



Official Newsletter of the Michigan Company of Military Historians & Collectors

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*"It is significant that despite the claims of air enthusiasts no battleship has yet been sunk by bombs."* Caption to photograph of the USS Arizona in the Army-Navy Football Game Program, November 29, 1941. Final score-Navy 14, Army 6.

*"Tom, you've never believed in air. Never get out from under the air umbrella; if you do, you'll be for it. And as you flutter up to heaven all you'll say is - 'My gosh, some sailor laid a hell of a mine for me!'"* Air Marshall Arthur Harris to Admiral Tom Phillips, commander of the squadron that included HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse; later sunk by Japanese carrier planes in 1942. Phillips fluttered upward, any final comment was unrecorded.

*"I feel that I am reserved for one end or the other."* Robert Lord Clive (1725-1774), comment when his pistol failed to go off twice when attempting to commit suicide. He eventually succeeded.

Our speaker will be James Smither, PhD, history professor at GVSU and moderator of the highly acclaimed Vietnam Veterans History Project.

### Company Notes

- ◆ New officers will be installed at this months meeting. They can be viewed below.
- ◆ WWII veteran and member Forrest Johnson died early this month.
- ◆ New member Misty Goins was elected last month and will serve as webmaster
  - ◆ Dues are still only \$40.00 and are expected. Mike Krushinsky will be anticipating your check.
  - ◆ The GVSU Veterans History Project will present Session #6 this thursday, 7PM, at Loosemore Auditorium, downtown campus. An all-Marine session. Dr Smither does a wonderful job in allowing each presenter to relate their experiences from induction to discharge and beyond.
  - ◆ Saturday, February 1, 7 PM, at the Westwood Community Church, 2828 Richmond NW, Lt. Col. Danny W. Davis (ret) PhD. will present a multi-media program "The History of the American Ranger, From Colonial Days to Afghanistan."

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# A Fighting Ship and a Fighting Name That Won't Go Down



One of the most unforgettable photographs from the December morning attack on Pearl Harbor. Lying in drydock the *USS Shaw* suffered a direct hit by a Jap bomb on the forecastle, exploding a magazine and wrecking the bridge and forward part of the hull. With smoke and flames roaring from her, destruction seemed complete. The enemy confidently checked her off the list U. S. warships. This writer questions why there was ammunition still stored on board while undergoing repairs. Never found an answer, so far.

The following is reprinted from the *Bureau of Navigation Bulletin*, March 1, 1942 and gives a short history of the name worn by the ship. “For a century and a half, Shaw has been a fighting name in the United States Navy. Beginning its fame with the doughty Captain John Shaw, USN in the 18th century, extending through the gallant, never-say-die spirit of the first *USS Shaw*, which was cut in half in collision in 1918 but reached port under its own power, it found a fitting culmination in the amazing “resurrection” where it was reported sunk at Pearl Harbor.

John Shaw, born in Ireland in 1773, first established his name firmly in American history in 1800, two years after he was made a lieutenant in the USN. It was during the undeclared war with France, where the real work lay in the capture of the privateers that swarmed out of the French ports of the West Indies. There were many spirited combats between our smaller vessels and larger enemy privateers. One of the most famous exploits of the war was the cruise of the *USS Enterprise* under Lieutenant Shaw, which in eight months captured six privateers and recaptured eleven American merchantmen.

In 1807 Lieutenant Shaw was commissioned a captain and continued his gallant service through the War of 1812. He died in 1823 at age fifty.

The name next appears in Navy annals with the commissioning the first *USS Shaw* (DD-68) as a *Sampson-class* destroyer in honor of Captain Shaw, launched from the Mare Island Navy Yard in 1916. She sailed to New York and then began Atlantic Ocean convoy duty. She saw active duty in WWI without mishap until October 9, 1918. At that time, she was part of a destroyer division escorting transports under the command of Commander William A. Glassford, between England and France. Glassford later became a Vice Admiral commanding the US Naval Forces, Southwest Pacific during WWII. Off the coast of England she was escorting the *RMS Aquitania*, a Cunard Line ocean liner and sister of the *RMS Mauretania* and *RMS Lusitania* (sunk by a German sub May 7, 1915). The *Shaw's* rudder jammed just as she was completing the right leg of a zigzag, leaving her headed directly toward a huge 45,000 ton transport. An earlier issue of the *Cannon Report* remarked how the steering cables on these ships traveled from the pilot house to the stern exposed on the main deck. Unable to avoid a collision, Commander Glassford decided to sacrifice his own ship rather than ram the *Aquitania*, and ordered full speed astern.



