

*Command Decision: Leadership Lessons from the Strategic Air
War Against Germany¹*

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The antifriction ball bearing, at first glance, seems like any other non-descript piece of machinery of the Industrial Age. Used in heavy manufacturing, the ball bearing is a small, spherical steel object— made with precision and housed inside another cylindrical object that gives it purpose. When used to manufacture armaments it becomes an integral part of a wartime economy. In World War II it was a key ingredient of the war effort of the German Third Reich. Heavy machinery depended on the ball bearing to reduce friction, wear and bind. Without the ball bearing, the manufacture of war materiel was nearly impossible. The ball bearing and the destruction of factories where it was produced became an obsession of the strategic bombing campaign of the 8th United States Army Air Force (USAAF) in the summer and fall of 1943. Out this terrible episode of the war, when thousands of airmen lost their lives, the lessons of the bombing campaign's Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) are significant. The leaders, events and decisions who influenced this intense and deadly episode of World War II remain relevant. Over seven decades since the war, yet the powerful lessons of leadership and command— mixed with human failing and the suffering of mankind, still make a compelling story.

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

The history of strategic bombing in World War II is well-documented and enshrined in academia and in countless volumes of research. It is also found in the unlikeliest of places, in a theatrical production performed in the New York theater—on Broadway— in 1947. The play, *Command Decision*² by William Wister Haines, is recognized as an important piece of post-war literature because it is an examination the decision making process involved with the strategic bombing campaign in the European Theater of Operations (ETO). Haines' contribution to literature brought forth a thoughtful and innovative approach to the study of the art and science of leadership and command. In a review of the play, *New York Times* theater critic, William Du Bois wrote, "The problem of command, the nerve-rearing job of decision, is the heart of the drama—and that story is ageless..."³ Although the play is fictional, Haines served in the war as an intelligence officer and planner in the 8th USAAF. Specifically, Haines served as a planner under Brig. Gen. Curtis Lemay, then an air division commander. Haines served forty-one months in the service and was discharged in 1945 with the rank of lieutenant colonel. He was awarded the Bronze Star and Legion of Merit for his service.⁴

Prior to World War II, Haines was a novelist and Hollywood screenplay writer before becoming a playwright. In presenting strategic bombing in a stage play, Haines enriched the anthology of post-war literature where war-time decision making was critically examined. Haines' first success as a writer came after he worked as an electric company lineman during the Great Depression. He chronicled his working class experiences in two books—*Slim* and *High Tension*. Haines knew how to tell a story, often taken from personal experience. Still, his works of fiction connected with audiences and critics, alike, because his style invoked a certain realism and served as biting social commentary on the time. His works, even though fiction, bring to life events that make

² This work was first published as a serialized book in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1946 and 1947. The film version was made in 1948. The book, film and play are nearly identical.

³ William Du Bois, "Unorthodoxies of William Wister Haines, Who Wrote 'Command Decision,' *New York Times*, November 2, 1947. Text-fiche.

⁴ "About The Author," *Slim: America's Best Known Lineman*, accessed March 21, 2014, <http://slimthelineman.com/about-the-author/> [accessed March 18, 2014].

the study of history enjoyable and less antiseptic. *Command Decision*, is an example of how Haines's animated a tedious, but important, subject—strategic bombing.

Strategic bombing in World War II is often studied in a narrow context—through a compilation of stories, or first-person narratives. Sy Bartlett's and Beirne Lay Jr.'s novel—later, film, *12 O'Clock High* is a captivating story of war-time leadership and is anything but dull. Similarly, but less dramatic, are the many memoirs, such as those written by Generals Curtis LeMay, Henry "Hap" Arnold and Ira Eaker. These personal narratives are unemotional and do not fully explore the controversy of 1943's CBO. Then, there is Haines' approach to events, in which he uses an allegorical technique to assert his point of view—in the form of a stage play. Haines' skill as a novelist shines through. The chain of events which comprised strategic bombing in the ETO in 1943, were made for the New York theater and brought to life in *Command Decision*. The play makes an otherwise moribund subject, full of statistics, grainy black and white photographs, foreign places and technical jargon, more relevant to the study of history. Moreover, it is a drama, where a human face is placed on the tragic circumstances in which hundreds of airmen, often lost their lives, in a single day. As a stage play, it is as enthralling as *Hamlet*, and as tragic as *Macbeth*. For this reason, Haines' approach to history is refreshingly honest. Real events, although fictionalized, are presented, in a dramatic fashion, so to capture the pathos of war. American theater patrons, perhaps used to war-time musicals and comedies, as a diversion from the war; were treated to the uncomfortable fact some decisions by the victorious 8th USAAF were flawed, rife with politics and, at times, incompetent. Undoubtedly, some playgoers squirmed in their seats during the heated and *in-your-face* exchanges, which depicted rare, behind the scenes nuts and bolts of military decision-making. Perhaps, others saw through the veil of fiction and could identify leading military and civilian figures of the day.

No matter the forum, historians are challenged with how to present events in an understandable manner. The presentation of dates, places, facts and outcomes are often lost on the reader, who might not visualize events such as the shock of Pearl Harbor or the tyranny of Nazi Germany. Only the most talented writers can bring historical events to life and keep a reader's interest. In contemporary times, historian David McCullough, comes to mind. Respectively, William Wister Haines, used his literary gifts to illuminate an important historical event and something that deeply affected him. His greatest

contribution to the study of history is the use of his talent, as a dramatist, to bring attention to an event which might, otherwise, be lost in volumes of unremarkable books or buried in a committee.

