashed at the might of the Nazi war machine, then, offered a way for Britain to reassert itself in the face of jealousy and concern at Germany's remarkable post-war recovery, whilst the lurking anti-German feeling made the reiteration of national greatness second nature to some Britons.

Reliving Britain's former glories, however, gave way to one of the ugliest forms of post-war celebration during the 1970s and 1980s: football hooliganism. The Dams raid, having constituted a swift kick to German industry, proved the perfect wartime story for British nationalists to use as compensation for the fact that Germany now vastly outperformed Britain in everything from sport to industry.²⁵² As Ruth Wittlinger has pointed out, the Dambusters theme was often sung at football matches between England and Germany, with English fans 'with outstretched arms mimic[ing] the aircraft attacking dams, la-lahing the tune of the Dambusters March'.²⁵³ This mocking intent infamously turned violent after England was defeated by West Germany in the World Cup semi-final of July 1990, as English fans beating up Italians, Scandinavians and even a Scot wearing a German football shirt.²⁵⁴ Such public shows of ill-feeling towards German success, Wittlinger continues, are 'an indication of how deeply embedded the Second World War is in the psyche of this country, in generations far too young to have experienced it'.²⁵⁵ Even Flight Officer Sydney Hobday voiced his discomfort with

²⁵¹ Wittlinger, 'Perceptions of Germany and the Germans in Post-war Britain', 453-465.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Weber-Newth & Steinert, *German Migrants in Post-War Britain*, 18.

²⁵⁵ Wittlinger, 'Perceptions of Germany and the Germans in Post-war Britain', 453-465.

English hooliganism in a 1983 interview: 'I'm sure there was more good spirit [during the war]...nowadays...everyone's at each other's throats all the time...the kids and football hooligans and things like that.'²⁵⁶ This yobbish behaviour perhaps most painfully illustrates how certain post-war Britons have hijacked and manipulated the memory of serious and dutiful wartime operations – particularly that of CHASTISE – and thus distorted its historical legacy in the process.

²⁵⁶ 7298. H. S. Hobday, *Oral History: British officer served as navigator with 617 Sqn RAF in GB, 1943 including Dambusters Raid, 16/5/1943- 17/5/1943* [Interview], 13/12/1983. I.W.M., London.

Chapter 3: The Legacy of CHASTISE from the Nineties to Now

Bomber Command & The Second World War

Nearly seventy-five years on, the public interest regarding Operation CHASTISE does not appear to have waned. Les Munro commented in 2013 that he was 'surprised by the interest shown in the Dams Raid by people of all ages, not least the young'.²⁵⁷ When one considers just how saturated British popular culture is with references to the Dambusters, however, this continued fixation with the raid does not seem unusual. Much of the interest in the Dams raid stems from the renewed gravitation of the public towards Bomber Command's conflicting history. The Dams raid shone in 1990s Britain among the darker allegations which swirled around Bomber Command's morality, mainly provoked by the erection of a statue commemorating Arthur "Bomber" Harris in 1992 and the fiftieth anniversary of Dresden three years later.²⁵⁸ Patrick Bishop captured this perfectly when he described the former as having been considered 'a feat of dash and daring...quite unlike the demolition work which Bomber Command conducted every night'.²⁵⁹ However, as Frances Houghton has documented, the 1990s witnessed a surge of wartime memoirs and recollections from Bomber Command veterans which sought to 'establish control over popular memories of 'their' war' in the face of the ongoing criticisms aimed at themselves and their leaders.²⁶⁰ Having once 'slipped into the shadows', Bomber Command's story was now openly shared with the British public at large: revealing its wartime operations to new generations and reinvigorating perceptions held by their predecessors.

²⁵⁷ L. Munro, 'Foreword', in R. Morris & R. Owen (eds.), *Breaching the German Dams: Flying Into History* (London: Newsdesk Communications, 2008), 5.

²⁵⁸ Connelly, 'Britain and the Debate over RAF Bomber Command's role', 6 – 17.

²⁵⁹ Bishop, *Bomber Boys: Fighting Back 1940 – 1945* (London: HarperPress, 2007), xxxii.

²⁶⁰ F. Houghton, 'Writing the 'Missing Chapter': Post-War Memoirs of Bomber Command Aircrew', in L. Noakes & J. Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 155 – 174.

Much of the veterans' backlash against the negative scrutiny of their wartime activities was launched against the criticisms of revisionist journalists and historians which began to circulate in the 1960s and 1970s. It was the virulent defamation of Harris' name – tarnished by the firestorms at Hamburg and Dresden – which particularly stoked indignation among Bomber Command's veterans. George "Johnny" Johnson, for instance, called Harris' post-war treatment in Britain 'most unfair and unnecessary'²⁶¹, whilst James Fyfe – a Flight Lieutenant who served as a Navigator in America and North-West Europe – asserted that that the Second World War 'had to be won at all costs, which is saying that no punches could be pulled'.²⁶² It was conveniently overlooked by critics of Bomber Command that the statue was actually intended as a memorial to Harris *and* the 55,000 men who had died serving under him.²⁶³ By failing to acknowledge this, the British media stirred up more controversy about the bomber offensive. Nevertheless, the same accusations of being a 'mass murderer' that were flung at Harris' statue were often aimed at the men of Bomber Command too. Houghton noted that a three-part Canadian documentary shown on Channel Four, which included an episode entitled 'Death by Moonlight: Bomber Command' (1993), greatly offended the air war veterans: they felt they had simply followed orders in their country's time of need.²⁶⁴

Houghton applied Henri Rousso's 'vectors of memory' concept to her work on Bomber Command aircrew memoirs during the 1990s and 2000s, which considers how groups and individuals strive to re-work a 'collective' memory for a

²⁶¹ 17970. G. L. Johnson, *British officer served as bomb aimer with 97 Sqn, RAF in GB, 1942; bomb aimer served with 617 Sqn, RAF in GB 1943-1944 including Dambusters raid on Sorpe Dam, Germany, 5/1943.* Interviewed by C. Wood, 02 April 1998 [Interview] I.W.M., London.

²⁶² Fyfe, "The Great Ingratitude", 323.

²⁶³ Houghton, 'Writing the 'Missing Chapter', 155 – 174.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

social purpose: in the case of the veterans, to defend themselves from post-war criticisms of their involvement in the strategic bombing offensive.²⁶⁵ Thus their unique memoirs, Houghton reminds us, document 'the response of the persons being remembered to the modes in which they perceive they are being memorialized'.²⁶⁶ This signifies an unusual attempt on behalf of the air war veterans to alter how history would perceive them, which was important considering that their stories may have gone to their graves with them had they not been provoked to speak out against the official 'snubbing'. Their increasing age also brought out an urgency to share their story that had been dormant in the early post-war years. Houghton pointed out that whilst Bomber Command largely remained silent immediately after the war, memoirs from 'submariners, commandoes, and prisoners of war positively flourished by comparison'²⁶⁷: other daring, brave wartime stories that could capture the public's imagination, but which did not come with the difficult stigma of targeting civilian populations. The flood of memoirs in response to such criticisms, however, not only thrust Bomber Command back into the public eye, but also rendered popular stories like that of the Dambusters particularly useful in rehabilitating Bomber Command's image.

Setting the Record Straight: Oral Histories

With this need for the Bomber Command veterans to defend each other against these outside criticisms, then, the voice of the Dambusters grew stronger in equally shedding light on their experiences of the raid and their views on the strategic bombing offensive. In conjunction with the emergence of the airmen's memoirs during the 1990s and 2000s, interviews with the Dambusters themselves – having

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

emerged in the 1980s – were even more valued owing to the remarkability of the raid. In some cases, as illustrated with Cheshire’s description of the squadron’s role to ‘not kill civilians’, the mythology of the operation was strengthened. In others, the exposure of the squadron’s veterans to the public arguably did much to redress many wartime misconceptions about the Dams raid. The personal accounts about the raid’s most famed protagonists, for instance, helped to re-construct their one-dimensional public personas into complex personalities. George “Johnny” Johnson, for instance, noted in an interview with the Imperial War Museum from 2004 that Gibson ‘was arrogant, he was bombastic... but one had to accept that at time he was one of, if not the most experienced pilot in Bomber Command, so he had something to be arrogant about.’²⁶⁸ The divisive nature of Gibson, deftly presented in Richard Morris’ biography in 1994, thus became apparent: the Wing Commander’s true character, away from its wartime glamorisation, came to the fore and now reflected his genuine reactions to the pressures of war leadership.