A moment later the *Aquitania* struck the destroyer and sliced her almost in two, cutting off ninety feet of the *Shaw's* bow or 30% of her length, stripping the forward boiler room, and tearing out the main mast. Fire broke out in the forward oil tank, and it seemed that the *Shaw* was doomed. But that was not the idea of the gallant commander and her crew. Keeping the ship in full reverse to lessen pressure on water-tight bulkheads, the fire was extinguished in the face of bursting ammunition. The damaged engines were put in working condition, the steering gear repaired, and slowly easing into reverse, they navigated the floating remnant backward 40 miles into Portsmouth, England where she was repaired and put

back into commission. Twelve seamen died in the mishap and a skeleton crew of twenty-one sailed her back into harbor. After repairs she joined the reserve destroyer group at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. She was transferred to the Coast Guard in 1926 and served in the Rum Patrol. In 1933 she was sent back to the Navy and scrapped in 1934.

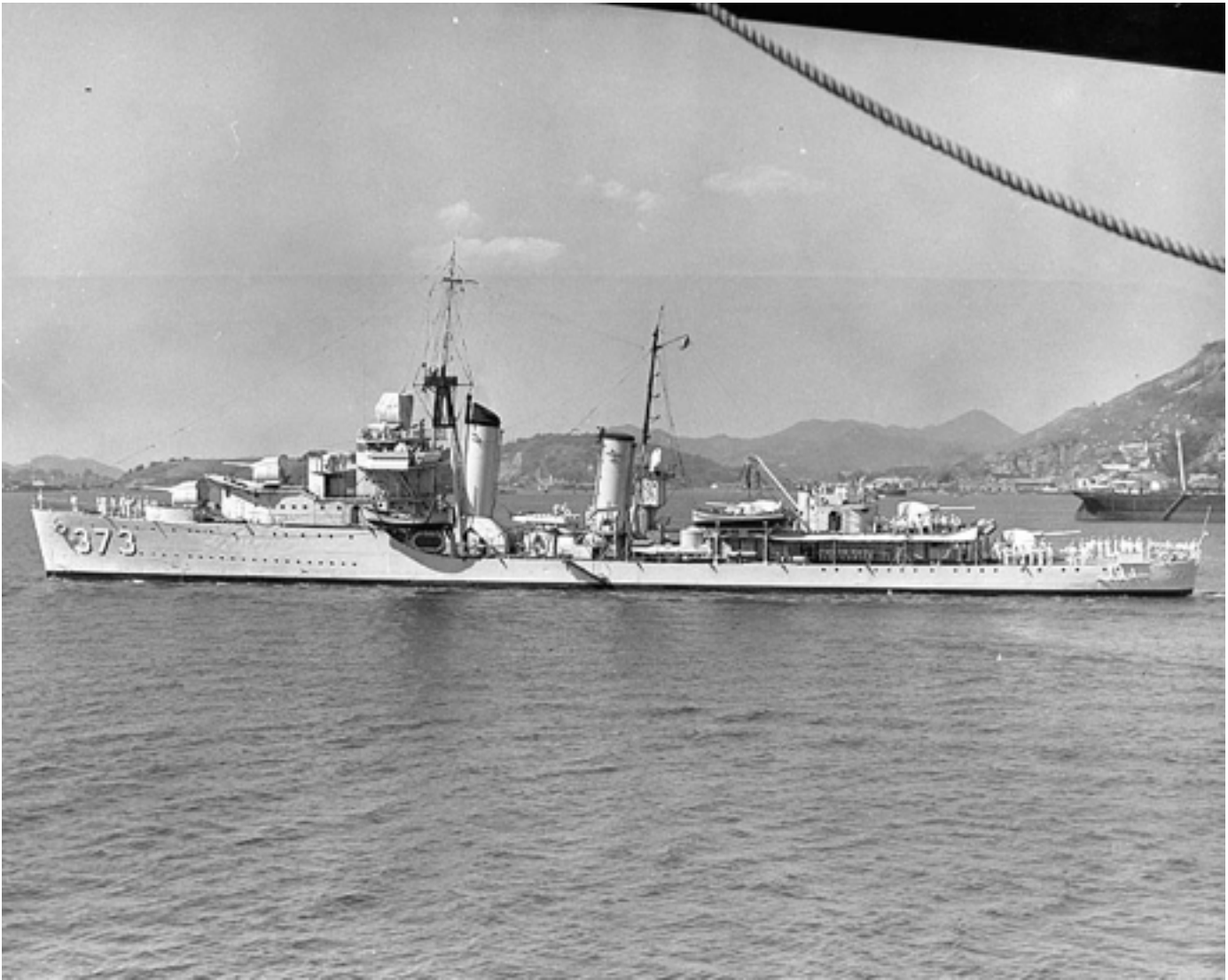
The second *USS Shaw* (DD-373) was a *Maham-class* destroyer launched from the Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1935 and commissioned in 1938. She began her career fittingly in company with the *USS Enterprise*, an aircraft carrier named after the famous schooner commanded by Captain John Shaw in 1800.