In 1943, the air campaign against Germany just commenced for the 8th USAAF. The 8th engaged in controversial daylight bombing by using precision targeting techniques. The United Kingdom's Royal Air Force (RAF) and its Prime Minister, Winston Churchill disliked the 8th's commander, Lt. Gen. Ira Eaker and his strategy of daylight bombing. Nevertheless, both countries had in common a desire to cripple the German war economy. A key component of German industry was aircraft production, namely the ball-bearing. Ball-bearing factories in Germany were located mainly in Schweinfurt. Other targets included heavy industry in Regensburg and Stuttgart. Neutral Sweden provided some production.

One of the darkest and bloodiest periods of the daylight bombing campaign for the 8th USAAF took place on 17 August 1943—the Schweinfurt-Regensburg mission (commonly referred to as Schweinfurt I). These attacks were the first of the deep penetration raids into Germany and quite risky. The risk was centered on the lack of a long-range fighter to protect the bomber force and follow it deep inside Germany. The results were disastrous. In all, sixty B-17s were lost and many more heavily damaged. Over 500 airmen were killed in action. Following Schweinfurt I, the 8th USAAF sought time to rebuild its combat power but still engage key targets in Germany. USAAF leadership decided to attack Stuttgart, which was even deeper inside Germany than either Schweinfurt or Regensburg. Again, heavy losses were sustained by the 8th and daylight bombing was in jeopardy. Political pressure began to mount in Washington and in the halls of the Pentagon.

As bad as the Schweinfurt I mission was, the Second Raid on Schweinfurt (Schweinfurt II) on 14 October 1943 was worse. "The results were catastrophic," wrote Yale University historian, William Emerson. "The Schweinfurt raid has become enshrined in Air Force history in the words of the surviving bomber crews applied to it — "Black Thursday." Sixty-five B-17s shot down or otherwise lost, seventeen bombers

returned to base as non-mission capable.⁵ Five complete aircrews lost — 590 Killed in Action and sixty-five taken as prisoner. Morale was at a low point in the 8th and many airmen were fatalistic about their survival. It became clear—8th USAAF could not suffer another “Black Thursday” and remain combat effective.

Within a week following Schweinfurt II the 8th USAAF halted unescorted deep attacks into Germany because of mounting losses and the impracticality of unescorted daylight bombing. “The USAAF leadership now recognized that air superiority was needed before daylight strategic bombing could take place.”⁶ As a result, a longer range fighter escort, the P-51 Mustang, was rushed to the ETO and daylight bombing resumed, in earnest, in early December 1943. It appeared a bitter and bloody chapter of the CBO was about to close, yet Germany remained defiant. USAAF leadership was re-shuffled with the concurrence of the Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was in preparations for the Allied invasion of France. In December of 1943, Lt. Gen. Eaker was reassigned to command the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces and was replaced by Maj. Gen. James “Jimmy” Doolittle. Doolittle changed strategies and made area bombing a priority over precision bombing. This change in leadership along with the Mustang fighter escort represented a turning point in the CBO and set the conditions to eventually aid in the defeat Germany.

Author Martin Caiden stoically remembered Schweinfurt II, “The battle fought on Black Thursday stands high in the history of American fighting men. It will be long remembered, like immortal struggles of Gettysburg, St. Mihiel and the Argonne, of Midway and the Bulge and Pork Chop Hill.”⁷ Caiden went to great lengths to tell the story from the points of view of B-17 crews in a narrative style, in *Black Thursday: The Story of the Schweinfurt Raid*. Moreover, Caiden’s meticulously researched account of Black Thursday is so dramatic and tragic in its telling, it poignantly reminds us history is not exclusive to textbooks, academic journals, or classroom lectures.

⁵ William R. Emerson, *Operation Point Blank: A Tale of Bombers and Fighters* (Colorado: U.S. Air Force Academy, 1962), p. 5.

⁶ Maj. Greg Grabow, “Schweinfurt Raids and the Pause in Daylight Strategic Bombing” [master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command & General Staff College, 2008], pp. 64-65.

⁷ Martin Caiden, *Black Thursday* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1960), p. 13.

In an earlier age, the poet and playwright William Shakespeare wrote his famous tragedy, *Julius Caesar* as a stage play to tell the story of political conspiracy set in the magnificence and decadence of ancient Rome. More recently, author Michael Shaara's seminal Civil War novel, *The Killer Angels*, is the story of the Battle of Gettysburg. Additionally, William Wister Haines tells the story of a modern day tragedy—the events of that fateful summer and fall of 1943, amidst death in the high altitude air over Germany. Clearly, Haines was inspired by many of the events of the time, for which he certainly had a front row seat. It is likely he witnessed many events which influenced his play and later, novel and film. Theater critic Du Bois wrote of Haines, "...from the moment he took off his uniform (shortly after V-J Day) he knew that he would not rest easily until it was down on paper."⁸

Most striking is the level of detail and authenticity throughout the play. Haines served nearly three years in the ETO and as a Du Bois noted, "in map-rooms, dark rooms—and many a command post not too dissimilar from that occupied by the character Gen. K.C. Dennis...[Haines] served as a staff officer with thirty brigadiers...he was called on to supply the facts, the hard, unbreakable figures on which any raid is based."⁹ Remarkable is Haines' thorough description of the setting for *Command Decision* which contains details consistent with someone who witnessed the event. In this excerpt, Haines describes the set with technical detail:

On right wall of alcove are three filing cabinets, one strap-locked and labeled: 'Top Secret.'...The Map is G.S.G.S. 1x 250,000, showing part of England, the Channel and North Sea and that part of Northwestern Europe roughly bounded by the 48th Parallel, North, and the 15th Meridian, East...¹⁰

Equally extraordinary is Haines' development of genuine characters and their dialogue. The interaction between characters is convincing and gripping in its realism. This is due, in part, to the fact the work which inspired *Command Decision* was written

⁸ Du Bois.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ William Wister Haines, Sr., *Command Decision*, (New York: Random House, 1946), pp. xi –xii.

during the war.¹¹ It comes as no surprise that Haines was outspoken—a no nonsense officer who disliked political meddling in the military execution of the bombing campaign. ¹² This accounts for the passion and authority which permeates the play.