Gibson’s character has needed to be rectified more than most figures in the raid. As Richard Morris has pointed out, ‘history remembers him as a sympathetic figure’²⁶⁹: yet much of this image originates with Richard Todd’s laxer portrayal of Gibson in *The Dam Busters* (1955).²⁷⁰ Those who knew him asserted that he was a strict disciplinarian and a polarising figure. George “Johnny” Johnson, for instance, remarked that one of Gibson’s greatest problems was that he ‘could not bring himself down to communicate with lower ranks’²⁷¹, and that some even called him

²⁶⁸ G. L. Johnson, ‘Johnny Johnson Talks About Guy Gibson’, *R.A.F. Benevolent Fund* [Interview]. 23 July 2013. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KL0ptasNvtE> [Accessed 02/08/17].

²⁶⁹ R. Morris, ‘Remembering Guy Gibson’, *The R.A.F. Museum* [Podcast] 14 May 2013. Available online: <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/media-vault/podcasts/remembering-guy-gibson/> [Accessed 10/08/17].

²⁷⁰ *Dambusters: Declassified*. Directed by S. Wichelow. [T.V. Programme] (B.B.C., 2010).

²⁷¹ Johnson, ‘Johnny Johnson Talks About Guy Gibson’, *R.A.F. Benevolent Fund*.

the 'arch-bastard' at 106 Squadron!²⁷² Les Munro saw this harsher side after explaining to Gibson that he had been forced to turn back once his communications were knocked out. Gibson simply replied that he was 'flying too high' and brusquely walked away.²⁷³ Yet there has often been hesitance among the veterans in highlighting his less affable side because of his immense bravery and inspired leadership during the raid. Munro pondered whether he was 'doing him an injustice or not' by listing some of his flaws as well as his great strengths: demonstrating the immense hold that Gibson's sizeable achievements still has on how his character is perceived.²⁷⁴ To not acknowledge both his human flaws and highly admirable qualities is to gloss over the raid's heavy strain on the men involved. Elevating Gibson as an untouchable figure also discourages historical scrutiny into his effectiveness and achievements, which can set a dangerous precedent when determining what makes an effective wartime leader.

Whilst the mythologization of CHASTISE has been overwhelmingly positive, there are also a few cases where hearsay and myth have negatively impacted its protagonists. In 2004, Munro corrected the long-standing myth that he and Anderson had disobeyed orders by returning to base in Lancaster AJ-W ED921/G "W for William" with the UPKEEP mine still on board.²⁷⁵ Widely accused of this by some reports and authors owing to the apparent requirement to 'jettison it because of the danger of it exploding', Munro confirmed that this was 'entirely incorrect', and an investigation by the squadron in 1993 confirmed that no such order had ever existed.²⁷⁶ Moreover, the exclusion of the Sorpe raid from the 1955

²⁷² AJohnsonGL170801-02, G. Johnson, *Interview with I.B.C.C* Interviewed by D. Ellin & H. Hughes for the International Bomber Command Centre, 01 August 2017, Bristol. . [Interview] IBCC Digital Archive.

²⁷³ Cooper, *The Dambusters Raid*, 130.

²⁷⁴ Johnson, *Interview with I.B.C.C.*, 01 August 2017.

²⁷⁵ L. Munro, *Interview with I.B.C.C.*, 4 June 2015.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

film to hide this so-called 'failure' came at the expense of the airmen who had either risked or lost their lives when attacking it. The fact that George "Johnny" Johnson pointed out how the film did not involve the raid because it was based on Brickhill's work – which, in Johnson's words, showed that 'as far as that was concerned, we had done nothing at all'²⁷⁷ - again illustrates how strongly the immediate post-war mythology had become entrenched. This demonstrates just how prone CHASTISE has been to misinformation, and that the myths surrounding the raid, both flattering and uncomplimentary, have persisted into the twenty-first century.

Postwar Reflections on the Dams Raid

James Holland has claimed that one of the most tragic influences that post-war criticism has had on the Dambusters' memories is that the 'downplaying of [the raid's] importance affected the way those who flew the raid viewed what they had done'.²⁷⁸ He pointed out, for example, that Flight Sergeant Ken Brown believed until his death that the losses were simply not worth what was achieved on the night.²⁷⁹ However, his argument suggests that it is not right for the men to reflect negatively on any aspect of what they did, as if the raid is immune to criticism even from its own participants. If they did perceive it in any negative way, this line of thought implies that this was due to the brain-washing of jumped-up, post-war revisionists and not through any autonomy on the part of the Dambusters. Yet it can be argued that it was an entirely natural process for the airmen to reconsider their wartime contributions, particularly with such heavy losses and life-changing fame. Whilst some men who flew on the raid may have altered their opinions due

²⁷⁷ Johnson, *Interview with I.B.C.C.*, 01 August 2017.

²⁷⁸ Holland, *Dam Busters*, 523.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

to post-war criticisms, there are many more examples of where the post-war criticisms of the raid have either reinforced certain Dambusters' staunch convictions that the raid was worthwhile, or have simply served to confirm the pre-existing reservations regarding the Dams raid held by other members of the aircrews.

Some of these post-war reflections have come from the passing of time and perspective, rather than on the command of revisionist scholars. Perhaps the starkest example of this was seen when George "Johnny" Johnson re-visited the Sorpe dam for the 2008 Five documentary *Last of the Dambusters*. At beginning of the programme, he felt utterly secure in the achievements and historical value of the raid. Indeed, his strong rejection of post-war revisionists was illustrated in his defiant statement that 'if I ever met one of those people, I would hope that my hands were tied behind my back because I don't know quite what I'd do with them'.²⁸⁰ Upon meeting a German *Blitzflut* survivor and seeing the images of the destruction caused by the Dams raid, however, Johnson noted that it '[had] made me feel quite guilty, in fact, to think of the disaster that we caused, to so many people that were not involved in the war anyway.'²⁸¹ He even noted that he 'had to be glad' that the raid had not succeeded at the Sorpe dam 'because it was going to cause so much damage'.²⁸² Nevertheless, he retained his belief at the end of his journey that the Dams raid was still certainly worthwhile, even if it had softened his attitude towards the raid to some extent: illustrating how it is not necessarily unnatural for those who had participated to reflect on what was such a dramatic, momentous and tragic event.

²⁸⁰ *Last of the Dambusters*. Directed by S.C. Chadwick. [T.V. Programme] (FIVE, 2008).

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*

Many Dambusters expressed their long-standing doubts over certain aspects of the raid whilst maintaining that it was worthwhile. Flight Sergeant William C. Townsend, after speaking with Dutch survivors following the war, claimed that experiencing their gratitude was the only time he had been 'really convinced that the Dams raid was the epic it's supposed to have been'.²⁸³ Flight Sergeant Leonard J. Sumpter, too, illustrated that post-raid reflections did not only arise in the face of revisionist pessimism. He noted in the 1980s that he 'could never understand why we never went again...they just let them get on with repairing them and they were back in operation again in six months' time'²⁸⁴: implying that he had always been confused as to why they never went back and capitalised on their success. Even Gibson, who died before the dawn of post-war revisionists, had explored such questions in *Enemy Coast Ahead* regarding the Dams raid: 'had it been worth it? Or were their lives just thrown away on a spectacular mission?'.²⁸⁵ Whilst he was personally convinced that 'militarily, it was cheap at the price'²⁸⁶, this demonstrates how questions over the worth of the raid had even been emerging long before any criticisms of the raid were expressed by historians, journalists or members of the public.

²⁸³ 8341. W. C. Townsend, *Oral History: British NCO served as pilot with 617 Sqn during Dambusters Raid, 16/5/1943-17/5/1943*. Interviewed by C. Wood for the Imperial War Museum [Interview] 24 October 1984, London. I.W.M.

²⁸⁴ 7372. L. J. Sumpter, *Oral History: British NCO served as bomb aimer with 617 Sqn in GB, 1943-1944 including Dambusters' Raid on Germany, 16/5/1943-17/5/1943*. Interviewed by C. Wood for the Imperial War Museum, 14 February 1984 [Interview] London. I.W.M.