In the Fall of 1940 she was dry-docked in Portsmouth, England undergoing some modifications. During an attack by German bombers she was knocked off her blocks and sustained minor hull damage. It was determined that further repairs should be undertaken at Pearl Harbor. Later she joined the Pacific Fleet and on the morning of December 7, 1941, was lying in dry dock at Pearl Harbor. In the Japanese attack on that base, she suffered a direct hit by a Jap bomb on the forecastle, exploding a magazine, and wrecking the bridge and forward part of the hull. But the Japs do not know American history. Apparently men and ships named Shaw have never learned how to admit defeat. In little over two months after the *Shaw* apparently was blown to bits in Pearl Harbor,



*Shaw v. Aquitania*

she was back at a West Coast port getting a new bow. Like the first Shaw, and like Captain Shaw a hundred and fifty years ago, she will soon be back on the high seas - ready for action with the enemy.” End of article.



The above is the *USS Shaw* in 1938, undergoing sea trials somewhere in the Caribbean. She spent much of her early life between Mare Island, Philadelphia, and Portsmouth, England before returning to Pearl. On 7 December, the *USS Shaw* was still drydocked, receiving adjustments to her depth charge mechanisms. During the Japanese attack, she took three hits: two bombs through the forward machine gun platform, and one through the port wing of the bridge. Fires spread through the ship. By 0925, all fire-fighting facilities were exhausted, and the order to abandon ship was given. Efforts to flood the dock were only partially successful; and, shortly after 0930, her forward magazine exploded. Casualties are unknown. Temporary repairs were made at Pearl Harbor during December 1941 and January 1942. On 9 February, the *USS Shaw* steamed towards San Francisco where repairs were completed, including the installation of a new bow, at the end of June. Following training in the San Diego, California, area, the *USS Shaw* returned to Pearl Harbor on 31 August. She then joined the *USS Hornet* as part of Task Force 61 in the Guadalcanal Campaign.

On 10 January, 1943, while entering Nouméa harbor, New Caledonia, the *Shaw* ran aground on Sournois Reef. She was freed on the 15th, but extensive damage to her hull, propellers, and sound gear necessitated temporary repairs at Nouméa - followed by lengthy repairs and rearmament at Pearl Harbor, which took through September. On 25 December, 1944, the *Shaw* escorted units engaged in the assault against Cape Gloucester, where she provided gunfire support and served as fighter director ship. On the 26th, the *Shaw* sustained casualties and damage when attacked by two “Vals”. The *Shaw* returned to Pearl Harbor

