

Background: Allied air attacks were heavy by June 1943. Here Goebbels is speaking to a memorial service for people killed by a bombing attack in Wuppertal. He uses the occasion to proclaim that Germany is innocent, and the Allies guilty. The speech was given on 18 June 1943.

The source: “In vorderster Reihe. Rede auf der Trauerkundgebung in der Elberfelder Stadthalle,” *Der steile Aufstieg* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1944), pp. 323-330.

In the Front Ranks

by Joseph Goebbels

A sad and moving occasion brings me back today to the city of my youth. I stand here as the representative of the Führer and of the entire German people to bid farewell to the dead of Wuppertal, victims in the ruins left by British air terror. Before the front and the homeland, I bow with pride and sorrow before the civilian dead, who paid for their loyalty to the Reich with their lives. This moving ceremony is particularly sad for me, since it affects a city in which I spent the best years of my political struggle.

Countless proud memories bind me to this city, its people and the entire province of Rhineland-Westphalia. I speak to you as a son of this land blessed in peace, praised in songs, a land that whatever fate befell it never lost its ties to the homeland. I lived and worked here for many years. The roots of my public work are here. A group of loyal National Socialists formed around me here in 1924, 1925, and 1926. From here we carried the banner of the National Socialist revolution deep into the Rhineland and the Ruhr. It is our common homeland, before whose dead we bow in this hour.

I return today to bid farewell to the dead of this city. Among them are many people dear to me, with whom I have passed countless hours of joy and pleasure, but also sorrow and disappointment in the eternal struggle for the Reich. I have the right to speak not only as the Führer's delegate and not only as the representative of the German people, but also in the name of the hard-tested people of this beautiful province. I express the feelings of sorrow and proud bitterness that move the heart of every German. The pain and sorrow shared by so many families in the areas affected by the bombing attacks are a part of the sorrow and pain of the entire German people. In the past we shared the pleasures of the proud resurrection of our national life. Today we share in brotherhood the pain and sorrows that the war brings to so many German families.

I stand amidst you, my Rhineland-Westphalian fellow citizens, to say that this province is not fighting alone at some lost position. The entire German people is with you, and surrounds you with love and loyalty. With proud admiration the nation watches the tough, bitter endurance of this part of our people in the face of enemy air terror. The enemy may leave cities and villages in soot and ashes, but can never break the human heart. The enormous sorrows and burdens, pain and tortures that are laid on the shoulders of this population are part of the larger war. It is the duty of the German nation to take upon itself as many as it can as fast as it can. What can be done to ease your material difficulties is being done. The Reich government is doing all it can, in cooperation with the local party and government offices, to bring help. The enemy may have left your houses and apartments in ruins. You can be sure that when victory has been won, the entire German people will bring to bear its enormous strength to rebuild the destroyed villages and cities of this province and make them more beautiful than they were before. New life will spring from the ruins around us. That which has been destroyed will be rebuilt, but now we must do everything possible to enable life to go on, even if under primitive conditions. All

the damage cannot be repaired. We cannot bring the dead back to life. They have fallen on the field of honor while fighting for Germany's freedom and greatness, just as the soldiers at the front. Whether man, woman, or child, they were victims of a cynical enemy that is trying to win by evil and perfidious air terror what he is unable to do by force of arms: to break our people's morale. I do not need to talk about that. We all know what this war is about. The enemy himself has told us often enough that, if we are weak, we will have a peace compared to which war is a blessing. They are about an insidious attempt to exterminate the greatest and proudest people on earth. The German nation is resisting with unanimity, strong weapons, and the strong hearts of men, women, and children. With unprecedented moral strength, they are withstanding the enemy's insidious attacks, its cowardly assault on their national honor, unity, and steadfastness. Our dead are their witnesses. We are obligated to them. As we lay them in mother earth, we know that they repose in the same grave of honor in which our soldiers on the front sleep. They German people receive their inheritance. Their day will come when we will take revenge for them.

