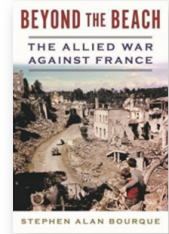


## BOOK REVIEW:

### *Beyond the beach: the allied war against France*

by Stephen Alan Bourque

Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, Maryland; 2018; 353 pp; ISBN 9781612518732 (hardcover):  
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*Beyond the Beach* addresses the Allied bombing campaign against German forces in France during World War II. The author focuses on the two phases of the Allied bombing campaign: attacks primarily against airfields, ports – including U-boat pens – and industry (strategic bombing campaign); and the bombing effort in preparation and support for the D-Day landings when rail yards, bridges and towns inland from the invasion beaches were targeted (tactical bombing campaign).

The author is Dr Stephen Bourque, a professor emeritus at the United States Army Command and General Staff College. After 20 years of enlisted and commissioned service in the United States Army, he obtained his PhD at Georgia State University and, since then, has taught at several military and civilian schools and universities, including the School of Advanced Military Studies.

In addressing the first phase of the bombing campaign, the author addresses the issue of casualties amongst the French population. He questions why official histories are silent on this matter and why fellow historians have not previously addressed this aspect of the bombing campaign.

United States doctrine identified a strategic bombing strategy against German military power; however, it did not address the use of heavy bomber aircraft against an enemy occupying a friendly state (which France was) – nor did the British doctrine. Moreover, the technology of the time did not enable bomber crews to achieve pinpoint accuracy when attacking targets.

The author cites strategic bombing campaign planning documents that indicated that attacks, particularly against railway marshalling yards and bridges within townships, would result in significant civilian casualties.

When addressing the issue of civilian casualties, he names them, quotes them, notes their ages and family dispositions, describes their situations and their tragedies. In doing so, he puts a human face to the results of the bombing campaigns, highlighting that fighting forces were not the only ones to be sacrificed in the quest for victory. While this is a powerful way to demonstrate the high price paid by the French population, it tends to be overpowering and harrowing.

The reader might gain the impression that the author rails against the razing of towns, killing innocent civilians along with the destruction of national infrastructure. However, in doing so, he acknowledges that the Allies were faced with overwhelming challenges and provides a balanced viewpoint when considering the necessity to wage war against an enemy that resided among the French population.

However, Stephen Bourque does rail strongly against the lack of extant documented history outside France

regarding the loss of some 60,000-70,000 French men, women and children who were killed during the campaign to liberate their country. He notes in many parts of the book that the after-raid reporting, and indeed, the post-war reporting of the bombing campaign against France, is silent on the casualties suffered by the French and the damage to their infrastructure and their national historical treasures.

In addressing the tactical bombing campaign in support of the Allied invasion and subsequent ground operations, the book also explores the relationship between ground and air operations and the air operation's effects on the French population. The use of strategic bomber forces in tactical support of troops on the ground and against German defences at Normandy resulted in massive damage to French towns, killing many of their occupants. General Eisenhower directed the use of these air forces at the request of his land commanders and against the will of the leaders of the strategic bombing forces – Harris and Spaatz.

As a sidenote to history, the author observes that historians have virtually ignored the bombing of the invasion beaches and the surrounding environs in what was the greatest air campaign in history. Some 12,600 aircraft attacked targets in France and Belgium, while 1130 aircraft attacked one beachhead battery. Appreciating the size of the bombing forces enables the reader to better understand the scope of damage inflicted upon the French population.

Indeed, this is the purpose of his book. It is revealed in his commentary regarding the “missing narrative” of this phase of the war and the lack of awareness of the vast majority of people outside France and that historians have not yet adequately redressed this matter.

Given a difficult operational environment, the Allied leaders were faced with a significant dilemma – to stop German reinforcements travelling thorough French towns and using French railways and roads from reaching the battlefields of Normandy and jeopardizing the invasion. That goal was attained and decisive German reinforcements never reached the beaches – but at a terrible cost.

*Beyond the Beach* is very well written, expertly researched and, while written with passion, is well balanced. It challenges histories of D-Day that ignore the bombing campaigns – campaigns which contributed directly to the success of the landings and subsequent breakout of forces into France; and it confronts the reader, documenting the terrible casualties and immense damage wrought upon the French population by the bombing. The book is well-suited for students of the application of air power.

**Bob Treloar**