on the 10th, joined the 5th Fleet there, and steamed towards the Marshall Islands on the 15th. She got underway from the Marshalls on 11 June with TF-52 to engage in the assault on Saipan Island. Thirty-six men were injured, three of whom later died of their wounds. The Shaw returned to Cape Sudest, New Guinea on the 27th; transferred her wounded and dead to shore facilities there, and continued on to Milne Bay for temporary repairs. Permanent repairs were completed at Hunter's Point, California, on 1 May 1944. The Shaw returned to Pearl Harbor on the 10th, joined the 5th Fleet there, and steamed towards the Marshall Islands on the 15th. She got underway from the Marshalls on 11 June with TF-52 to engage in the assault on Saipan Island. Guam was her next duty then the Luzon Invasion, January, 1945.

In early April, the *USS Shaw* operated in the Visayas, the island group south of Luzon. She sustained damage on an uncharted pinnacle, and underwent temporary repairs. On the 25th, she steamed towards the United States West Coast. The *Shaw* arrived at San Francisco on 19 May. Repairs and upgrades to her systems took into August. The work was completed on the 20th. The USS Shaw then departed for the East Coast of the United States. Upon her arrival at Philadelphia, the warship was routed to New York City for deactivation. Decommissioned on 2 October 1945, her name was stricken from the Navy List two days later. Her hulk was scrapped in July 1946.

She had an arduous history and many mishaps in uncharted waters. Many of her crew served their total enlistment from 1941 to 1945 aboard the ship. An interesting sidelight was discovered while researching for this article. The *Shaw* and Edgar Rice Burroughs (author of the *Tarzan* series) both experienced the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. Burroughs and son Hulbert were playing tennis on the Niumalu Hotel grounds when the attack began and ERB, between games, followed the attack with binoculars, probably seeing the attack on, and resulting explosion of, the Shaw which was in the navy yards dry dock at the time. ERB went on to become the Pacific Theater's oldest war correspondent. He spent almost 7 months aboard the *Shaw* as an embedded correspondent, 6 weeks of which he rode with the ship back to Pearl from the mishap at Noumea.



USS Shaw after the attack at Pearl

# Personal Recollections

There are events that are made more realistic when someone, who was actually present, describes what they had experienced. Our perception of that event now assumes another dimension and we are given an additional perspective formerly unavailable. Our benefit cannot be understated nor minimized, attesting to the value of an organization such as ours. Lacking a face-to-face encounter, these oral or written eyewitness accounts are priceless. I have come across two items, unrelated in time, but unique in the point of view they present. The first is of a *USS Arizona* survivor, Charles Gordon, and the following is his edited account.

*"The Navy didn't like me and I hated the Navy. The only reason I was wearing a uniform was because a New York judge ordered me to enlist post haste, or spend a year in Ryker's Island Prison for an unauthorized joyride in a Plymouth sedan. After two years of service, I've spent more time in Navy brigs than I'd spent at sea. I was a duty dodo, the always-in-trouble seaman Third Class nobody wanted to bunk with.*

*I had just gotten out of the brig ashore and had reported as ordered to the battleship Arizona anchored to a quay at Ford Island. I'd been on the ship maybe three or four days but officially I wasn't as yet a crewman because my records had gotten lost in transit from the states. I was going to be an engineering snipe - apprentice water tender or boiler warden. I'd slept in my bunk and had just emerged from the shower when all hell broke loose that Sunday morning. Bells started ringing, and men began scurrying around yelling something about being under attack by Japanese planes. What sort of nonsense was this, I thought, still dripping wet as I slipped on my shoes, skivvies, and a tee shirt. Then we heard aft the distant sound of exploding bombs and shell fragments pelting the deck and superstructure. All I knew was that I wanted out of that steel tomb if we were really under attack. But how? I had only a vague idea of the ship's interior labyrinth of passageways and with everyone running in different directions, I was soon totally confused which way to go. Then that bomb or stick of bombs went down our stack and exploded the forward powder magazines, blowing the ship nearly in two as this single powerful blast sent us to the shallow bottom of Pearl Harbor. In seconds, the passageway I was in became a living horror. Flames sprang up everywhere and vicious sparks snapped and cracked from severed electrical connections. Water seemed to be coming in from everywhere as the passageway quickly filled with choking smoke and floating bodies. Then the lights flickered and went out, plunging us into an eerie darkness as injured men yelled and screamed for help. The blast had knocked me off my feet, given me a three-inch gash on my forehead, injured my elbow, and knocked the wind out of my lungs. Dropping to my knees where the air wasn't polluted with thick whirls of billious smoke. I crept ahead until the fast-rising water forced me to stand and wade.*