Command Decision is firmly rooted in the dramatic and disastrous events surrounding 1943's CBO. The play offers keen insight into the difficulties of strategic military decision making. It also explores, among other things, topics such as leadership, mission command, morality, and the application of political pressure in pursuit of strategic objectives. Nearly 70 years later, in midst of another war, the play remains as relevant to contemporary society as it was to post-war America. Arguably, *Command Decision* is even more relevant to today's students of leadership and air power. We know more, today, about World War II than we did in 1947 and the lessons of leadership are timeless. Although Haines, Eaker, LeMay and men like them are long gone, their contributions to discussions about the complex nature of warfare are significant.

Although cliché—very often art imitates life. The profound loss of life in the air war undoubtedly influenced Haines. When deconstructed, the play's characters show a strong resemblance to key leaders of the time, particularly, Eaker and LeMay—Haines' disclaimer notwithstanding. The play is a combination of events and persons from August to October 1943. It takes place in the offices of the fictional 5th American Bombardment Division in England. Action takes place over the period of two days. The drama centers on people, events and places; especially, daylight precision bombing and the resulting heavy loss of life.

The play depicts the visit of a Congressional delegation, led by an antagonistic character, Congressman Arthur Malcom. The fictional Malcom is symbolic of organizational politics and external pressure heaped on the command. In the latter part of the play, the character Malcolm tests the patience and nerve of the protagonist, the character, Brig. Gen. K.C. "Casey" Dennis, by needling Dennis about losses. The Dennis

¹¹ In a telephone conversation with William Wister Haines, Jr. on March 6, 2014, Haines, Jr. said his father drafted the work that would become *Command Decision* while serving as an intelligence officer in the 8th USAAF.

¹² In a telephone conversation with William Wister Haines, Jr. on March 6, 2014, Haines, Jr. revealed biographical and personality details about his father.

character loosely resembles the often bigger-than-life Brig. Gen. Curtis LeMay, who was controversial in the 1960s as the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff. LeMay, nicknamed “Old Iron Ass” was tough, but respected by those who served with him.¹³ He personally, led many missions over Germany and was finally grounded as the air war became more dangerous. It is interesting to note that LeMay was eventually grounded during the CBO for administrative reasons, whereas, the character Dennis was grounded for medical reasons. In contrast, Eaker was possibly the inspiration for the character, Maj. Gen. Roland Kane. The character, Kane, strongly resembles Eaker. To that end, U.S. Army historian, Charles B. MacDonald wrote “Although it [*Command Decision*] is the story of a unique officer and a unique situation, it is apparently based on an officer known to the author...”¹⁴ In the play, Kane is Dennis’ superior. In his military career, Ira Eaker’s troubles are well documented. Eaker was a respected air tactician, but very wed to the doctrine of daylight precision bombing. At his losses mounted in 1943, Eaker openly worried about the failures of strategic bombing.¹⁵ Eventually, his fears caught up with him as setbacks in the campaign continued. Eaker reassigned in December 1943, just as the P-51 Mustang was brought into the ETO and the outlook for the Allies in the air war, brightened. Historians differ on whether Eaker was relieved or merely reassigned in the best interest of the war.¹⁶

From the beginning of the play, Haines is honest about the burden of command, morality and political posturing. Throughout the play he makes veiled references to the events of Black Thursday and other actual events. Early in the opening act, the character

¹³ James Parton, *Air Force Spoken Here: General Ira Eaker and the Command of the Air*, (Alabama: Air University Press, 2000), p. 235.

¹⁴ *Military Affairs* Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring, 1949) ,42-46 Published by: Society for Military History, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1982649> [accessed May 21, 2014].

¹⁵ Charles Griffith, *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing of World War II*, (Alabama: Air University Press, 1999), p. 132.

¹⁶ Martin Middlebrook, *The Schweinfurt-Regensburg Mission*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1992), pp. 314 – 315.

Brig. Gen. Dennis¹⁷ confronts a pilot (the character Capt. Jenks) who refuses to fly another mission and who faces a court martial.

DENNIS

Damn it, boy, don't you realize this is serious?

JENKS

I'm not going to get killed to make you a record. I'll tell the court so, too, and whole damned world.

DENNIS

What else will you tell them?

JENKS

That you lost forty bombers, four hundred men, by deliberately sending us beyond fighter cover yesterday. This morning, when we're entitled to a milk run, you order us further into Germany.

DENNIS

Who told you you were entitled to a milk run?

JENKS

You big boys think flag-fodder like us even read a calendar, don't you? Where do the Air Forces get those statistical records for sorties and tonnages that General Kane announces regularly? They get 'em on milk runs, over the Channel ports, the last three days of the month.¹⁸

With this dynamic opening Haines sets the tone for the play. He asserts his contempt for political grandstanding and the unnecessary risk of life. The reader cannot help to notice if Haines witnessed something similar to this and was, perhaps, sympathetic when he inserted the Capt. Jenks character into the play. It is difficult to say

¹⁷ The character, Brig. Gen. Dennis, is portrayed by Clark Gable in the film version and by Paul Kelly, on the theater stage.

