

PART 4

Why 'Bomber' Harris should have his Statue

(Written 9th October 1991)

When in mid 1941, at the age of eighteen, I volunteered to join the Royal Air Force, it was, I suppose, a means to an end. I just wanted to be a pilot and fly. It was not too long before I realised I was caught up in a war for Britain's survival. At a certain stage in my flying instruction someone pointed to the left and I became a bomber pilot, had someone pointed to the right I might well have become a fighter pilot hero instead of a bomber pilot which some Britons deem to call war criminals.

Much clap-trap is appearing in the correspondence columns of the Daily Telegraph about Bomber Harris' bomber offensive against Germany, but first of all let me emphasise that it was not his offensive. He was, in the final analysis, taking orders from the War Cabinet. Albeit his powers of argument probably swayed the Cabinet into his line of thinking but they always had the power to displace him and appoint another in his stead. They, without exception, backed him like the rest of the beleaguered Britons, to the full. When I was proudly wearing my Royal Air Force wings not a single person approached me to tell me I was doing 'the wrong thing'. In the newsreels of the day, which still are shown occasionally on TV, one can see the public and the newspapers saying in unison 'give them one for me'. My bombaimer, familiar with the London blitz, always used to say on release of his bombs 'That's some of your own medicine' or words to that effect.

We were engaged in Total Warfare, I repeat 'total' warfare. Nothing like it has happened since. It was 'them or us.' Just as simple as that. If 'them', we thought, rightly or wrongly, that life as we knew it would no longer exist. Families would be broken up, women would be molested and men transported for forced labour and our land pillaged. If this was not to be - well we just couldn't take the risk, everything that was happening in conquered countries pointed in this direction and at this stage no one had even heard of the holocaust. If it was 'us' - well it was to be sunshine at the end of a very long and dark tunnel.

This was Total War and everyone is in total war. Hitler proved that to us and had we kept on the kid gloves then assuredly we would have been vanquished. Don't forget that in the early months of the war our planes were dropping leaflets over Germany which got us nowhere except in the loss of valuable aircrew. There are no innocents in Total War. Women worked in

factories producing guns and other weapons of war and they even assisted in manning the guns which were shooting down our aircraft. Young children, as soon as they were old enough had swastikas put on their arms and started training, who knows, but possibly with a view to patrolling the streets of occupied Britain. Homes were roots for men at the front, a source from which they could seek comfort. They were at the front to kill our soldiers and if they had no homes their stomach for fighting may well be diminished. It is difficult in these days of peace, 45 years of peace, to imagine the feelings of those who were engrossed in such a battle as the Second World War. I say 45 years of peace because even the Vietnam war with its losses of over one million men was insignificant against the fifty million total dead of World War II.

German dead, resulting from the Bomber Command offensive over all the war years were believed to be five hundred thousand. Just two atomic bombs dropped on Japan possibly exceeded this figure.

Bomber Harris firmly believed and obviously convinced his superiors, that Germany could be defeated by bombing alone and in turn passed this belief onto all the aircrew in his Command. In those hectic days of 1943 and early 1944 the whole Command thought it could be done. All Germans were the enemy, not just selected groups. Bombing by Bomber Command at night and the American Eight Air Force by day, giving the Germans no respite until they finally capitulated. And Harris was convinced this could be achieved and that countless thousands of soldiers could be saved from massacre by the opening of a Second Front.

Heavy losses of both aircrew and aircraft prevented him seeing this through and indeed the morale of the Germans was such that he may not have succeeded. But at the time, at the opening of his Bomber Offensive, he was convinced he could do it. Events later, in Japan, proved that he could have been right because two atom bombs dropped by the Americans and not directly at military targets but at Nagasaki and Hiroshima as a whole did bring Japan to her knees and there is no question but that it saved the lives of thousands of allied invasion soldiers who would have been engaged on mainland Japan.

Speer, the Germans' armaments chief always maintained that had the Bomber Offensive been continued Germany would have succumbed and there would have been no necessity for a Second Front.

It is a terrible indictment to say that bomber aircrew were needlessly sacrificed, amongst them my own rear gunner and wireless operator. They were fighting for a cause they strongly believed in and who knows history might yet prove that without their efforts the war might well have been lost and that generations reading that history might never have been born.

I am told that a Mr. Edwin Howards, a leading historian at Yale University who is busily engaged in compiling a history of World War II clearly states that the Bomber Offensive was a Second Front. And because of its sorties over Germany and because of Russian pressure for more action against Germany it

did give Churchill much more power to his elbow when attending the Big Three conferences.

