

A Statistical Comparison of Three Air Wars

Introduction

The US has engaged in three major aerial bombardment efforts during the twentieth century. The first -- the air warfare directed against the Axis powers in World War II -- marked the initial commitment of US military planners to the use of air power as a major strategic weapon. In the subsequent US military involvements in Korea and Vietnam, aerial bombardment has played a key role not only in the conduct of military operations themselves, but also in the determination of military and political strategy.

Comparison

No two air wars are exactly alike. Even within World War II, assessments and comparisons must take into account the significant differences of the Pacific and European theatres of operation, as well as the irreversible march of technology that made the terminal stages of World War II air operations so different from its beginnings.

Differences in the nature of the target systems, the areas of sanctuaries, the technology of bombing, and the very nature of the enemy make broad statistical comparisons of the three major US air efforts tenuous at best. There are, however, several areas of statistical comparison which indicate the relative extent, if not the effectiveness, of these three aerial bombardment programs. In the following tabulation, the most significant of these statistical comparisons are presented.

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	<u>World War II</u> ^{1/}	<u>Korea</u>	<u>Rolling Thunder</u> ^{2/}
Area of enemy-held territory (Square miles)	137,000 ^{3/}	47,000	61,000
Population of Target area (millions)	80 ^{4/}	9	18
Tonnage Delivered (thousands of tons)	2,697 ^{5/}	698	162 ^{5/}
Total Sorties Flown (thousands)	4,129 ^{5/}	1,041	203.1 ^{5/}
Total Ordnance-Carrying Sorties (thousands)	1,442 ^{6/}	N.A.	108.1
Total Aircraft Lost	40,379	1,246	489
Average Aircraft Lost Per Thousand Sorties	9.8	1.7	2.4
Percent of Ordnance Dropped on Industrial Targets	23.7	N.A.	.004
Percent of Ordnance Dropped on Military Targets	11.1	N.A.	.005
Percent of Ordnance Dropped on Land Transportation Targets	32.1	N.A.	93.0 ^{7/}
Percent of Ordnance Dropped on Electric Power Plants	.03	N.A.	.4
Civilian Casualties (thousands killed)	305 ^{8/}	N.A.	23.99 ^{9/}
Civilians Killed Per Ton of Ordnance	.22	N.A.	.15
Civilains Killed Per Ordnance Carrying Sortie	.21	N.A.	.22

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1. Data given are, unless otherwise noted, for the European Theatre of Operations.
2. Rolling Thunder data given through December 1966.
3. Germany only.
4. Germany only.
5. Total Allied effort; US and Great Britain during World War II, US and other UN forces during Korean War, US and Vietnam during Rolling Thunder.
6. Bomber sorties only.
7. Includes ordnance dropped on bridges, rail facilities, and 11 armed reconnaissance ordnance.
8. Germany only. Estimated by the US Strategic Bombing Survey.
9. Based on latest CIA estimate.

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