

LEARNING WAR THE HARD WAY

Danger of Overoptimism, Need for Experience as Lessons of Setback

Questions of whether U. S. counted too much on air power and aid from allies

People in this country now are to learn about war the hard way. The lessons to be learned are the direct product of the sudden change in the war in Europe.

What now is happening in Europe, in turn, is a product of widely held misconceptions and miscalculations, in which high military officials may have shared. It becomes important now to understand what were the misconceptions and miscalculations, and what are some of the lessons they teach. Those lessons are of the deepest long-range concern to this country.

Lesson No. 1 is that, in war, overoptimism is an expensive commodity. Highest U. S. military officials have accepted and acted upon an optimistic appraisal of the war against Germany. One year ago, an end to the campaign in Italy was believed to be in sight. That campaign now is stalemated. Last September, an end to the entire war against Germany was believed to be a matter of weeks. Now, the American armies are having to fight desperately to undo the effects of a hard-driving German offensive. A less optimistic view might have prevented that offensive from getting under way.

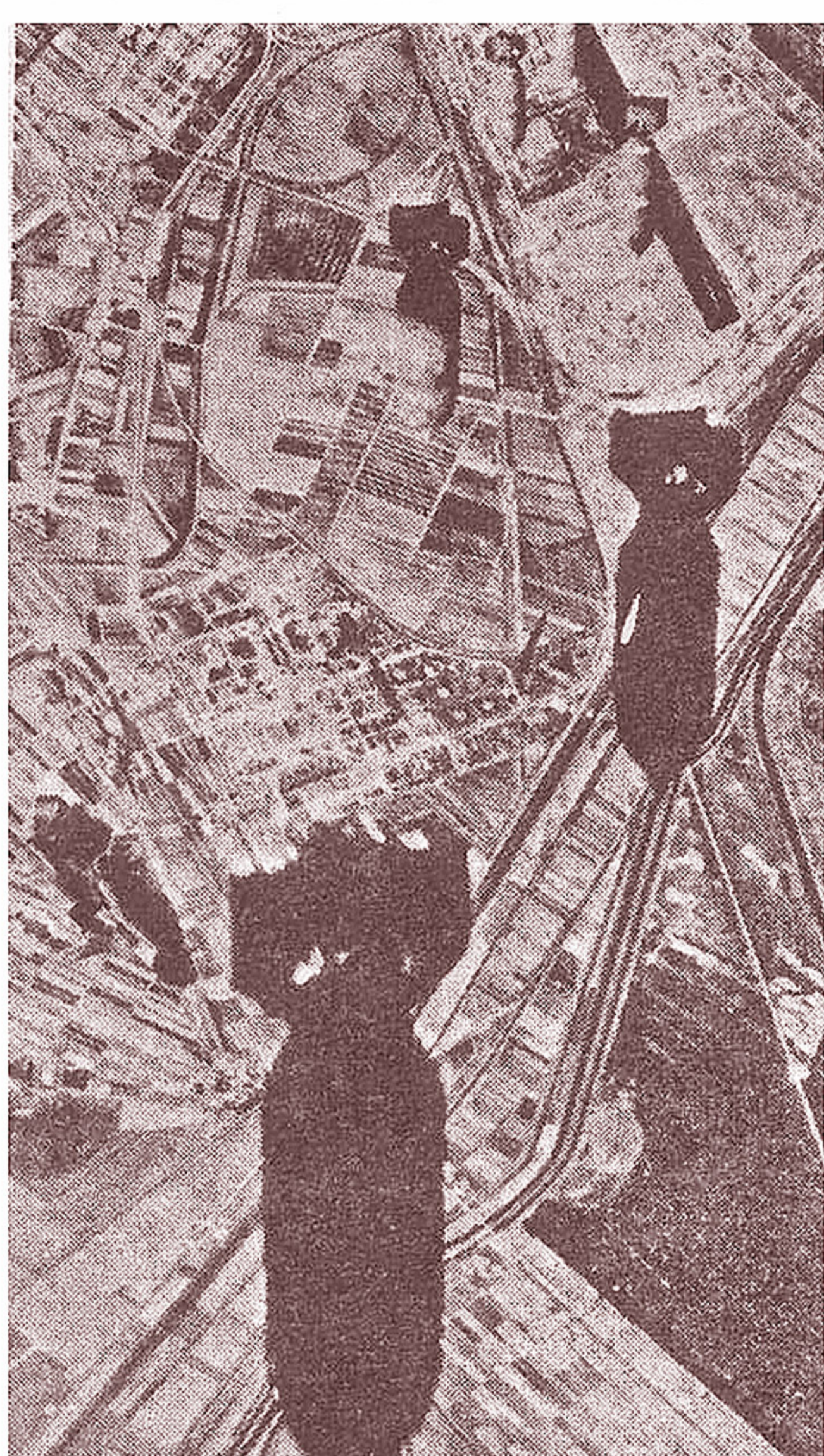
Lesson No. 2 is that it is a mistake to underestimate German will to resist. Many Americans, including high officials, believed that Germany would give up rather than fight on her own soil. That idea has been shown to be a myth.