*Groping along in water up to my waist, the flickering darkness was broken only by the light of the sparks and fires until I soon found a battle lantern attached to a bulkhead that convinced me that I was at least heading forward, hopefully to safety. Then I stumbled upon a sailor lying half submerged in the fast-flooding corridor. Bending over to help him to his feet, he suddenly went totally limp and shockingly broke in two as his intestines spilled from his severed torso. Holding his upper half, I realized he was already dead and laid what was left of him in a small recess as I jerked off his identity disk. Then, more violent explosions shook the tortured hull and the inrush of sea water seemed to dramatically intensify, scaring the hell out of me.*

*"You've got to get out of this death trap," as I kept telling myself as I stumbled upon a dazed sailor with blood gushing from his severed right arm. He was speechless, in shock and shaking like a leaf. I did not know much about first aid, but I knew I had to apply a tourniquet to that stump to keep him from bleeding to death. Finding some rags floating by, I tied them into a string, wrapped it*

*around his wounded arm and led him down the passageway in water now up to our chests. Coming around a corner, I suddenly spotted a thin beam of light spilling from an overhead hatch 30-ft ahead. That hatch and the ladder leading up to it were our salvation as, choking on the ever-thickening smoke, we made our way to safety. Once at the ladder, helping hands from the deck above reached down to lift the wounded sailor as I scrambled up the ladder behind him. But even there on the main deck the smoke and fire was so intense it was difficult to comprehend the awesome damage to Arizona's twisted, fire-blackened superstructure. In what seemed an eternity, a 26-ft whaleboat emerged from the swirling smoke and six or seven of us clustered on the deck jumped into the oily sludge to swim to safety.*

*Once at Ford Island, someone led me to an emergency aid station even as the last attacks were being made. They patched up my scalp, bandaged my elbow, and put me to work assisting the other wounded personnel soon flooding the aid station. By nightfall, the worst of the nightmare was over and though many fires still burned and all too many bloated corpses still floated in that Harbor of Death, we felt the worse was behind us. The losses had been appalling.*

*Oddly, a personal miracle happened to me as I struggled to get off that doomed ship. I started to care, not only about myself but everyone around me. We had been savagely attacked and our country certainly was at war, or soon would be, and I was part of it. Suddenly, I no longer wanted to be the odd man out, the rugged individualist. I wanted to help, be part of the struggle, and I did help long into the dawn of 8 December 1941. My days as a dodo were over, I swore.*

*My exploits put me in for a commendation letter that allowed me to strike for any rating I wanted. The nicest thing that had ever happened in my Navy life, I told them I wanted to become a Navy medic, a corpsman, that if we were at war I preferred saving lives to taking them. After 2 years I was a Corpsman 1C, didn't see much sea duty for I was soon attached to the 1st Marine Division that shortly landed on Guadalcanal, but that's another story."*