²⁸⁵ Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, 272.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

'Der Totentanz'²⁸⁷: Didactic Remembrance of the Raid in Germany

Before considering how the raid has been remembered at large in Britain, it is worth contemplating how Operation 'Züchtigung' – CHASTISE's name in German – is now perceived in Germany to illustrate how memorialisation of the raid has been affected by different national sentiments. Whilst the raid is not as well known in Germany as it is in Britain, Euler has pointed out that 'the Dams disasters remain unforgotten' in the local areas (See Appendix D)²⁸⁸ It was not until Euler's *Wasserkrieg: 17. Mai 1943* (1975) and *Als Deutschlands Dämme Brachen* (1999) that such testimonies would be widely voiced in German literature. In 1993, an article by Karl Schulte entitled 'Die Sintflut' ('The Flood') – a word that often has Biblical undertones in German²⁸⁹ – for *Die Zeit* vividly brought home the full horrors of the raid to a broad audience. The article explicitly described the immense level of damage inflicted by the flood, and made for distressing reading. He reported the terrible cacophony of 'mankind and animals crying in *'Todesangst'* ('mortal agony'); the fact that the rescuers had retrieved bodies hanging from the trees, some 'naked, their clothes torn from their bodies' by the force of the water; and he recalled how his mother, a nurse of the Red Cross with whom Schulte lived in Fröndenberg, came home several days after the catastrophe and was silent after witnessing the 'shattered and contorted bodies' of the *Blitzflut* victims being straightened out to make them look somewhat human again.²⁹⁰

Naturally, the British glorification of the raid does not sit well with some

²⁸⁷ 'Der Totentanz' ('Dance of the Dead') was the name of S.P.D. politician Hans-Jochen Vögel's speech, which he gave at the Kaiserhaus in Arnshausen to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the *Möhnekatastrophe*.

²⁸⁸ Euler, *The Dambuster Raid*, 9.

²⁸⁹ 'Sintflut, der'. *Duden*. Available online: <http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Sintflut> [Accessed 20/08/17].

²⁹⁰ K. Schulte, 'Die Sintflut', *Die Zeit*. 14 May 1993. <http://www.zeit.de/1993/20/die-sintflut> [Accessed 22/08/17].

Germans. Karl-Heinz Wilmes, the mayor of Günne, felt that ‘the film made of the attack was not necessary’²⁹¹, although his later comment that it ‘glorified a raid which did not succeed’²⁹² is questionable. Having grown up in Nazi Germany, Wolfgang Schnüller noted that he ‘can’t remember seeing a movie about the suffering of the German people during the bombings. But I remember seeing the movie about the “Dam Busters”. Allied airmen who busted the dam received a medal for drowning thousands of civilians but that was not shown in the award-winning movie.’²⁹³ Nevertheless, the commemoration of both British and German losses is certainly more pronounced in Germany than it is in Britain. Oliver Köhler, who runs the Sperrmauer Museum on the Dams raid in Edersee, was among those who called for George “Johnny” Johnson to receive a knighthood: he felt that without the Dambusters, ‘the war would have gone on for much longer’.²⁹⁴ The fact that a locally crowd-funded memorial to AJ-E ED927/G “E for Easy” was erected in 2013 on the spot of its crash site in Haldern, for instance, reflected the general belief that, in local historian and policeman Volker Schürmann’s words, ‘behind every victim there is a family.’²⁹⁵ Whilst the memory of the Dams raid in Germany is still painful, then, the locals have still endeavoured to remember all those involved.

This willingness to commemorate the Dambusters in Germany often stems

²⁹¹ Tweedie, ‘Dambusters raid survivors: “The memory will never leave us”’, *The Telegraph*.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ W. Schüller, *Memoirs of a German Boyhood: The Wehrmacht and the Australian Odyssey* (Gordon: Xlibris Publishing, 2012), 137.

²⁹⁴ BBC News, ‘German call to honour Dambuster George ‘Johnny’ Johnson’, *BBC News*. 07 March 2017. Available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-39179894> [Accessed 15/07/17].

²⁹⁵ J. McCann, ‘German village builds Dambusters memorial to honour British war heroes’, *Sunday Express*. 13 June 2015. Available online: <http://www.express.co.uk/news/history/584265/Germany-UK-war-Dambusters-memorial-heroes-fallen-soldiers-bombing> [Accessed 23/08/17].

from the belief that the raid represented a brave and courageous effort to bring a nefarious regime to its knees. Hans-Jochen Vögel, the politician from the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (S.P.D.)– responding to the British Ambassador Simon MacDonald’s speech during the 70th anniversary of the *Möhnekatastrophe* – reflected this by noting that the fault of the Dams raid lay ultimately with the ‘devilish German dictatorship [which] turned against its European neighbours and its own people’.²⁹⁶ He also encompassed a general air of reconciliation in his speech by reminding the audience of Hitler’s wish to eradicate British cities, likening the bombardment of Coventry to Dresden.²⁹⁷ MacDonald replied that ‘today, bombing a dam is forbidden with good reason’, and he was also careful to outline the appalling damage and loss suffered in the German communities that drowned below the *Blitzflut*: the deaths of German, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians and the R.A.F. aircrews.²⁹⁸ However, he was also careful to express the fact that it was carried out at a time where ‘[Britain] fought against one of the worst tyrannies of all time’, and was engaged in a ‘matter of life or death’.²⁹⁹ He concluded that the raid was going to be remembered differently in Britain and Germany, and that all memories and cultural interpretations ‘deserve to be told’.³⁰⁰ If so, the German memorialisation of CHASTISE should also be kept in mind as we turn back to the main question.

Memory & Commemoration of CHASTISE in Britain

In Britain, there has been a shift towards publicly commemorating both sides of the Dams raid and simultaneously celebrating its achievements. The raid received

²⁹⁶ Vögel, ‘*Der Totentanz des 17. Mai 1943*’, [Speech] (The Kaiserhaus, Arnsberg, 17 May 2013.)

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ S. MacDonald, ‘*Gedenkrede zum 70. Jahrestag der Möhnekatastrophe*’ [Speech] (The Kaiserhaus, Arnsberg, 17 May 2013.)

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

its most recent public boost during its 70th anniversary in 2013: given that the three remaining survivors were now all in their nineties, more emphasis was placed on the celebrations than the Ministry of Defence's tradition of commemorating the 75th anniversary.³⁰¹ Several interviews were conducted with the *Blitzflut* survivors by the BBC and the Telegraph that year. However, other newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* did not mention their deaths, instead choosing to focus on commemorative mishaps at home – 'Dambusters vs. 'El and Safety'³⁰² for the former, 'Hobbits hold up the Dambusters'³⁰³ for the latter. Nevertheless, the most evident example of both sides being commemorated has been through television. As Ashplant, Dawson and Roper have indicated, 'war commemoration [has been] transformed into a media event'³⁰⁴ on an unprecedented scale; it can now be found across the news, social media, television and radio in a way that links modern audiences with the presence of veterans and their memories. During the R.A.F. sunset ceremony broadcast from Scampton by the B.B.C. to commemorate the raid in 2013, Rev. Squadron Leader Alex Hobson's encouraged the attendees to remember 'all those who in the air, or on the ground, gave or lost their lives in this and other raids by Bomber Command in the struggle against tyranny.'³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ University of Huddersfield Research, *Prof Morris talks to Robert Owen, Official Historian of the 617 Squadron Aircrew Association*, 19 July 2013 [Video] Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIDZpLQ6Jtg&t=2s> [Accessed 21/08/17].

³⁰² R. Hardman, 'Dambusters v Elf 'n' Safety: On the 70th anniversary of their legendary raid, jobsworths have banned the war's bravest airmen - and the public - from an official fly-past honouring their courage', *Daily Mail*. Available online: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2323508/Dambusters-v-Elf-n-Safety-On-70th-anniversary-legendary-raid-jobsworths-banned-wars-bravest-airmen--public--official-fly-past-honouring-courage.html> [Accessed 15/08/17].

³⁰³ A. Helliker, 'Hobbits hold up the Dambusters', *Sunday Express*. 19 May 2013. Available online: <http://www.express.co.uk/comment/columnists/adam-helliker/400797/Hobbits-hold-up-the-Dambusters> [Accessed 20/08/17].

³⁰⁴ T. G. Ashplant et. al, 'The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration: Contexts, Structures and Dynamics', in T. G. Ashplant et. al (eds.), *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3- 86.

³⁰⁵ *RAF Scampton Sunset Ceremony - Dambusters 70*. [T.V. Programme] (BBC News, 2013).