¹⁸ Haines, Sr., pp. 18-19.

if this event was fact or fiction. It is unclear from history if any pilot or airman ever refused to fly missions, but it seems coincidental Haines included this incident in his play. A similar event was the plot of an episode of the 1966 U.S. fictional television series “12 O’Clock High.”¹⁹ The series, created by a “Black Thursday” B-17 pilot, Beirne Lay, Jr., featured an episode in which a B-17 pilot declines to fly a mission in which the chances of surviving are very low. All the while, the pilot resists pressure exerted from his superiors.²⁰ It is likely Haines was inspired to write along the same lines. Imagine for a moment, Haines, in his war time position as an intelligence staff officer, possibly a witness to a heated conversation involving a pilot who was not inclined to fly a “suicide mission.” Whether true or not, the scene in *Command Decision* raises thought-provoking moral questions of the necessity of executing perceived “suicide missions” versus the desire for self-preservation. This plotline is a pervasive theme throughout the play and underscores its importance as literature.

Similarly, the issue of long range fighter escorts for bombers was a hot topic following Schweinfurt II. The failure of the mission was partly attributed to the lack of a long range fighter escort for the B-17. The P-47 Thunderbolt, while greatly appreciated by crews, had a short range and usually had to return to base soon upon reaching the borders of France and the Benelux countries. As a result, B-17s and other aircraft flew without fighter escorts as they attacked targets in eastern France and throughout Germany. A B-17 crew member summed it up after the ill-fated Black Thursday mission, during the crew debrief. When asked by an intelligence officer for comments: “Yeah. (expletive deleted), give us fighters for escort!”²¹ The Luftwaffe was well aware of the limited range of the Thunderbolt and took advantage of the situation. Luftwaffe fighter aircraft attacked U.S. bombers with fierce intensity. Their withering aerial attacks against B-17s caused the 8th USAAF to culminate after Schweinfurt II. Daylight bombing was halted from October to December of 1943 as longer range P-51 Mustangs were rushed to

¹⁹ This U.S. television series was co-created by Bernie Lay, Jr., the screenwriter of the 1949 film of the same name, which was based on Lay’s 1948 book; also, of the same name.

²⁰ Internet Movie Database, “12 O’Clock High (TV Series), Twenty Fifth Mission (1966), Plot Summary, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0734488/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ov_pl [accessed March 10, 2014].

²¹ Caiden, p. 283.

England. Exacerbating the issue was the burgeoning Luftwaffe jet fighter development, which raised the possibility the Germans might attempt to achieve air superiority. In the context of the play, Haines addresses this issue in a frank exchange between characters Brig. Gen. Clifton Garnett, a Pentagon staff officer/political hack and Brig. Gen. Dennis; in Dennis' headquarters in England.

GARNETT

Of course our new Mustangs will be a great improvement.

DENNIS

This isn't an improvement, Cliff. This is a revolution.

GARNETT

Even, so when you get enough of our new Mustangs...

DENNIS

Can you arrange an armistice until we get 'em?

GARNETT

Casey, I've battled the United Chiefs for every bomber you've got. I've stuck my neck out to get you Mustangs to protect them. I've fought for this Air Corps just as hard as you have. Now, when will the German get these jets?²²

Haines took a dim view of political machinations. This short exchange in the play highlights the difficulties in getting necessary equipment to the front. The Garnett character is symbolic of Haines' scorn for military red tape and political operatives who often interfered with the war effort. The character Dennis' sarcasm summed up the frustration of those close to the fight. The Mustang was first developed in 1940. It was used by the RAF as early as 1941. Early results showed its engine did not do well at high altitudes, but it worked well in attacking distant targets in Norway. Unfortunately, the Mustang was secondary in importance to the U.S. based Air Material Command (AMC), who went forward in developing another long range fighter, the P-75. The P-75, initially, looked promising but ran into problems in testing. It was not be re-designed quickly

²² Haines, Sr., pp. 39-40.

enough to meet the critical need for the 8th USAAF. By this time, Mustangs were equipped with a second-generation engine. The race was on to get it into production. It was not until October 1943, approximately the same time as Black Thursday that AMC finally gave priority to the 8th USAAF to receive the fighters. The re-designed Mustang arrived in England in November 1943 and flew its first mission, escorting bombers on 1 December.²³ Another misstep that delayed the Mustang from getting to England was USAAF leadership's over-confidence in the B-17 as a self-defending aircraft. Eaker and many others like him hedged their bets on the heavily armed and armor clad and aptly named "Flying Fortress." The Schweinfurt-Regensburg raid (17 August 1943) and the arrival of the Mustang "signified the end of the self-defending bomber dream..."²⁴ It was also the end of Eaker in the 8th. He was re-assigned and the Mustang prevailed as a bomber escort in the ETO. Daylight bombing resumed, in earnest, in December 1943—this time under the command Doolittle. Doolittle took the 8th USAAF in a different direction. He came in with a "wider perspective...with less of the dedicated bomber man's outlook..."²⁵ Doolittle favored a different approach and won the support of Great Britain; whose leadership steadfastly remained opposed daylight bombing. In a twist of irony and contradiction, Eaker favored the first generation Mustang and sought its procurement, albeit too late to change the outcome of Black Thursday.

In the play, Haines does not directly address Eaker's bedrock belief in the B-17 as impregnable, nor his conviction to attack long range targets without fighter escorts. This is an idea Haines subtly addresses throughout the play. For example, when the characters Garnett and Dennis disagree over the doctrine of daylight bombing:

GARNETT

Your losses are the United Chiefs rap, Casey. Remember, half of them are Admirals. A very substantial body of opinion doesn't believe we can succeed with daylight precision bombardment over Germany.