Lesson No. 3 is that there is no substitute in war for military experience. The Germans long have been schooled as a military nation. Their armies, from generals to privates, are the product of many decades of intensive training in the arts of war. In contrast, the U. S. overnight has tried to become a great power in land warfare. An Army of 8,000,000 has been built in four years' time from a small force of less than 300,000. Leaders who were low in rank and commanded 5,000 or 10,000 men suddenly have had to assume high rank and command hundreds of thousands or millions of men. They are at a handicap in combat with the professional German militarists.

Lesson No. 4 is that excessive dependence upon allies is dangerous. Americans pinned their hopes for an early end to the war on a Russian winter offensive through Poland, to be co-ordinated with the Allied offensive in the West. Whatever the reason, such an offensive has not yet materialized. Some Americans also have looked to the British and Canadians, with their limited man power, to bear a large part of the fighting in the West. Now, the people of this country are finding that they must look primarily to their own efforts to win the two great wars in which they are engaged.

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Lesson No. 5 is that the experiment of trying to defeat Germany by overwhelming air power is not a complete success. The Allies first placed great hopes in the attempt to crush Germany with strategic bombing. That bombing damaged Germany, but did not end the war. Tactical bombing, in conjunction with fighting by ground troops, played a vital part in the spectacular Allied victories of last summer. Now, however, the tactical air arm is hampered by bad weather and by short days. Bad weather prevented Allied fliers from detecting the concentrations of German troops in time. Bad weather also prevented Allied planes from knocking out German forces in their



WAR FROM THE AIR
... lesson learned?

break-through advance to the west. Questions are raised, therefore, as to whether too many men and too much material have been allocated to air forces, with an effectiveness limited by weather, rather than to all-weather ground forces.

Lesson No. 6 is that this country cannot fight two full-scale wars at the same time and be at her maximum strength in either. Ships, troops, and equipment used for campaigns in the Pacific were not available for possible landings in the Balkans, Norway, Denmark, or on the North German coast. Plans for the two wars evidently were made on the assumption that this country was strong enough to go ahead with big operations against Japan without delaying victory over Germany. The problem now is to restore the situation on the Western Front in Europe without slowing up the war against the Japanese.

Lesson No. 7 is that the element of surprise still is an important factor in warfare, and that an army with an inadequate intelligence service is always in danger. Early in the war, the Germans repeatedly used surprise, but over the last two years most of the surprises were sprung by the Allies. Now it is again the Germans who have used surprise. This time, fighting on their own soil, and with some of their countrymen living behind Allied lines, they had an extremely accurate knowledge of how thinly our forces were spread. At the same time, with the advantage of totalitarian controls, they

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succeeded in hiding their preparations from Allied agents. Thus they were able to achieve a new surprise in the same region and over the same roads as they traversed in their surprise offensives of 1914 and 1940.

The over-all lesson is that this war will not be won until the Allies have reached and destroyed the real sources of Germany's power. It cannot be won simply by fighting to Germany's boundaries, while the German armies remain intact.

When these lessons are translated into terms of the Japanese war, they mean that bombing alone will not defeat Japan, that blockade alone may not defeat her, and that it may be necessary actually to invade Japan and Manchuria and destroy the Japanese armies before that war ends. Thus, U. S. military leaders now are convinced that this country must pay the high price of destroying both the German and Japanese armies.

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