There is, however, still a tangible aura that encircles the Dams raid with each anniversary in Britain. Once again, 617 Squadron could not resist several references to the legend during the 70th anniversary. The decorative Dambusters tailfins installed onto 617 Squadron aircraft, for instance, not only increased the size of the squadron's insignia depicting a broken dam and three lightning bolts, but also depicted a Tornado GR4 and a Lancaster Bomber side-by-side with the dates '2013' and '1943' written next to them.³⁰⁶ The airmen also forged a direct connection in 2016 when photographs of certain 617 Squadron personnel re-enacting wartime photographs of the Dambusters were distributed for the 73rd anniversary of the raid. Wing Commander Jon Butcher, for instance, was photographed in the exact same pose as that of Gibson in one of the latter's most iconic photographs posing with his plundered German life jacket.³⁰⁷ The images of the current personnel were even digitally edited to stand alongside the original Dambusters as young men.³⁰⁸ Upon being asked why the raid is still so popular in Britain today, Mary Stopes-Roe - the daughter of Barnes Wallis- attributed its enduring appeal to 'the skill, guts, spirit, persistence' demonstrated that is perhaps lacking in the current world.³⁰⁹ Indeed, their sacrifice does seem remarkable to a post-war world, and the continued interest is not surprising.

However, it can be argued that the Dams raid is also celebrated among present-day Britons because its sanitized presentation aligns with current perceptions of acceptable warfare. The firebombing of Dresden is still abhorred

³⁰⁶ R.A.F. Museum, *617 Sqn Dambusters 70th* [Photograph] 27 March 2013. Available online: <https://www.raf.mod.uk/raflossiemouth/gallery/617sqndambusters70th.cfm?start=13&viewmedia=18#pageContent> [Accessed 20/08/17].

³⁰⁷ Ministry of Defence, 'The Dambusters in 2016: from Lancaster to Lightning', *GOV UK*. 16 May 2016. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-dambusters-in-2016-from-lancaster-to-lightning> [Accessed 20/08/17].

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ University of Huddersfield Research, *Prof Morris talks to Mary Stopes-Roe, daughter of Barnes Wallis, inventor of the "bouncing bomb"*, 19 July 2013 [Video] Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTXvTXbBGJY&t=1s> [Accessed 21/08/17].

because of the sheer destruction it wreaked on refugees, women, children and injured servicemen. Though a 'war crime' in the post-war sense had not existed at the time, certain historians— most notably Donald Bloxham, Alexander McKee and Jörg Friedrich - have determined that Dresden's destruction was tantamount to a war crime for causing unprecedented suffering: thus applying international legislation retrospectively to a past event. Naturally, the Dams raid - which did not actively target civilians - was considered more in line with the acceptable conduct of war, and thus did not constitute a war crime. Conducting precision strikes with minimal civilian deaths is one of the prime concerns of the present-day British public. The use of drone airstrikes by the United States and Great Britain against ISIS in the ongoing civil war in Syria (2011—)for instance, is often subjected to public scrutiny over their accuracy. Whilst the victims of the *Blitzflut* were the heaviest hit so far during the strategic bombing offensive, the 1,294 casualties would soon be dwarfed by the 42,600 dead in Hamburg and the 25,000 dead at Dresden. Coupled with its precise nature, the raid thus appeared to be relatively merciful in terms of civilian deaths whilst having been conducted in a brave and memorable fashion.³¹⁰

Yet an additional protocol added to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 in 1977 deemed any attacks on dams, dykes and nuclear electrical generating stations to be illegal.³¹¹ This was the case 'even where these objects are military objectives...if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequent severe losses among the civilian population'.³¹² The casualty rate of

³¹⁰ M. Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 2008), 150.

³¹¹ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)*, Article 56:1. 8 June 1977. Available online: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=3376730EC D9DF7B1C12563CD0051DD37> [04/09/17].

³¹² Ibid.

1,294 victims at the Möhne and Eder dams would now be considered a clear breach of this protocol. This is not to claim that the Dams raid was a war crime, either then or now: the fact that the destruction of two legitimate industrial targets was an attempt to *save* lives by bringing the war to a premature end demonstrates this. Rather, this has been brought up to illustrate the selectiveness of British memory in exempting the Dams raid from legal retrospect due to its precision and heroics. It is interesting that the concept of retrospective legality is often brought up when analysing more controversial events – such as Operation GOMORRAH, when Hamburg was razed to the ground – but such a perspective is never applied to Operation CHASTISE. Indeed, the international condemnation of N.A.T.O.'s bombing of water resources during the Kosovo War (1998 -1999) illustrated how such an act is now considered deplorable. Professor Kader Asmal, for instance, then a Government minister for South Africa, declared it to be a war crime as 'reservoirs, dams, sewage systems and related resources should never be used like this'³¹³.

CHASTISE As Folklore in Contemporary British Culture

The continued fondness for the Dams raid in Britain lies within the overarching 'post-memory' of the Second World War. The legacy of the war is found at every turn in our popular culture, from museums, objects, ancestry sites, the sheer numbers of published works to personal interactions with surviving veterans or witnesses. Yet even for members of the public who do not necessarily deeply engage with the war's finer details, its memory has been kept alive in other ways.

³¹³ A. Kirby, 'Kosovo waterways bombing a 'war crime'', *BBC News*. 14 July 1999. Available online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/394326.stm> [Accessed 23/08/17].

From Spitfire beer to 'Keep Calm and Carry On' posters³¹⁴ - as Noakes and Pattinson have reminded us - to vintage 1940s weekends and battle re-enactments, the war's influence on British society is still keenly felt. The memory of CHASTISE in contemporary Britain has certainly received a boost from this: its influence can be seen in everything from Dambusters keyrings, clothing, fridge magnets to badges and introductory books in museum gift shops. Richard Morris has even pointed out that there have been 'Dambuster commemorative mugs, Royal Worcester plates [and] stamps', whilst 'Macallans distilled a limited edition Dambusters whisky; the Cheese Society sells Dambuster cheese; Amber Ales brew Dambuster IPA'.³¹⁵ Such homage paid to a historical event that most of these consumers did not experience, then, points to Connelly's assertion that many Britons do 'carry a peculiar and particular history of the Second World War with them'.³¹⁶

It is noticeable that wartime rhetoric often resurfaces in Britain in the face of national challenges, where it can emerge as a both rallying point and a sense of comfort depending on the situation. Noakes and Pattinson wrote of how the July 7/7 terror bombings in London (2005) appeared to evoke the famed 'Blitz spirit', with Sir Ian Blair - the Metropolitan Police Commander at the time - noting that 'if London can survive the Blitz, then it can survive four miserable events like this'.³¹⁷ Even in May 2017, the terrorist attack on the Manchester Arena at an Ariane

³¹⁴ L. Noakes & J. Pattinson, 'Introduction: 'Keep calm and carry on': The cultural memory of the Second World War in Britain', in L. Noakes & J. Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1 - 24.

³¹⁵ R. Morris, 'The legacy of the Dambusters', *History Extra*. 01 May 2013. Available online: <http://www.historyextra.com/article/premium/legacy-dambusters-WW2-bombing-raid> [Accessed 20/08/17].

³¹⁶ M. Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, 16.

³¹⁷ N.B.C., 'Londoners urged to 'carry on'', *NBC News*. 08 July 2005. Available online: http://www.nbcnews.com/id/8507605/ns/world_news-attacks_on_london/t/londoners-urged-carry/#.WbXfKciGNPY [Accessed 20/08/17].

Grande concert was described as having ‘invoked the Blitz spirit’ among the Mancunians.³¹⁸ *The Financial Times* even reminded its readers that Manchester ‘[had] been attacked before’: during the Manchester Blitz of December 1940, when German bombing raids had killed 684 people.³¹⁹ Such examples demonstrate that much as Britain may think it is moving on from the Second World War, it is all too tempting to hark back to its previous overcoming of adversity when reflecting on new tragedies. It shows, therefore, just how subliminal this rhetoric is, and thus it is inevitable that it still re-emerges in certain circumstances. As Noakes and Pattinson have pointed out, then, the references to Britain’s history in this respect illustrate the extent to which they have permeated the public consciousness by being continually evoked ‘even when the events being described bear little relation to the memories being mobilized.’³²⁰

There is one aspect of the raid’s mythology which has retained its popularity above all else: Eric Coates’ ‘Dambusters March’. As Stephen Fry admitted in his forward to Max Arthur’s oral history collection on CHASTISE, he is one of those people who cannot listen to it ‘without tears pricking my eyes’.³²¹ The stirring anthem lives on both through the R.A.F. airmen’s hymn and the church hymn ‘God is our strength and refuge’ with the raid quite possibly having inspired some of the words (‘swirling floods are raging’).³²² The song also continues to prove a popular hit with the B.B.C.’s annual ‘Party in the Park’, orchestral shows and even rock concerts, and most notably featured in the London 2012 Olympics

³¹⁸ B. Groom, ‘City of swagger fights back against hate with ‘spirit of Manchester’, *Financial Times*. 24 May 2017. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/1f6bc01c-40ce-11e7-82b6-896b95f30f58> [Accessed 20/08/17].