I understand that Mr. Howard will point out that, in addition to the damage being caused to German cities, which included massive damage to her war industries (which prompted Speer's comment), the offensive pinned down hundreds of fighter aircraft, tens of thousands of men operating all the defences (guns, fire fighting services, searchlights, balloon barrages etc.) and thousands of light and heavy anti- aircraft guns.

In order to maintain their defences the Germans had to produce fighters in preference to bombers. If Germany had been allowed to produce bombers and all these defending soldiers and artillery could have been moved to the Russian Front and to defend the French coast who knows what the result might have been. Hitler said the Reich would last a thousand years and with all this additional weaponry at his disposal it might have been achieved. These bombers, produced instead of fighters, would certainly have continued to pound British cities at night as they had previously pounded Coventry, Birmingham, Bristol, London, Rotterdam, Warsaw, etc. and this in addition to the onslaught of V.I's and V.II's which they would have been able to manufacture uninterrupted.

Make no mistake, the Bomber Offensive of 1943/44 against German industry and cities was a 2nd. Front. Every time bombers went into German airspace it was a battle. It was a battle against great odds and the aircrew losses confirm this.

The long hours over enemy territory, constantly on guard, never knowing when a bullet or shell might strike to end it all and this from an enemy one could not see, possibly attacking from below, the corkscrewing and weaving from the attacking plane one could see, seeing other unfortunate bombers falling from the sky in flames and too dark to see if any parachutes emerge. The flights through bad weather, thunderstorms, breaking through low cloud at near danger height. Encountering fog after hours of testing flying and the hazards of landing in fog and then to cap it all German intruder aircraft sometimes sitting over ones home aerodrome ready to shoot you down when navigation lights were switched on.. And possibly the same thing the next night and if your luck held out possibly the next night as well. Yes, it was a Second Front all right.

Not once did I hear condemnation of the job we were doing and although I understand, it did happen occasionally, not once did I hear of an aircrew member going LMF (Lack of Moral Fibre).

I am proud to have been a member of Bomber Command and shared the comradeship I found in the Royal Air Force. Proud to be the possessor of the Distinguished Flying Cross which I wear on behalf of all my crew, particularly my rear gunner and wireless operator who were killed finishing their tour with another pilot.

So give Bomber Harris his rightful place in British history and let us - his 'old lags' - erect his monument in the shadow of the Royal Air Force church of

St. Clement Danes, which after all, is Royal Air Force land.

Let the doubters try to project themselves back to those desperate days and not try to relate to the events, practices and beliefs of the present day.

This article was written by Max Hastings, Editor of the 'Daily Telegraph'

The decision of The Bomber Command Assoc. to raise funds for the erection of a statue to 'Bomber' Harris, their war-time chief caused such controversy, not least from the Germans.

It was proposed that the statue be erected on the forecourt of the R.A.F. Church, St Clements Danes in the Strand, London and coupled with the name of 'Bomber'

Harris would be the 55,000 aircrew who lost their lives in Bomber Command.

Many letters both condemning and supporting the project were written to the national newspapers.

The volume of interest shown prompted me to keep a scrap book of all the correspondence and newspaper articles involved. This scrap book can be found elsewhere.

The statue was eventually erected and unveiled by Her Majesty, the Queen Mother, Patron of the Bomber Command Association.

small can him Jones — drove me to the station after we had talked for several hours. He suddenly turned to me in the car and asked: "Has anybody else mentioned having nightmares about it?"

Jones was a much-decorated pilot. On wartime bomber stations in his early 20s, he was regarded as a star — yes, a heroic figure. He was also a statistical phenomenon. For most of the war, the probabilities dictated that a heavy aircraft crew was unlikely to complete a tour of 30 operations over Germany, the norm before being rested or transferred to instructing duties. Some 55,573 aircrew were killed flying for Bomber Command. Yet Jones survived the usual horrors — including flying home a badly damaged Halifax to crash-land in England — and completed two tours.

When he left the RAF after the war, he became a teacher and for years he said that he never thought much about his experiences. Then he found himself being questioned by much younger colleagues, a new generation, about Bomber Command. "How could you have done it?" they asked. "How could you have flown over Germany night after night to bomb women and children?"

He began to brood deeply, and he disliked what he found. He became a remedial teacher, working with handicapped children, and he told me that he regarded this as a form of atonement for what he had been party to between 1942 and 1945, the bomber offensive which killed something between 300,000 and 600,000 in Germany, most of them civilians.