²³ Alan J. Levine, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940 – 1945*, (Connecticut: Praeger Publications, 1992), pp. 112-113.

²⁴ Middlebrook, pp. 314 – 315

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

DENNIS

A very substantial body of opinion didn't believe the Wright Brothers could fly.

GARNETT

Casey, you know the United Chiefs are having a global re-allocation meeting, next Tuesday?

DENNIS (Shocked)

Global re-allocation, next Tuesday?

GARNETT

To review the whole record.

DENNIS

Are we getting cold feet on precision bombardment?

GARNETT

It's making a terrible drain on our best industrial capacity and the very cream of our manpower.

KANE

They were upset about our losses, even before this week.

DENNIS

Cliff, were you sent here to slow us up?

GARNETT

Not specifically; but our people felt I should warn you, because you might even scare the United Chiefs into abandoning our whole B-29 strategy in the Pacific.²⁶

While Haines does not overtly take sides in the daylight bombardment debate, he highlights the effects of national level policy discussions and political pressure on the ability of an operational level commander to perform his mission. On one hand, there is

²⁶ Haines, Sr., pp. 43-44.

the United Chiefs,²⁷ a policy making body in Washington D.C., with great influence over the President and Congress. In contrast, there is the operational commander, in close combat with the enemy, with another perspective, but with limited influence on national policy. Haines seems to ask—who is more credible—the United Chiefs or the pilots/crew/commanders who have to face the Luftwaffe on a daily basis? Unlike an earlier passage in the play, where Haines pointedly inserts his opinion on issues of morality and mission command; Haines is more restrained in the argument over daylight bombardment. He paints neither character — Brig. Gen. Garnett nor Brig. Gen. Dennis as malevolent, but uses their exchange to underscore the simple truth that wars are won on the front lines and not in the Pentagon. Near the end of the play, the Garnett character, who, until this point, is not portrayed in a sympathetic light; comes to this realization and sees the war from the character Dennis' point of view.

Haines' criticism as expressed in the play, at times, seems subdued. There are also times when he does not hold back and his frustrations are clear. For instance, halfway through the first act, the performance turns to the character Gen. Kane and his excitement about the bombing of Schweinhaufen (read: Schweinfurt.) Except—the bombers attacked the wrong (and less important) target with substantial loss of life. Kane, who is crestfallen, suddenly, realizes a public relations opportunity and a way to avoid the expected negative reaction from such a loss.

This is illustrated in the following excerpt, which includes the characters: Lt. Goldberg, the mission navigator; Maj. Prescott, Kane's public affairs officer; Brig, Gen Garnett and Brig. Gen. Dennis. They are pouring over aerial reconnaissance photographs looking for way out of the public relations disaster.

KANE

Look, Cliff. Look! Here's the highway coming in, here's the river—here's the factory...

GOLDBERG

²⁷ Haines' pseudonym for the World War II era Combined Chiefs of Staff.

You've got them upside down, sir.

DENNIS

General Kane, I'd like a minute alone with you, sir.

KANE

Of course, Casey. My God! Look at the destruction, Cliff! These will have to go to Washington by special plane.

PRESCOTT

Sir! I'd like to frame these, dramatically, on good white board, with a title...The Doom of Schweinhafen!

KANE

Yes! The very thing, Homer!

GOLDBERG

It isn't Schweinhafen, sir.

KANE

Not Schweinhafen? What are they?

GOLDBERG

The Nautilus Torpedo factory, at Grtizenheim, sir.

GARNETT

Torpedo factory! This is very opportune! Half the United Chiefs are admirals. If we get these to that meeting...

KANE

I'll send my own plane! (Claps GOLDBERG on the shoulder) You don't know what you've done for us, boy! Showing them that in the midst of the greatest air campaign in history we still think enough of the larger picture to knock out a torpedo factory...

DENNIS

I'm sorry sir. It wasn't *too*. It was instead.²⁸

The character, Gen. Kane takes few minutes to discuss the situation and the implications of the bombing the wrong target, the 440 airmen killed and his erroneous report to the United Chiefs. Finally, still looking to overcome the injury to his reputation, he wonders out loud if the United Chiefs would know a torpedo factor from a ball-bearing factory.

KANE

No man alive could tell these pictures from Schweinhafen. . . (*Pauses—eyes Garnett*) Cliff—do the United Chiefs actually study strike photos?

GARNETT (*Shocked—evasive*)

Well, sir, of course they're not trained interpreters themselves, but. . .

PRESCOTT

Sir. I got some draughtsman to make three by five mountings for the panels—before and after pictures—on good white board with glossy black lettering. . .The first title will be: "Doom of the Axis Torpedo Factory."

DENNIS

(expletive deleted)!²⁹

In its entirety, *Command Decision* is a composite of fictional characters and events. It is doubtful any publisher in 1947, especially, so soon after the war, would dare to print anything containing specific events or name actual persons, for fear of libel.³⁰ In the preceding scene Haines uses tragedy as a literary device to make his point regarding the ruinous attacks on Stuttgart, Regensburg and Schweinfurt. We can only speculate and wonder, with a liberal dose of hindsight. Haines wrote his play soon after the war, probably based on notes he took as events occurred. Moreover, Haines did not have the

²⁸ Haines, Sr., pp. 74-77.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁰ Any conclusions made in this paper about William Wister Haines and *Command Decision* are solely the opinion of the author.

benefit of extensive hindsight and it is likely events depicted in *Command Decision* were based on how events unfolded to Haines as an observer-participant.