³¹⁹ Noakes & Pattinson, ‘Introduction: ‘Keep calm and carry on’, 1 – 24.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ S. Fry, ‘Foreword’, in M. Arthur, *Dambusters: A Landmark Oral History* (London: Virgin Books, 2008), ix – xi.

³²² ‘RAF Hymns: The Airman’s Hymn’, *Royal Air Force*. Available online: <https://www.raf.mod.uk/chaplains/liturgicalresources/rafhymns.cfm> [Accessed 18/08/17].

opening ceremony. It began playing during the video package where two of the most iconic British figures, Queen Elizabeth II and the fictional spy James Bond - played by Daniel Craig- took off in a Union Flag-emblazoned helicopter. Flying over London towards the Olympic Stadium, the theme song kept blaring as they were smiled and waved at by an animated version of Churchill's statue in Parliament Square. This association of the Dambusters theme with such iconic British legends, then, illustrated again the national fondness which surrounds it, and reinforced a strong message that it was to be celebrated as such alongside other important figures and events of history.

The Dams Raid Among the Young

Yet it appears that among younger British generations, there is perhaps not always the same widespread reverence for the Dams raid that their parents and grandparents harboured. A rather gauche and irreverent parody of the Dambusters raid, for instance, was performed by several young British comedians for the 2017 series of Comedy Central's cult TV show 'Drunk History'.³²³ Much of the raid's recognizability now comes through video games, from Hyperspace's *The Dambusters App* (2012) – an iPhone game that gives the player 19 attempts to breach the dams – to the fictional side-mission included in the best-selling computer game *Call of Duty* (2003), which pits the player in hand-to-hand combat during a second attempt to 'blow up' the Eder dam in order to secure a 'Dambusters' award.' It is fascinating, though, that the depiction of the Germans in this video game is not ultra-flattering: the Eder dam is absolutely swathed in swastika banners despite not having had such banners everywhere when it was attacked, and the call over the tannoy system in German for the guards to '*Nimm*

³²³ 'Episode 3', *Drunk History*. Series 3, Episode 1. Directed by T. McKay [T.V. Programme] (Comedy Central, 2017).

keine Gefangenen! ('take no prisoners!') conflates the *Heer* (army) with the typical Nazi stereotype of brutality and lack of mercy. The game is American in origin, but nevertheless remained a strong seller in the U.K. and thus its influence was still considerable on this country's young generations; the Dams raid, after all, would not have necessarily appealed to an American audience.

There are, however, more traditional forms of entertainment inspired by CHASTISE. A popular tactical board game entitled *Enemy Coast Ahead: The Dambuster Raid* (2015) requires players to navigate a 22" by 34" map with counters representing everything from the Lancasters, their flight crews and attacks waves to even the status of the aircraft (see Appendix E).³²⁴ Nevertheless, the strongly military based game still makes room for the more personal touches, where even the death of Gibson's dog is a variable factor on the 'morale' of each player's crews.³²⁵ This illustrates how painstaking attention to the raid has still been paid in present-day British popular culture to the Dams raid. Indeed, CHASTISE does still crop up frequently within the arts and literature of British culture. Dick King-Smith's *the Fox Busters* (1978), which, as Ramsden has written, 'ingeniously reworked the 1943 story with dive-bombing female super-chickens with low-level flying and a miracle bomb'³²⁶, was adapted into a British-American T.V. cartoon in 1999. The resulting series certainly did not shy away from its references to CHASTISE: the chickens made the noise of heavy bomber engines when flying and the sound of machine gun fire when attacking the foxes, pelting them with bouncing eggs.³²⁷ One episode was even entitled 'Where Egos Dare': a

³²⁴ P. Baker, 'Enemy Coast Ahead – Boardgame Review', *Armchair General*. 09 February 2015. Available online: <http://www.armchairgeneral.com/enemy-coast-ahead-boardgame-review.htm> [Accessed 22/08/17].

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ramsden, *The Dambusters: A British Film Guide*, 5.

³²⁷ *The Foxbusters*. Directed by J. Doyle. [T.V. Programme]. (ITV: 1999).

nod to the popular 1968 British war film *Where Eagles Dare*, based on Alastair Maclean's novel of the same name, which depicts a fictional daring Allied parachuting raid to release a Nazi-captured U.S. General.³²⁸

British Historiography: Filling the Gaps

Given that the Dams raid remains entrenched within the British psyche, then, it is not surprising that most scholars who gravitate towards it are from this island. There have been notable contributions to its English-language historiography by the ex-U.S. colonel Doug Dildy and Germany's Helmuth Euler and Ralf Blank, yet the fact that the field is dominated by British scholars illustrates the immense hold that the CHASTISE legend has over its native historians. Indeed, many British historians have expressed their personal fondness and identification with the raid: James Holland, when discussing the 1955 film, noted how it was 'a jolly good film too...I love everything about it'.³²⁹ Simon Winder recalled 'a vivid memory of one happy summer re-enacting the RAF's epic Dam Busters raid in our living room', and claimed every British male child, up until the early 1970s, were surrounded by 'every game, every conversation, every television programme seemed in some way to spring from the War'.³³⁰ As mentioned earlier, Jonathan Falconer attributed his 'passion for the exploits of Guy Gibson and his dam busters' to Brickhill's narrative history. It is inevitable that our own reasons for being drawn to studying this aspect of history is inherent in our work: historians, after all, are the ones who are sat trawling through archives and spending hours editing their work, and so it is natural that they will tackle an issue that stimulates both themselves and their

³²⁸ 'Where Eagles Dare', *The Foxbusters*, Series 1, Episode 2 [T.V. Programme]. (ITV, 16 September 1999).

³²⁹ University of Huddersfield Research, *James Holland: 'The Dams Raid – A Reassessment'*, 26 July 2013 [Video] Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIpYmw1sRJu> [Accessed 21/08/17].

³³⁰ S. Winder, *The Man Who Saved Britain* (London: Picador, 2006), 36.

audience. It is also such passion which has driven the excellent research into the raid's military intricacies.

As Gabrielle M. Spiegel puts it, however, 'the writing of history cannot be entirely divorced from the psychology of individual historians'³³¹: when such historians' interests negatively affect which aspects are studied and which are ignored, it can be problematic. It appears that the story of CHASTISE has perhaps become a victim of this in that so much of its historiography has, as the ex-U.S. Air Force colonel Doug Dildy has written, 'lavishly expound[ed] on the militarily insignificant'.³³² To date, no extensive cultural or social history exists on the legacy of the Dams raid, despite its ripples still being felt so keenly in our society. This, in turn, has led to the chronic understudy of several fascinating post-war developments related to CHASTISE, despite the relevant files languishing in our national archives. The first concerns an official investigation into the serious allegation that some of the Dambusters missing after the Möhne dam raid had been murdered on the orders of the *Kreisleiter* (district leader) of Mulheim.³³³ Resulting from the Dulag Luft war trials at Wuppertal, where an American officer had testified that a German had informed him of this war crime, the Air Ministry wrote to the War Crimes Group (North West Europe) on 3 November 1947. It asked for clarity on this rumour as 'some of the relatives of the five aircrews detailed in our reply have seen in the press a report of the statement...and are anxious to know more'.³³⁴

³³¹ G. M. Spiegel, 'Revising the Past / Revisiting the Present: How Change Happens in Historiography', in *History and Theory*, Issue 46: Revision in History, 46:4 (December 2007), 1-19.

³³² Dildy, *Dambusters: Operation CHASTISE, 1943*, loc. 41.