This second narration appeared in a book written by the correspondent Matthew McAllester entitled *Beyond the Mountains of the Damned*. When the country of Yugoslavia fell apart in the early 1990's a virtual civil war broke out among the various ethnic and religious groups of that region. McAllester concerned himself with the Albanians living in Pec, Kosovo. They were mostly Muslims but some were Christians. He described how Serbian paramilitary groups engaged in behaviors that were to *cleanse* the area of Albanians, regardless of their religious persuasion. The mother of a now favorite author of mine and who is also a member of our Company admonished him one day when, as a child, he commented on the Battle of the Boyne, 1690, and remarked that it happened so long ago. She said **"never let time interfere with your history"**. Such a simple statement but it speaks for all who have suffered repression in some form over hundreds of years and serves as an explanation for the desire to right a wrong or at least get an acknowledgment of past misdeeds. This phrase resonates among so many people that too often we neglect the sufferings others have endured because we believe that *bygones should be bygones*, a phrase that not only speaks of our ignorance but is also reflective of our short national history. McAllester writes of a young Serb, Tony, who returned to Pec: *We met at an outdoor café on the outskirts of Pec, next to a gas station. There was a gentle breeze and we drank milky coffee. Twenty-six years old, he wore a lime green polo shirt and new jeans. He spoke softly, thoughtfully. he wanted to confess, and looking back to expose the organization and the country to which he had allied himself for a few weeks in the first half of 1999. "Our group was not so patriotic, nationalistic. We were a small group and it was strictly business. It was not like a holy war or a sacred war. As a killer I saw many evils I want to forget as soon as possible. I don't want to bring those things to mind."*

*An oil smuggler before the war Tony was now wealthy, "I have a good car. I bought an apartment here. But it's not so much. If I had only ten per cent of all the goods that passed through my hands I'd be the richest man here...I came away with 200,000 Marks. It's the foundation of a*

*decent life here, an apartment. I haven't decided what to do with the rest of the money." Tony sat uncomfortably with that money in his pocket, I felt. "I've withdrawn to a certain degree. I don't want to think about it. I wanted to get out of there, that hell, to finish the job and go. It wasn't my war." Some memories pushed their way into Tony's sleep. Two or three things he could not forget.*

*"We were in a village before the units came and cleansed it. All the houses were ruined. There were only a few houses left. The Serb houses were spared. In one house lived an old woman and her granddaughter who was sixteen or seventeen. They were both Serbs. We stayed in that village for two or three days, a bit longer than usual because we were waiting for a shipment from another place. We were supposed to meet there. That girl was cooking for our unit for two or three days. On the third day four guys got drunk and stoned and they raped her. I remember as we were leaving that village, the grandmother took her black scarf off her head and she addressed us with the worst curses."*

*There was a worse memory. It had been raining overnight and Tony's unit woke up to a fresh morning and sat outside the house they were staying in; sipping coffee, smoking cigarettes and getting ready for the day's work. One of Tony's friends needed to correct the telescopic sight on his rifle. "An old man was alone with his cows in the fields. It wasn't his war. He didn't know what was happening. He wasn't guilty. My colleague raised his rifle. It was fitted with a silencer. He aimed at the old Albanian man, obviously tending to his cows. Phud. The muffled shot sped toward the man but he continued to tap his his stick at the flanks of his cows. The paramilitary lowered the rifle and corrected the sight. Another shot. Another correction. And this went on for several more shots, with Tony and the others passively watching, until the old man fell silently to the ground around the feet of his cows. There," Tony's colleague said, putting down the rifle, "it's fixed."*

*McAllester wondered why Tony was telling him this, Tony replied "I want to tell someone. I don't have anyone here to tell the story to. People are too stupid here to understand. I know it's not good that I did that job. But I entered into it and it's impossible to go back. I'm not very happy with it. I definitely wouldn't go and do it now. When you see such things... I can't erase them from my memory."*

There is a cost to combat and oftentimes we never stop paying the price. The burdens of war seldom fall solely on the combatants. The *USS Arizona* survivor still has vivid memories of his short time aboard ship, but he managed to persevere and benefit from his experiences. Tony will probably never come to grips with the damage he inflicted upon the innocents. In all likelihood he made contributions to someone's history that will never be forgotten. Among all the afflicted societies that have suffered unjustly in just the 20th century, the Irish, the Kurds, the Armenians, the Iraqis, the Iranians, the Chileans (to name just a few) Nelson Mandela of South Africa realized the futility of treating historical events as if they just happened. For this cycle to end we must forget and forgive in order to move on, not to do otherwise condemns our children to a never-ending horror.