Haines was not far from the truth in his depictions. His indignation over the public relations maneuvering seems valid, although how events actually took place is not always clear. In 1943 there were no substantial reports of accidental attacks on targets as depicted in the play, but bombardments during Schweinfurt I mostly missed their intended targets—the VKF ball-bearing factories. This was an issue for the 8th USAAF. Throughout 1943 there was terrible inaccuracy and mistakes in bombing. Only sixteen percent of 8th USAAF bombs came within 1,000 feet of their intended targets.³¹ By contrast, bombers mostly hit their targets in Regensburg, although crews used the wrong munitions and the results were dismal.³²

Additionally, the positive mission assessment in the aftermath of the Regensburg raid was attributed to misinterpretation of reconnaissance photographs and not necessarily because of overly optimistic public relations. Contributing to an atmosphere of uneasiness in the 8th USAAF, was the sharp criticism heaped on Eaker from the USAAF Commander, Gen. “Hap” Arnold during the CBO.³³ In light of this, it is easy to see how mission results might be exaggerated in the face of critics and the unconscionable loss of life. Without specifics, Arnold, wrote of the September 1943 raid on Stuttgart: “Certain features of the operation never did find their way into the reports sent up through channels.”³⁴ Arnold, of course, referred to how bombers missed their targets, a fact omitted by Eaker in his post attack assessments. There is evidence the results of Schweinfurt II were also exaggerated: “Immediate reports circulating...submitted by the (1st Bombardment) wing...tried to put a good face on the results as much as possible. Those early assessments were wildly exaggerated ...They were intended for the immediate encouragement of men fight...and for public consumption at home.”³⁵ Eaker, with a graduate journalism degree, was regarded as a “true public relations expert.”³⁶

³¹ John Correll, 2008. “Daylight Precision Bombing” Air Force Association, October 1. <http://www.airforcemag.com/magazinearchive/pages/2008/october%202008/1008daylight.aspx> [accessed March 5, 2014].

³² Middlebrook, pp. 287-288.

³³ Parton, pp. 271-273.

³⁴ Arnold, p. 219.

³⁵ Middlebrook, p. 291.

³⁶ Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities and Civilians* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1993), p. 41.

Cables from Eaker to Arnold, and to the media, following Schweinfurt II painted the raid as a triumph.³⁷ Not only were these press reports untrue, so were some of the intelligence assessments. To make matters worse, some of the intelligence was possibly German misinformation and then passed along by the 8th USAAF as positive stories.³⁸ Furthermore, Eaker was regarded as complicit in the whole affair according to historians Donald Caldwell and Richard Muller, “As soon as the reconnaissance photographs were received on the evening of [17 October], Generals Eaker and [Brig. Gen. Fred] Anderson knew that the Schweinfurt raid had been a failure...The results of the bombing were exaggerated, and the high losses were well disguised in after-mission reports...”³⁹ Ultimately, Eaker knew there was a lot at stake and he was anxious for success in the CBO. Everything that Eaker —and the so-called “Young Turks of the Air Corps” who previously stood with Billy Mitchell⁴⁰ at his court-martial—was in jeopardy. To Eaker, the hard fought doctrine of precision daylight bombing was at risk along with a speedy conclusion to the war.

As a result of these failures, there were no overt policy changes from either the President or military leaders, although there was one subtle policy indication. It came after Schweinfurt I during the First Quebec Conference in August 1943, where President Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) held tri-lateral talks with Great Britain and Canada. Following news of the mission, Arnold dispatched one of his strategic planners, Maj. Gen. Haywood Hansell to the conference as an advocate for daylight bombing. Arnold feared FDR might lose confidence in the strategy in light of Schweinfurt I. After all, Churchill lobbied against daylight bombing and the Schweinfurt I disaster might convince FDR to change his mind. After a briefing on the mission, where Hansell attempted to portray the losses in a positive light, FDR refused to send the usual note of post-mission congratulations to the 8th USAAF. This signaled FDR's displeasure. Although, FDR took no immediate

³⁷ Grabow, p. 56.

³⁸ Caiden, pp. 289-290.

³⁹ Donald Caldwell and Richard Muller, *The Luftwaffe over Germany: Defense of the Reich* (London: Greenhill Books, 2007), p. 114.

⁴⁰ Maj. Gen. William “Billy” Mitchell (1879-1936), a U.S. Army Air Corps pioneer, was court-martialed in November 1925 (then Col. Mitchell) for his outspoken and controversial opinions regarding air power in the post World War I era.

action, the failure of the mission seemed ominous for Eaker's tenure as commander of the 8th.⁴¹ The once friendly relationship between Arnold and began to change. Arnold wrote about a raid on Stuttgart in his 1951 memoirs, but in muted tones. He described a dinner hosted by Eaker, attended by Arnold, other USAAF leaders and the top leadership of the RAF. At this dinner the results of the mission were announced, "inspite of those heavy losses, the bombing results on Stuttgart 'had been excellent.' " In hindsight, Arnold remarked, "despite all of the optimistic talk at the dinner table that night, the mission had been a complete failure." Not one of the B-17s hit its assigned target.⁴² After recounting this incident, Arnold began the next paragraph in the book with a quote from an unnamed source, "You can use the brilliant but lazy man as a strategist; a brilliant but energetic man as Chief of Staff, but God help you with a dumb but energetic man!"⁴³ The context of neither the quote, nor its placement was explained.