³³³ WO 309/1988. 'Alleged murder of four British airmen, Mulheim (Möhne Dam raid), Germany, 16 - 17 May 1943', British Army of the Rhein War Crimes Group, 01 February 1946 - 30 November 1947. T.N.A., Kew.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

In addition to the testimony of the American, Captain John Whitney, it was also noted in a letter from 18 April 1946 that the investigation had initially been undertaken by Major T.P.A. Davies in the previous December 'as a result of information contained in captured enemy documents'.³³⁵ However, the United States Army could not trace a Captain John Whitney and the War Crimes Group Legal Section later confirmed that the alleged incident had been mixed up with the murder of four unidentified Allied airmen who had attacked the Krembs barrage between 7 – 9 October 1944.³³⁶ Nevertheless, this case is important in illustrating the complexity of the raid's repercussions: this could have signified another startling quirk to the Dams raid mythology had the allegations not been disproved. The other ignored development is Barnes Wallis' post-war patent dispute with the Ministry of Supply over UPKEEP and HIGHBALL. It is often reported that Wallis was awarded £10,000 in 1951 by the Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors for his wartime inventions. The frequent claim that he was simply 'awarded' the money, however, implies that a panel scrambled to award Wallis: in reality, he had to submit the claim himself. He initially filed his application on 1 March 1950 for a Shortened Procedure: a process designed as 'a simple and expeditious means of bringing referred claims to a hearing before the Commission'; the statement was only required to be brief and 'provide a summary of the material facts'.³³⁷

That little attention has been paid to Wallis' struggle is odd, given that CHASTISE mythology has often favoured the interpretation of the scientist being locked in a battle with bureaucracy. Multiple extensions were needed to reach a decision: on 22 February 1951, nearly a year later, S. W. Slaughter wrote on

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ AVIA 53/627. 'B. N. Wallis – Disputed Claim Submitted To Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors', 1950 – 1951. 6/c CLAIMS/217. T.N.A., Kew.

behalf of the Principal Patents & Awards Officer to Wallis to inform him that the claim 'should be dealt with as a Full Procedure case insofar as documents are concerned'.³³⁸ The hold-up mainly stemmed from the Ministry of Supply's protests at some of Wallis' comments, such as his claims that he had 'supplied all the technical data required for the production of the weapon'; that 'had [his] invention not been made [the dams] could not have been breached'; and that he had pressed on with developing his inventions 'even contrary to the wishes of [his] own Directors'.³³⁹ The Ministry, however, denied that 'the Claimant was ever seriously discouraged'³⁴⁰, but this would have arguably bolstered Wallis' conviction that the authorities worked actively against him. Yet among the Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors, Wallis' case was given top priority. A Mr. W. W. Hackett, who had earlier submitted a claim for Sten Gun barrels³⁴¹, had his claim suspended over a final decision 'until the claim by Mr. B. N. Wallis has been heard.'³⁴² This illustrated, again, that whilst there were objections to Wallis' claims, sufficient support was in place for his wishes to be realised.

CHASTISE: Academic vs. Popular Perceptions

In a seemingly well-thumbed topic, then, how have so many startling repercussions of the raid – from Fraser's interrogation and the war crime rumours, to Wallis' patent dispute and a plethora of cultural sources - gone largely unmentioned in Britain? One possibility is that the superfluous historiography of the raid has given the impression that the topic has already been 'done-to-death'.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors, *Use of Inventions and Designs by Government Departments: Compendium of the Principles and Procedure adopted by the 1946 Royal Commission in assessing compensation and making awards* (London: H.M.S.O., 1957). Available online: https://archive.org/stream/op1265894-1001/op1265894-1001_djvu.txt [Accessed 10/08/17].

³⁴² AVIA 53/627. 'B. N. Wallis – Disputed Claim Submitted To Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors', 1950 – 1951.

Yet certain academics continued to devise fascinating new insights into the Dams raid during the 2000s. Charles S. Cockell, for instance, offered a refreshing and interdisciplinary interpretation in his journal article 'Science and Scientific Legacy of Operation CHASTISE' (2002). He separated the technological requirements of the raid into seven 'problems' that needed to be solved – the weapon, the aircraft, the drop height, the drop distance, night flying, communications and human factors – and thus gave a more specialised account of scientific innovation regarding the raid.³⁴³ He discussed, for instance, the Squadron's Medical Officer's trialling of Cloretone on the crew of ED937 for the men of 617 Squadron's airsickness – even if most did not take it!³⁴⁴ Richard Morris and Robert Owen, too, have worked hard to shine the historiographical spotlight onto the raid's lesser-considered factors, such as the role of reconnaissance and communications: Owen's observation that that the aircraft of Gibson and his deputy leader most likely contained duplicate V.H.F. radio sets in case communication was lost – and that appropriate codewords were in place to overcome this - bestows another dimension of meticulousness and remarkability to the operation.³⁴⁵

Unfortunately, certain aspects of CHASTISE long remained uncovered because these niche topics do not reflect public demand. As Peter Gray has pointed out, publishers tend to 'jump on anniversary bandwagons such as the Battle of Britain, the Somme and individual raids such as the Dambusters'.³⁴⁶ A few academic historians have condemned this commercial interest, with Patrick Joyce

³⁴³ C. Cockell, 'The science and scientific legacy of Operation Chastise', *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, Vol. 27, Iss. 4. (2004) Available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/030801802225005734> [Accessed 24/05/2017], 278 – 286.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ R. Morris & R. Owen, *Breaching the German Dams: Flying Into History* (London: Newsdesk Communications, 2008), 32.

³⁴⁶ Gray, *Air Warfare: History, Theory and Practice*, 7.

arguing that scholars should defy 'the market power of the mass, capitalist market'.³⁴⁷ It can be argued that this approach stifles new research: most authors and their publishers, after all, know that playing the 'classic' hits is what sells. This is particularly true for popular historians, who rely more heavily on publishing best-sellers to make a living. However, the increased sensitivity required by popular and T.V. historians in gauging their audience's interests has arguably meant that many of these historians engage with their audience in a way that their 'ivory-tower' counterparts sometimes do not. De Groot, for instance, has noted that 'how a society consumes its history is crucial to the understanding of contemporary popular culture'.³⁴⁸ Though Professor Richard Overy, Dr. Peter Caddick-Adams and Professor Eric Grove have all passed comment on the raid, the fact that its most thorough and authoritative accounts have been provided by non-professional historians - such as Alan W. Cooper, Martin Bowman, Kevin Wilson, John Nichol and naturally Holland - demonstrates a unique sense of public awareness of and interest in the raid's intricacies which does not rely on academics to tell the story.

Nevertheless, as Peter Gray pointed out, military studies by journalistic or T.V. historians are 'not always to the highest academic standards'.³⁴⁹ Indeed, there is a discernible preference for the raid's wartime mythology among popular historians than their academic counterparts. As noted earlier, Holland claimed that any attempt to critique the significance of CHASTISE is 'absolute nonsense of the first order'. Dan Snow, one of the most prominent figures during the 70th anniversary commemorations of the raid, claimed that the Dams raid 'did not bring

³⁴⁷ J. De Groot, *Consuming history: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture* (London: Routledge, 2016), 2.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Gray, *Air Warfare: History, Theory and Practice*, 6.

German war production to a permanent halt, but nobody had expected it to'. Whilst it is true that there was some scepticism shown about whether the effects of the raid would either materialise quickly, there was an impassioned belief among certain individuals that the raid would at least shorten the war considerably. Lieutenant Colonel Charles Wallis, received a letter from a War Office official that embraced his brother's plan to drop a ten-ton bomb as 'an attractive way of shortening the war'.³⁵⁰ When 5 Group reported the raid to its airmen, a poem published in the wake of the Dams raid even rallied the R.A.F. - the 'trustees for the Allies' - to press on 'in this final phase'³⁵¹, whilst the Daily Mail even called on Britain to 'END THE WAR SWIFTLY' in the main headline of its 20 May 1943 edition following the raid.³⁵² This demonstrates, then, how Snow's assessment seemingly obscured some of the contemporary hopes for the raid that fell short.

Another area where this lack of academic rigour becomes problematic is in the tendency for such popular works to engage superficially with the arguments of their fellow researchers. The issue with *CHASTISE* is that it appears so personal to every British scholar that they struggle to interact with differing interpretations. This means that the casual reader of the subject is not exposed to strands of alternative thought on the matter; or, if they are, such arguments are not sufficiently analysed by the author to prove that their own interpretation is more valid. Holland's claim that there had been only 'two works in the past thirty years', for instance, demonstrates this perfectly. Whilst it was arguably not in the interests of his commercial book on the Dams raid – produced as a companion to the documentary 'Dam Busters: The Race to Smash the Dams' (2011) – to wade deeply

³⁵⁰ Sweetman, *Epic or Myth*, 25.

³⁵¹ AIR 14/2088. '5 Group News', No. 10. May, 1943.

³⁵² Daily Mail, 'End the War Swiftly', *Daily Mail*. 20 May 1943. The B.N.A., London.

into the historiography, for him to not specify which works on CHASTISE he considered the most significant demonstrates a lack of academic precision. This blunts the full impact of his assertions within what is otherwise a stimulating and well-researched book. Sweetman, on the other hand, wrote the first major chronicle in the 1980s before much of the raid's historiography existed; yet he was careful to outline expert opinions of the time, both from historical scholars such as Hans Rumpf and from academic scientists, journalists and German engineering experts such as Walter Rohland and Otto Kirschmer.