Hollywood seldom gets historical events correct but it sometimes can take a concept and show in one scene the pervasiveness and futility of revenge. In the movie *Taken 2*, Liam Neeson plays a retired CIA operative who had his daughter kidnapped by a father whose son was killed by Liam. The son was a low-life of the highest sort, drug trafficker, dealer in stolen arms, trader of girls for prostitution, the sort of person that can destabilize emerging governments. He objected to curtailing his operations and fought to maintain and even expand his criminal enterprise. Failing to surrender peacefully he was killed. Regardless, his father sought revenge and to get to his killer he kidnapped Liam's daughter. After much shooting and killing Liam rescues his daughter, killing almost all of the father's friends in the process. The scene opens with only Liam and the father in a room full of dead bodies. Liam has a gun and it's aimed at the defeated, beaten, and unarmed father. Liam says that enough is enough and the killing has to stop here and now. He turns to walk away but turns back and gives his gun to the father saying "this ends now, go home in peace." The father



looks incredulous but nods acceptance. Liam turns and walks away. He hears a click, the hammer fell on an empty chamber. A disgusted Liam turns, looks at the sheepish father and shoots him dead. *C'est la vie.*

## Göring versus Harris

In the years leading up to the to WWII, the British government was worried. If, in the event of war, the German Air Force launched a major offensive against London, the British military command believed that there was nothing they could do to stop it. Basil Liddell Hart, one of the foremost military theorists of the day, estimated that in the first week of any German attack, London could see 250,000 civilian deaths and injuries. Winston Churchill described London as “the greatest target in the world, a kind of tremendous, fat, valuable cow, tied up to attract the beast of prey.” He predicted that the city would be so helpless in the face of attack that between 3-4 million Londoners would flee to the countryside. In 1937, on the eve of war, the British military command issued a report with the direst prediction of all: a sustained German bombing attack would leave 600,000 dead and 1.2 million wounded and create mass panic in the streets. People would refuse to go to work. Industrial production would grind to a halt. The army would be useless against the Germans because it would be preoccupied with keeping order among millions of panicked civilians. Several psychiatric hospitals were set up just outside the city limits to handle what they expected would be a flood of psychological casualties. “There is every chance.” the report stated. “that this could cost us the war.”

*Excerpted from Malcolm Gladwell's **David and Goliath.***

In the Fall of 1940 the *Blitz* (the German word for lightning) commenced. The German Air Marshal, Hermann Göring promised Hitler that massive air bombing would force England to sue for peace and negate the need for a land assault, Operation Sealion. Between 7 September 1940 and 21 May 1941 there were major aerial raids (attacks in which more than 100 tons of high explosives were dropped) on 16 British cities. When night bombers aiming for RAF airfields drifted off course and accidentally destroyed several London homes, killing civilians, Churchill's immediate response was to bomb Berlin. This resulted in a rapid escalation by the Germans starting on 24 August 1940. More than one million London houses were destroyed or damaged, and more than 40,000 civilians were killed, almost half of them in London. Ports and industrial centers outside London were also heavily attacked. The major Atlantic sea port of Liverpool was also heavily bombed, causing nearly 4,000 deaths. The North Sea port of Hull, a convenient and easily found primary and secondary target for bombers unable to locate their primary targets, was subjected to 86 raids, within the city boundaries during the war, with a conservative estimate of 1200 civilians killed and 95% of its housing stock destroyed or damaged. Other ports including Bristol, Cardiff, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Southampton, and Swansea were also targeted, as were the industrial cities of Birmingham, Belfast, Coventry, Glasgow and Manchester. Birmingham and Coventry were heavily targeted because of the Spitfire and tank factories in Birmingham and the many munitions factories in Coventry; the city center of Coventry was almost completely destroyed. So what happened? The panic never came. The psychiatric hospitals built were switched over to military use because no one showed up.