I THOUGHT then, and I believe now, that it is wrong for any man who flew for Bomber Command to be burdened with personal guilt. It is fair to say that this man was unusual. Most air crew veterans harbour quite different emotions: anger and even bitterness that some of a new generation should judge with such harshness what they did in the name of their country.

It is these sentiments which lie at the heart of the controversy today, almost half a century later, about next month's unveiling of a statue to Sir Arthur Harris, Bomber Command's wartime C-in-C, and the debate about whether the Queen should go to Dresden in October, when she makes her official visit to Germany.

The survivors of Bomber Command were deeply distressed after the war, when their own society appeared determined to distance itself from what they had done at such cost. Harris himself was denied a peerage. No special campaign medal was struck for the bomber aircrew, who received only the Aircrew Europe medal, indistinguishable from that awarded to men who flew fighters and transports, at incomparably smaller risk.

In recent years, the controversy about the bombing of Germany has deepened, and become starkly simplified by some critics. The "We were all guilty" school of moralists seeks to discern an equipoise of shame. The Germans inflicted terrible cruelties upon the world, above all by the killing of Jews in the Holocaust. But we, the Allies — they point out — massacred hundreds of thousands of women and children by our indiscriminate terror bombing of Germany.

There is plenty of chilling superfi-

Fifty years ago, when I was interviewing survivors of the RAF's Bomber Command for a book about the wartime air offensive against Germany, one of them — we shall call him Jones — drove me to



Bomber Harris: 'It is monstrously unjust to saddle him with responsibility'

For my book, I examined in great detail one typical Bomber Command raid, against the town of Darmstadt, near Frankfurt, on September 11 1944. By that stage of the war, the techniques of saturation bombing had become highly refined. Darmstadt had not been seriously attacked before, because its industrial output was marginal. Its defences were slight. One of the pilots noted in his logbook, the morning after the attack by 232 aircraft: "A quiet trip all round."

Bomber Command's attack on Darmstadt did little damage to the city's industries in the suburbs, but raised a firestorm in the city centre which killed at least 8,453 people. These casualties were broken down by the post-war United States Strategic Bombing Survey:

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|------------------------|
| 956 military |
| 1,766 civilian males |
| 2,742 civilian females |
| 2,129 children |
| 368 prisoners of war |
| 492 foreign labourers |

This count was not untypical for any Bomber Command raid on Germany in the last years of the Second

World War. Sir Arthur Harris became obsessive in his determination to complete the undertaking he had begun in February 1942, of razing the major cities of Germany.

To a later generation, Harris did not seem appealing. A ruthless uncompromising apostle of the doctrine of strategic bombing, he lacked any cultural leavening and was contemptuously when controversy began to close in on his Command. "The feeling over Dresden can easily be explained by any psychiatrist. It is connected with German bands and Dresden shepherdesses. This sort of thing — and Harris wrote much else, even more ruthless — makes ugly reading half a century later. Yet here, surely, is the essence of this debate. It is a huge error to seek to impose upon the event of the Second World War a moral even military view dictated by hindsight.

The salient facts about the bomber offensive seem to me these: first, it was the Germans who introduced the world to mass strategic bombing, and killed 50,000 British civilians before the Allied offensive

Statues of
military
leaders stir
emotions
in both
Britain and
Germany

THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH MAY 31 1992

Bomber Harris's old lags stand by their leader

by Christy Campbell
Defence Correspondent

THE VETERAN Master Bomber's eyes burned. Almost 50 years ago they had reflected the glow of the city of Cologne, blazing beneath his Stirling bomber.

"I'm certainly going to be in The Strand on Sunday," former Pathfinder leader Wing Commander Hamish Mahaddie, 81, said. "And I'll be as proud as anyone to see the statue of 'Bomber' Harris unveiled. If anyone should ask what he did, I shall say he was the greatest British commander of the Second World War. He led us in the offensive that was the most important single contribution to the defeat of Hitler's Germany."

This morning, he will don his bowler hat and defence medal (bomber crews were not awarded a campaign medal after the war, a wound that still hurts) — and join fellow veterans to see the Queen Mother honour their commander, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, outside St Clement Danes, the RAF church in The Strand.

The ceremony is described as private, with no official involvement. The Government still wants to stay away from "Bomber" Harris (some crews still prefer to call him "Butcher") and his plan to wreck the cities of the Reich from end to end.

The bronze statue is of a portly figure in uniform, his eyes scanning the horizon as if waiting for his bomber crews to return: 55,000 men never did come back.