Continued pressure on FDR was evident after the losses of Schweinfurt II. In a press conference on 15 October 1943, the normally relaxed and articulate FDR stammered and stuttered his way through a question from a reporter about the mission where the loss of sixty Flying Fortresses was the topic. FDR seemed caught off guard and undecidedly replied,

I – I – put it this way, that of course we don't want to have a – a net loss over a period years or months greater than the – a loss greater than the – than the accretions...On the other side of the picture, we have to remember that we brought down, let us say, a hundred German fighter planes,, which is in the – in the – in manpower is not as much by any means as our loss of 60 bombers...⁴⁴

Although FDR was noted for his involvement with military leadership and his deep interest in some tactical and operational aspects of the war, he allowed USAAF leadership to, ultimately, resolve this dilemma.

⁴¹ Charles Griffith, *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II*, (Alabama: Air University Press, 1999), p. 132.

⁴² Gen. H.H. Arnold, *Global Mission*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1951), pp. 218-219.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Documents relating to Press Conferences of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933-1945; National Archives at Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum. [Online version, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/pc/pc0154.pdf#search=, National Archives and Records Administration, March 15, 2014], pp. 160-161.

Lastly, the play climaxes after another act of intense dialogue and finally, heartbreaking tragedy when, off-stage, a highly regarded wing commander, perishes in battle. This final scene recalls the heartrending events of the 1943 air campaign. The dramatic conclusion brings a roller-coaster of emotions and offers lingering questions about how such a tragedy could happen.

To complete the analysis of *Command Decision* an examination of the views of Both Lt. Gen. Ira Eaker and Brig. Gen. Curtis LeMay are warranted, since two characters in the play appear to be proxies for each man. Eaker's memoir, "*Air Force Spoken Here*" was written by his war time aide, James Parton, and published in 1986. Eaker strongly defended precision bombing and never regretted his decisions in Schweinfurt I and II. Eaker felt post-war historians who considered Schweinfurt II a disaster, were wrong. Eaker's felt victory is measured, first, by achievement and second, by cost. Schweinfurt II showed bombers were unstoppable and could inflict mass destruction, even without fighter escorts. Furthermore, Eaker pointed to contradictions in the War Department definition of victory. Ground based battles in the Pacific Theater, where huge losses of infantry often equaled same kind of losses incurred by missions like Schweinfurt II, but were declared successful. By contrast, the bombardment of central Germany was called a disaster.⁴⁵ Moreover, following Schweinfurt II Eaker wanted to send a larger bomber force in a concentrated attack on key industrial targets. Eaker's battlefield calculus predicted acceptable losses if German industrial areas were attacked a third time. Eaker was willing to re-engage these targets despite earlier losses, bad weather and the lack of long range fighter escorts. In the end, Eaker was bitterly disappointed when he was re-assigned from the 8th USAAF in January 1944 and worked very hard to remain in command in England.⁴⁶

On the other hand, LeMay offers little detailed analysis of precision bombing. LeMay was in command of the 3rd Air Division only for Schweinfurt I. His memoir, "*Mission with LeMay*" was published in 1965. Lemay, in a very pragmatic style, tells his story, event-by-event, which makes his experiences seem more personal than analytical.

⁴⁵ Parton, pp. 327-328.

⁴⁶ Parton, p. 324.

By doing so, LeMay defies his post war stereotype as a war mongerer. He was reserved in his recollections of Schweinfurt I. His criticism of the mission was subtle and reflective. LeMay did not dwell on hindsight, but recounted measures he took in 1943 to train his crews for times when bad weather and other adverse flying conditions stacked the odds against them. The only hint of regret were certain events surrounding Schweinfurt I. LeMay acknowledged the beating the 8th USAAF took when striking German industrial targets, but never expressed regret for precision bombing. For example, the decision for the 3rd Air Division to attack Regensburg and then land in North Africa was a failure. According to Lemay, failure was due to operational planning and not because of the doctrine of precision bombing.⁴⁷ The only overt evidence for LeMay's defense of precision bombing was when he cited as an example the bombardment of Brussels Belgium on 7 September, just one day after a disastrous raid on Stuttgart. In the raid on Brussels, the 8th had adequate fighter escorts who remained with the bombers the entire mission. No bombers were lost on this mission and no enemy fighters were encountered. Additionally, LeMay cautioned if there were any more failures such as Schweinfurt I, the doctrine of precision bombing was in jeopardy.⁴⁸ Lemay finished the war in command of the XXI Bomber Command in the Pacific. Against Japan, he favored low-altitude night attacks on Japan. This was not a repudiation of precision bombing, as practiced in the ETO, but merely adapting the mission to the conditions at hand — namely Pacific weather, strong Japanese air defenses and the B-29 "Superfortress" airframe.

All told, *Command Decision* ran successfully on Broadway between 1947 and 1948 for a total of 409 performances. It was well-received by critics and audiences, alike. It was groundbreaking because it departed from the usual war story — stereotypically revolving around "socially, culturally, and ethnic diverse collection of freedom-loving civilians...defending democracy from totalitarian predators."⁴⁹ *Command Decision* dared to tell the story how the pressures of leadership, mixed with politics, often collide with the humanity of the individual. The play frankly addressed the realities of war and showed war time leaders in true character, without flag waving or War Department propaganda. Although Haines insisted *Command Decision* was not a history,⁵⁰ he took a

⁴⁷ Curtis E. LeMay, *Mission with LeMay* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 295

⁴⁸ LeMay, p. 300.

⁴⁹ M. Paul Holsinger, *War and American Popular Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 250.

⁵⁰ Du Bois.

chance in telling this story, because only a few years earlier, actor/director Orson Welles tried something similar, with *Citizen Kane*, although, not a war subject. Welles ran afoul of publisher William Randolph Hearst and found himself blacklisted. Perhaps in light of this, Haines was careful to develop composite characters since many resembled those still alive. In doing so, Haines started a genuine dialogue of the strategic air campaign, while events were fresh in the minds of the public, without having to wait for the principals to die.