I wish to speak so loudly here that no one can fail to hear. I stand here as an accuser before the world public. I accuse the enemy of conducting brutal air terror for no other reason than to torture a defenseless civilian population, to inflict sorrow, horrors, pain, and death upon them as a way of forcing them to betray their nation. Such an attempt will never succeed. These cowardly deeds will only bring eternal shame on the nations whose governments carry on such contemptible and insidious warfare against women, old people, and children.

The enemy knows that he is doing only limited damage to our armaments and war industries. That is not his goal. His goal is to torture defenseless civilians, to bring death to their homes and dwellings, and to attempt to break German morale. It is his last attempt to salvage his otherwise hopeless military strategy. Numerous murdered women, old people, and children testify against the Anglo-American plutocrats. They join me in accusing a military policy that mocks all standards of human decency. Countless destroyed schools, hospitals, churches, and cultural monuments join me raising their hands from amidst the ruins to condemn a military strategy that commits such crimes.

It will do the enemy no good to use the tried and true methods of the Jewish men behind the scenes by turning the accused into accusers and the accusers into the accused. The guilt for waging war against civilian populations rests clearly with the Western plutocrats. They can never wash their hands of their responsibility. This type of air terror comes from the sick brains of plutocratic world destroyers. The Führer did all he could to avoid the war, and to wage it in humane ways after it was forced upon him. England above all rejected his efforts. From the murder of children in Freiburg on 10 May 1940 to the present, a long series of sorrow and deep human misery caused by the British-American bombing war against German cities testifies against England and the USA and their cowardly and terrible plutocratic leaders.

The enemy even admits his guilt in careless moments. He does not conceal his hopes that the air war will break the powers of resistance of the German people in the Homeland. An official spokesman recently said openly on the English radio: "One catches oneself feeling happy that men, women, and children are forced to suffer so terribly." It is almost a direct incitement to murder German women and children when some time ago a British new agency wrote: "For Heaven's sake, get to work on the German civilian population. That is the only way to break their morale." Even the Church of England recently said: "We cannot support the campaign to prohibit air attacks on cities because they kill civilians. We are all equal to the bombers. Bombs do not distinguish between men, women, and children."

So says the English church. The Anglo-American military leadership differs only in that they not only make no distinctions between men, women, and children, but do not even wish to. They intentionally and cynically carry the war to civilian areas, turn them into a battlegrounds, and force women, the

aged, and children to live and fight like soldiers. The fate and the future of our people is being decided not only at the front, but also in the homeland. The children who fall to enemy terror prepare the way for millions of other children in the future. The women who lose their lives to enemy bombing terror prepare the way for millions of women to give birth in the coming decades and centuries. As I speak to you in deepest sorrow and proudest memory of those who have fallen in this city and throughout the Reich, I know that I express the deepest feelings of the people of this province. The sacrifice of life that so many of your fellow citizens have made for the freedom and future of the fatherland is but a reason and obligation for you to continue your bitter resistance to enemy air terror. It is not customary to speak of hatred at a graveside. Death usually brings not only sorrow, but also a kind of reconciliation. But in this case, it cries for revenge. The dead whose memory we honor today are the victims of the enemy's cold, calculating cynicism. The cynicism will end only when it is beaten down by painful, repeated counter-blows. Through me, the German people praise our dead. We understand their deaths in this sense, and know they did not die in vain. The hour is coming when we will defeat terror with counter-terror. The enemy is committing one bloody deed after another. He will have to pay the bill one day. Countless engineers, workers and builders are at work to speed that day. I know that the German people are waiting impatiently. I know the thoughts that fill our hearts as we remember those who have fallen in the air war. The name of the enemy has been written deep into our hearts during the past sorrowful weeks. That will be the basis for our coming actions.

Until that day, the people of this district must bear their heavy burdens with National Socialist steadfastness. The whole nation breathlessly follows the battle. The cities that survive despite the fire and rubble will receive unfading laurels on their coats of arms. When the happy day of victory rings out across the Reich, which we all not only long for, but are doing all we can to bring about, the flags of our Reich will rise high from the ruined streets and buildings. More than any other province of the Reich, these areas will be able to say:

The war put us in the front ranks of the fighting home front. It showed us its dreadful face. Now we have the first right to bow before the goddess of history to receive the laurels of victory.