Brexit & Second World War Rhetoric: The Dam Busters Motif

Yet CHASTISE's memory has not only been invoked within the cultural and social sphere of British society: its instant recognizability has rendered it ideal for being used in British politics as well. Such references have come from across the political spectrum, with the *Daily Telegraph* creating a satirical cartoon featuring the Dams raid which parodied the former Prime Minister David Cameron's U-turn over boosting the defence budget in February 2013.³⁵³ Entitled 'The Bouncing Cheque', given that his promise appeared to keep skipping over the heads of the Armed Forces, it depicted a Lancaster bomber with the aircraft recognition number 'No. 10 Squadron' – as a reference to 10 Downing Street – and showed the aircraft dropping a 'bouncing bomb' over a dam at night-time with a note tied around it: 'Please pay the Armed Forces, Signed David Cameron'.³⁵⁴ In 2014, Paul Thomas also drew a Dambusters-themed cartoon, 'Dambusters 2014...', which depicted a Lancaster bomber emblazoned with the word 'UKIP' – the United Kingdom

³⁵³ Blowers, 'The Bouncing Cheque', *The Telegraph*. 01 February 2013. Available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/cartoon/9978495/February-2013.html?image=26> [Accessed 09/08/17].

³⁵⁴ P. Thomas, 'Dambusters 2014...', *The Daily Express*. 2014. Available online: <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/65/c5/b2/65c5b20dbd8088c9bebc91f7f6325674--more.jpg> [Accessed 09/08/17].

Independence Party– flying towards the European Union (E.U.)’s headquarters and delivering a bouncing bomb to the heart of it.³⁵⁵ This image, produced a year before the 2015 General Election, demonstrated how the story of CHASTISE had been taken up by right-wing political voters to signify the alternative future that UKIP could deliver: the willingness to ‘stand up’ against the E.U., using a motif so quintessentially British as the Dams raid to act as a metaphor for the political party’s ambitions.

With the emergence of the ‘in-out’ Brexit referendum in 2016 - which asked Britons whether they wished to remain a member of or leave the E.U. - interest in lessons from the Second World War particularly spiked on both sides of the debate. Such historical considerations were expressed early on by public figures, whether they were raised as a warning against leaving Europe or to demonstrate Britain’s past resiliency and resourcefulness when alone. Both the Leave and Remain campaigns equally raised awareness of the Second World War, though from a different angle, by emphasising the pleas of its veterans to either leave or remain depending on their personal viewpoint. Nevertheless, some Leave voters illustrated a greater tendency to evoke Britain’s wartime persona than their Remain counterparts: the economist Roger Bootle describing Brexit as ‘the Great Escape’³⁵⁶, or the Conservative MP Penny Mordaunt’s claim that ‘Britain [also] stood alone in 1940 after the defeat at Dunkirk’, reflect this.³⁵⁷ Moreover, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, echoed Britain’s

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ T. Colson, ‘Roger Bootle: Leaving the EU is a ‘Great Escape’ for the economy’, *Business Insider*. 09 March 2017. Available online: <http://uk.businessinsider.com/bootle-brexit-is-the-great-escape-the-uk-will-do-extremely-well-2017-3> [Accessed 14/08/17].

³⁵⁷ P. Mordaunt, ‘The spirit of Dunkirk will see us thrive outside the EU’, *The Telegraph*. 25 February 2016. Available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/eureferendum/12173650/The-spirit-of-Dunkirk-will-see-us-thrive-outside-the-EU.html> [Accessed 14/08/17].

perceived tenacity by claiming that '[if] our civil service can cope with World War Two...they can easily cope with this'.³⁵⁸ This sense of British – and, it must be said, predominantly English – nationalism has been known to draw upon the embers of the Empire and of national wartime legends in order to illustrate the country's ability to adapt to unforeseen and difficult circumstances.³⁵⁹

Nevertheless, there was also a negative association with wartime stories such as the Dambusters among some Remainers, as the evocation of wartime rhetoric by the Leave voters was considered reductive and myopically patriotic. The editor of the *Financial Times*, Robert Schrimmsley, claimed after the Brexit vote that 'too many voters were swept along by nostalgists who dream of going back to the 1950s and walk home at night humming the theme to *The Dam Busters*'³⁶⁰: illustrating disgruntlement against the invoking of the war's spirit in a present-day discussion. In an article for *The New Statesman*, the political journalist John Elledge claimed that the post-war rhetoric regarding the conflict 'didn't really seem to affect contemporary politics' in the past; arguing that whilst the nation's fixation on the war was 'embarrassing', it had also been 'irrelevant' and so the country 'could cope' with Britain's reiteration of its wartime myths such as the Blitz spirit and the miracle of Dunkirk.³⁶¹ Conversely, the joint anti-Brexit letter compiled by multiple historians that urged voters to learn from the conflict signified an alternative use of the memory of the Second World War to drive home a political

³⁵⁸ K. McDonald, 'David Davis: We coped with World War Two, we can cope with Brexit', *I News*. 18 January 2017. Available online: <https://inews.co.uk/essentials/news/politics/david-davis-we-coped-with-world-war-two-we-can-cope-with-brexit/> [Accessed 14/08/17].

³⁵⁹ C. Calhoun, 'Populist, Nationalism and Brexit', in W. Outhwaite (ed.), *Brexit: Sociological Responses* (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 57-76.

³⁶⁰ R. Schrimmsley, 'Brexit: remains of the day', *Financial Times*. 01 July 2016. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/772b0ba8-3e47-11e6-9f2c-36b487ebd80a> [Accessed 14/08/17].

³⁶¹ J. Elledge, 'Britain has built a national myth on winning the Second World War, but it's distorting our politics', *New Statesman*. 18 August 2017. Available online: http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/brexit/2017/08/britain-has-built-national-myth-winning-second-world-war-it-s-distorting-our?page=19&utm_referrer=PANTHEON_STRIPPED&qt-trending=1 [Accessed 05/09/17].

point. Both the Brexiteers' and Remainers' evocation of the war's legacy illustrated just how engrained the memory of this war remains in this country in that it still affects the shaping of the nation, nearly eighty years after its outbreak. The ghost of the war for Britain, then, has still not been exorcised; and, judging by its frequent re-emergence during Brexit, neither has the spirit of CHASTISE.

Conclusion

This thesis was conceived after the author experienced a highly surreal moment when stood atop the Möhne dam in the summer of 2014. Having just inspected the German war memorial on the left-hand side of the dam, our British battlefields tour group had shuffled over to the middle of its vast wall. The tour guide encouraged us to visualise how Gibson and his men must have approached their target, leaving the group wondering how on Earth they could have swooped so low in the moonlight to attack it. We soaked in the magnificent view in broad daylight, the water dotted with sailors and their boats, and could not quite believe that so much havoc and destruction had been wreaked here. Suddenly, the first rousing notes of a very familiar song burst out- ‘da, da, de da dah lah lah dah!’ — and my father and I turned, partially in shock, towards an elderly British couple from our group. They had taken out a small, portable music device and were now nodding their heads along to Eric Coates’ ‘Dambusters March’. Embarrassed at their brassiness, we tried to distance ourselves from them for fear of offending the German locals. Yet this bizarre experience inspired this dissertation because it illustrated just how strongly the story of CHASTISE grips certain Britons to this day.

However, as this dissertation has strived to demonstrate, the wartime mythology of the Dams raid – from its glamorisation and distortion of its British protagonists, to its downplaying of its ugly repercussions in the Reich – persists in present-day Britain. It is possible that the advent of popular historians and military enthusiasts has contributed to the perpetuation of this, although these scholars certainly must be credited with having both revived and sustained the public’s interest in Operation CHASTISE. Whilst its few academic scholars have done an admirable job of illustrating how such a dog-eared topic still has plenty of life left

in it, the fact that one still needs to redress CHASTISE's wartime mythology in the new millennium is testimony to its entrenchment in British society. It does appear, however, that there has been a slight shift away from celebrating the raid as if it were an achievement experienced 'first-hand' by generations who were not there. The Dams raid now appears to represent an opportunity of second-hand nostalgia rather than a shining example to follow, as it was for the generation raised with Brickhill and the film. This can be seen in how the German perspective is, overall, now more widely considered alongside the British interpretation, though it still receives less coverage.