It is not entirely clear how military and civilian leaders, in 1948, reacted to the play. The only clues are contained in critical reviews in the *New York Times*. There was no visible evidence of dissatisfaction with *Command Decision* or charges of slander or defamation of character. None of the reviews addressed any similarities to specific events and persons—perhaps a testament to the skill of Haines as a writer. Most reviews lauded the play for addressing the burdens of command. The only hint of controversy was film critic Bosley Crowther, who wondered if the U.S. House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) might render the pending film adaption of *Command Decision*, as propaganda.⁵¹ There is no evidence HUAC considered the play or criticized Haines. Charles B. MacDonald suspected the characters in the play were based on persons encountered by Haines during the war. On the whole, reviews remarked how well the play was staged, given the fact it was dialogue and not action-based.

The western military tradition of institutional self-criticism permits such objectivity. The U.S. military is, inherently, a self-correcting organization and lives up to this tradition. Today, the operational context and the circumstances of warfare are different. It still remains, that military commanders must contend with a press-conscious leadership, who operate under intense pressure to meet mission objectives, under the watchful eyes of politicians. In the current age, the stakes are much higher, with quick delivery nuclear weapons and the specter of mutually assured destruction. Again, Charles B. MacDonald, writing in 1949, about post-war literature, recognized works of fiction were just as important as autobiographical books. Perhaps McDonald meant fiction tends to study the philosophical or psychological nature of a character; which

⁵¹ Bosley Crowther, "Command Decisions: Will Film-Making Be Complicated by The 'Un-American' Probers?," *New York Times*, January 23, 1949. Text-fiche.

asserts subjects are broader than the mere study of warfare. Haines stepped out of the traditional soldier-author role and addressed events as they occurred in the human dimension instead of another re-telling of tactics and stark facts. More importantly, as theater critic, Pat Craig, wrote:

...there were those who made the decisions— the command decisions— based not completely on military logic or combat benefit. They were forced, sometimes under direct order, to also consider what impact their decisions would have on the folks back home. Their decisions became matters of practical politics—Congress would look more favorably on more funds if the war was being waged in a way that would have fewer casualties and direct impact on those at home who help elect the guys who are in office.⁵²

The question remains: How much and what kind of criticism is warranted from the safety and security of looking at events in hindsight? How is judgment passed on 8th USAAF leaders involved in the tragic events that occurred over central Germany in late 1943? What is the value of re-visiting these events when so much has changed in air warfare after World War II and the advent of jet aircraft? Lastly, how do we reconcile the loss of life in the 8th with the seemingly impossible situation men like Eaker, Arnold and LeMay were in? A logical answer is to continue to objectively study leaders, their decisions and how they were influenced; not looking for blame, but for ways to improve.

There are some key insights from *Command Decision* for students of leadership to consider: For instance, how do we effectively wage war against an enemy like Nazi Germany with the minimal loss of life? No doubt Eaker thought his plan to engage the enemy through precision daylight bombing was best. It appeared Eaker was so wedded to precision bombing, even after Schweinfurt II, he stayed the course. Besides, what role did hubris, emotion and the failings of mortal men play in Eaker's decisions? His long-held views on aerial bombardment defined his legacy in the service. But the Luftwaffe had other ideas in battle and put highly defined cracks in Eaker's carefully crafted strategy. The Germans fiercely defended places like Schweinfurt, which caught Eaker off guard. We tend to forget our leaders have the same failings as everyone else.

⁵² Pat Craig, "Disturbing 'Decision': On Stage Theatre presents William Wister Haines' play about war and politics." *Contra Costa Times* (Walnut Creek, CA, May 19, 2007, *Newspaper Source Plus*, EBSCOhost [accessed May 30, 2014].

Furthermore, another lesson to consider is how leaders achieve their military objectives in the face of public opinion, outside influences and distractions? 1943 was a pivotal year in the war. Eaker was under incredible pressure to cripple key portions of the German war economy in advance of an Allied invasion of Europe. Likewise, FDR felt pressure from the public and from Congress. The very popular Churchill had his pressures, too. He wanted the Allies to join the RAF in night bombing—something Eaker vehemently opposed. Another dilemma, as depicted in the play—how do leaders at the tactical and operational level win the public relations battle with Congressmen and the Pentagon? Although these outside influences are depicted unfavorably in the play, they serve as a check and balance. The skill required to deal with this dynamic of organizational behavior is bellwether trait of great leaders. Despite all of these challenges, Eaker was mostly successful in many aspects of the air campaign against Germany. It is unlikely history will ever place Eaker on the same pedestal as more successful leaders such as General Omar Bradley or Admiral William “Bull” Halsey. As for Eaker, he could not deliver a death blow quickly enough to Germany, from the air. The toll of air crew lives and equipment lost became intolerable. In the end, Eaker ran out of time and was replaced six months before Operation Overlord. Eaker left the 8th feeling empty and as if the job was incomplete. This aspect of the burden of this command weighed heavily on him throughout his life.

By studying the complexities of leadership and command, vicariously, through literature and the dramatic arts, it gives emerging leaders important lessons from the past. *Command Decision* plays an important part in understanding the multifaceted nature of what happened in the summer and autumn of 1943 as airmen of the 8th USAAF encountered an enemy unlike no other in modern history. This and other important works enable military leaders to make sound, logical command decisions—hopefully, void of the meddling, politics and other distractions about which William Wister Haines so aptly warned us.