The typical explanation favored by the British was the “stiff upper lip” - the stoicism believed to be inherent in the English character. But what later became evident was that bombing did not have the effect that everyone thought it would; for civilians from other countries turned out to be unexpectedly resilient in the face of bombing. This puzzle, although observed and commented on during the war, was solved after the war by Canadian psychiatrist J.T. MacCurdy, in a book entitled *The Structure of Morale*. Without going into his study, suffice it to say that the affected population can be divided into three groups: those *killed*; those experiencing *near misses* (feel the blast, see the destruction, maybe even wounded): and those *remote misses*

(listen to the sirens, watch the planes and hear the attack). A near miss may leave you temporality traumatized but the *near misses* get a feeling of excitement with a flavor of invulnerability after several attacks. The *remote miss* make you feel invincible. MacCurdy continues “we are all liable to fear, we are also prone to be afraid of being afraid.” When faced with this fear and surviving, we are exhilarated. “The contrast between the previous apprehension and the present relief and feeling of security promotes a self-confidence that is the very father and mother of courage.” This lesson was lost upon Göring and his English counterpart, Harris.

Arthur Travers Harris, commonly known as "Bomber" Harris by the press, and often within the RAF as "Butcher" Harris, was Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of RAF Bomber Command (from early 1943 holding the rank of Air Chief Marshal) during the latter half of World War II. Harris believed that “the aim of the Combined Bomber Offensive is the destruction of German cities, the killing of German workers, and the disruption of civilised life throughout Germany... and the destruction of houses, public utilities, transport and lives, the creation of a refugee problem on an unprecedented scale, and the breakdown of morale both at home and at the battle fronts by fear of extended and intensified bombing. They are not by-products of attempts to hit factories.”

Churchill did not believe that this method was the course to take but the Soviets were demanding that the Western Allies do something to relieve the pressure and so he convinced the Russians that this air campaign was analogous to a third front. Harris was just one of an influential group of high-ranking Allied air commanders who believed that massive and sustained area bombing alone would force Germany to surrender. On a number of occasions he wrote to his superiors claiming the war would be over in a matter of months. In the face of evidence to the contrary Harris persisted and continued attempting to plow Germany under. A tactic and concept employed by the United States during the Vietnam War with less than stellar results and the unnecessary loss of American aircrews.

Prior to D-Day Harris unleashed raids of 1000 plane armadas against Cologne, Hamburg, Berlin and Nuremberg with dubious strategic results. The loss of planes and aircrews were having a serious effect on morale. After June, 6, 1944 Harris was so wedded to his task of “making the rubble bounce in every large German city” that he protested when ordered to attack French railroad targets. He maintained that this tactic was using Bomber Command for a purpose it was not designed or suited for. It seemed that he was blind to the tactical and practical applications of bombing and considered Bomber Command to be his personal plow.

The RAF and USAAF suffered the greatest number of fatalities of all the services in WWII. Over 100,000 Allied airmen were KIA with the loss of over 12,000 heavy bombers. Of all the deaths resulting from WWI, 5% were civilian; in WWII, 67% were civilian. Britain lost 60,400 civilians to air raids, Germany lost over 543,000. A cost/benefit analysis determining the effectiveness of area bombing will undoubtedly show Harris’ most famous justification of area bombing to ring hollow. He stated “I do not personally regard the whole of the remaining cities of Germany as worth the bones of one British Grenadier”; however, one fifth of an airman seemed to be an acceptable loss per German civilian. In his memoirs Harris unabashedly claims that “...in spite of all that happened, bombing proved a relatively humane method.” This writer wonders as compared to what?

After the war, Harris, who considered himself to be a Rhodesian and was in line to become its governor during the war but Churchill needed him in England; moved to South Africa in 1948. In 1953 Churchill, now Prime Minister again, insisted that Harris accept a baronetcy and he became Baronet. He returned to the UK, and lived his remaining years in the Ferry House in Goring-on-Thames.

Despite protests from Germany as well as some in Britain, the Bomber Harris Trust (an RAF veterans' organization formed to defend the good name of their commander) erected a statue of him outside the RAF Church of St. Clement Danes, London in 1992. It was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother who looked surprised when she was jeered by protesters, one of whom shouted "Harris was a war criminal". The line on the statue reads "The Nation owes them all an immense debt." The statue had to be kept under 24-hour guard for a period of months as it was often vandalized by protesters who covered it with red paint.