In the past, it could have been said that it was not truly necessary for British historians to unpick the cosier wartime myths from the fabric of society. Mark Connelly, for instance, chose to not undermine the myth of the Blitz in *We Can Take It!: Britain in the Second World War* (2004) because 'it is too deeply implanted into the hearts and minds of the British people to do that'.³⁶² Yet if such Second World War rhetoric wields the power after nearly eighty years to contribute, to some degree, to momentous political decisions like Brexit, then it could be argued that for historians to not be explicit enough in presenting two 'versions' of the past – the contemporary myth and the retrospective reality – is to actually dismiss what is commonly seen as the entire purpose of the historical study: to prepare for the future by learning from the past. As this study has intended to illustrate, not standing firm in redressing the wartime and post-war mythology of even the most popular historical events can be damaging to many parties. Certain Dambusters themselves, for instance, were irked by false accusations regarding their conduct of

³⁶² Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, 1

the raid; the stories of the *Blitzflut* victims were long obscured from history; and entire personalities of prominent figures were worryingly manipulated.

In such a public and influential historiographical topic like CHASTISE, then, its practitioners cannot afford to always hone in on minute details that personally interest them at the expense of the bigger picture. This practice has arguably repressed new lines of enquiry into the Dams raid by enforcing 'standard' and commercial areas of historical research which do not give its historians much chance to wander off the beaten track; whilst all scholars do need a solid foundation in the subject they are studying, it is often down the lesser-travelled roads that truly unique and stimulating research will be found. As Noble Frankland once wrote, 'historians who repeat each other give the profession a bad name and they waste the world's timber resources and the time of their readers'.³⁶³ Simply reshaping the same content in different ways comes with two perils: that future historians may become complacent with what has been done on a well-thumbed topic, and that the memory of CHASTISE and all those affected will fade into obscurity as a result. Prospective historians considering tackling the Dams raid, then, should be aware of the national fondness surrounding it in this country, but they should not be deterred by it: redressing the mythology of Operation CHASTISE respectfully and reasonably should be viewed as simply another way of paying homage to the historical importance and legacy of the Dambusters.

³⁶³ Frankland, *History at War*, 8.

Appendices

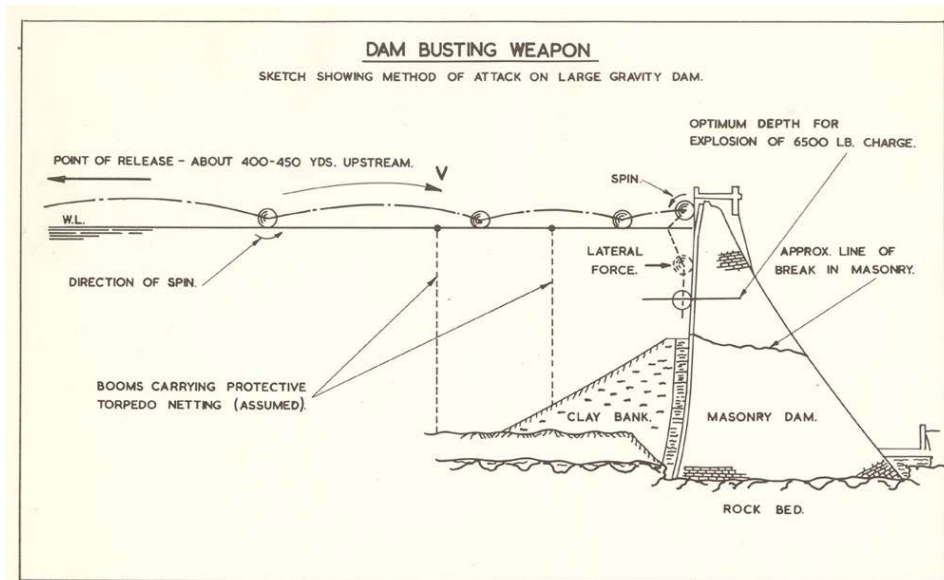
Appendix A

Schalber, *Zerstörte Möhnetalsperre ('Destroyed Möhne Dam')*, May 1943. Bundesarchiv, Picture 101I-637-4192-20 [Photograph].



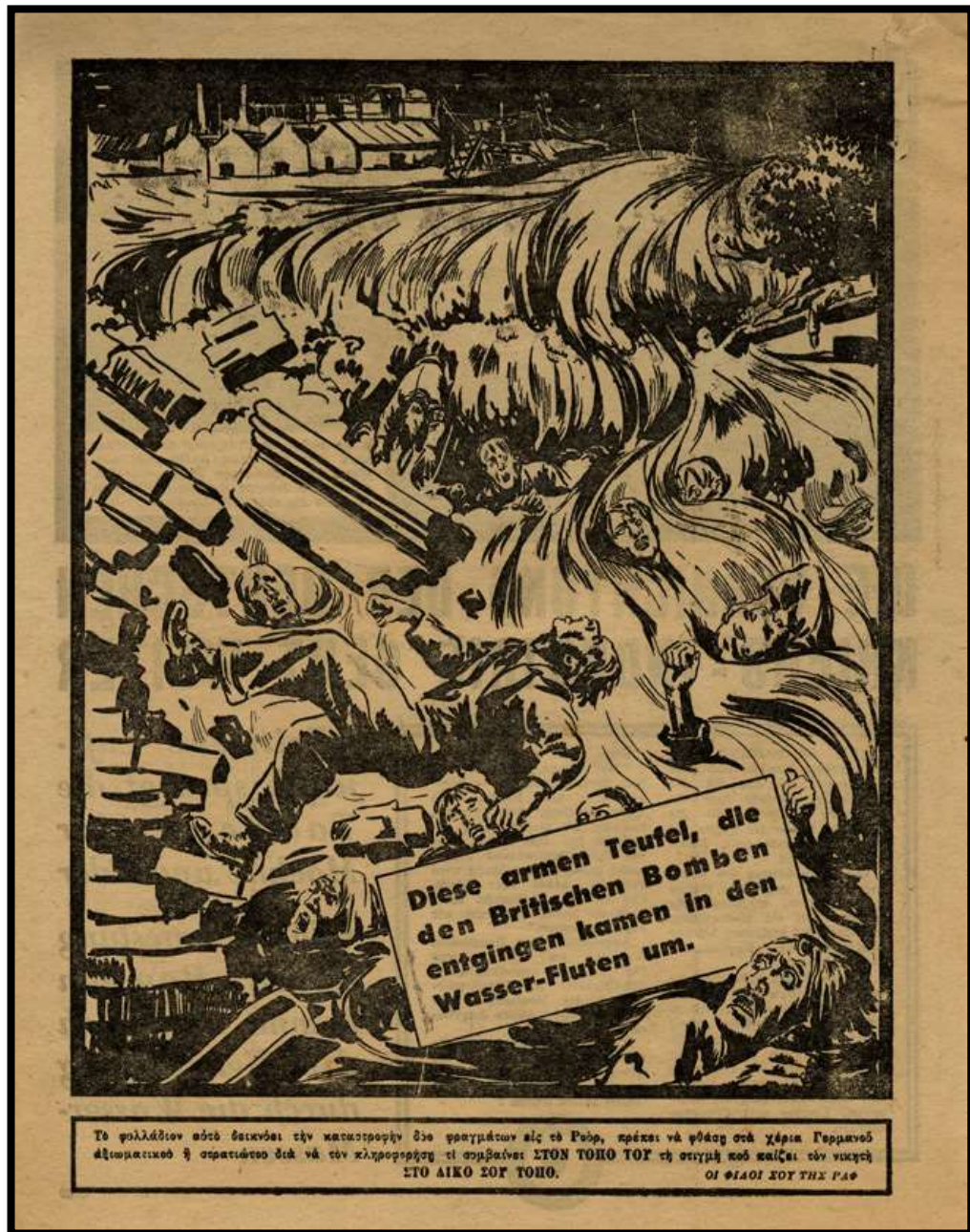
Appendix B

B3255. *Dam Busting Weapon* [Diagram/Photograph]. The R.A.F. Museum, Hendon.



Appendix C

Allied Force Headquarters (A.F.H.Q.)/ Psychological Warfare Branch (P.W.B.), G/20, *Die Vernichtung der deutsche Kriegsindustrie geht weiter (The Destruction of the German War Industry Goes On, Dams Raid)*, 1943. PsyWar Archive. Available online: https://www.psywar.org/product_PWBAFHQG020.php [Accessed 10/08/17].



Appendix D

V. Taylor, 2015. *Möhne Dam Memorial*, Möhnesee [Photograph].



Appendix E

P. S. Baker, *Enemy Coast Ahead: Board Game Review #2*. 09 February 2015 [Photograph]
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