Harris's "old lags", as he called them, dismiss the protests of German politicians. They want to see their commander honoured and rehabilitated at last as a tribute to them all.

Sir Arthur died in 1984, driven into semi-exile after the war, reviled in some quarters as a "bureaucrat of death" who had blindly driven his crews beyond endurance to slaughter women and children.

"No one in Bomber Command will say he was wrong," said Wing Commander Mahaddie. "And I remember how he looked when he realised what he had lost at Nuremberg, 700 men in one night. That was an agony he took to the grave."

Reg Kindred was 19 when he went on to bombers in 1941. In his London flat last week, he rested his artificial leg and recalled his fourth and last mission — as a ser-

geant pilot flying an underpowered twin-engined Avro Manchester bomber to attack two German warships in the French port of Brest in January 1942.

"We were freezing cold, even in our flying jackets," he said. "We made a target run but missed. The bomb-aimer said 'Go round again'. Suddenly all hell broke loose, we were caught in a cone of searchlights and there was an almighty bang to starboard. I saw the snow-covered coast of France spinning through the cockpit canopy and thought: you've really buggered it up this time."

Three weeks later he woke up in a German military hospital, minus his leg.

He is convinced it was all worth the sacrifice.

"Bomber Command was an amateur shambles until Harris took over in 1942," said Wing Commander Mahaddie. "I had flown 30 missions by then and don't think we hit a thing — but by now Harris had the big bombers coming into service, and the trained navigators who could do just what he wanted — pound Germany to rubble."

More than 500,000 civilians died in the bomber offensive, which by 1945 had reduced Germany's cities to rubble — as Harris had promised.

After the Dresden raid, which killed 100,000 civilians, Harris wrote a secret memorandum which Wing Commander Mahaddie now possesses: "This sentiment about Dresden is all about ideas of shepherdess girls and German bands. Actually the city is a mass of munition works and a key transport point to the east — it is now none of those things."

The Scots-born Pathfinder is no more sentimental in describing his last mission, over Cologne in January 1943. "We followed the Rhine, glinting in starlight. I thought the bomb-aimer couldn't miss — the railway station's right by the cathedral. Right, right, steady, steady — bombs gone!"

But while the crew concentrated on dropping phosphorus markers, a night fighter had crept underneath the bomber stream. "My cockpit disintegrated around me," he said.

"Half my radio operator's

hand was blown off. We to shoot his arm full of morphine straight through his leather flying jacket.

The Stirling limped across the North Sea, landed, soaked in sweat."

In Germany this week they are pasting pictures of "Bomber" Harris to rubble remains from the devastation of 50 years ago. In London, cardboard pigeons have fluttered out of St Clement Danes.

It had been said the statue should have been of an anonymous aircrew. But the survivors of Bomber Command, it seems that a statue of their leader is exactly what they want.

● Two German cities badly hit by air raids are holding their own ceremonies to coincide with today's unveiling of the "Bomber" Harris statue, writes Robert Tilley.

Civic leaders in Cologne and Dresden are taking part in wreath-laying ceremonies.

To the Point — P22
Peter Simple — P24

The forgotten victims of Bomber Command

A royal visit to Dresden in October would amount to a gratuitous acknowledgment by the British of war-guilt for which there is no justification, argues MAX HASTINGS

sive as a policy born of military desperation, in 1941 when they possessed no other means whatever of carrying the war to Germany.

That old aphorism, "we make war as we must, rather than as we should", has never been more relevant. Bomber Command attacked whole cities rather than specific industries, because it lacked the technology effectively to do anything else. To this day — as Vietnam and even the Gulf war showed — aerial bombardment remains terribly imprecise.

By late-1943, many war leaders had become sceptical not about the morality of bombing (although there were a few voices on this subject, too) but about its value, when so many thousands of Britain's best young men, and such a huge proportion of our war effort, had become committed to striking Germany's cities. The critics perceived that less damage was being done to Hitler's war-making capability than Harris and his acolytes promised. Yet it has been insufficiently understood to what extent the British in 1944-45 were the prisoners of industrial and strategic decisions that had been taken in quite different circumstances, three years earlier.

Churchill and Portal, the Chief of Air Staff, may deserve criticism for failing to control Harris, or even sack him — as I believe should have been done in the winter of 1944, when he was obviously pursuing his own policy rather than following the order of the Allied high command. But, from beginning to end, Harris was a subordinate. It is monstrously unjust to saddle him with responsibility for the bomber offensive, when he was appointed to carry out a policy conceived by Portal and Lord Cherwell, endorsed first explicitly, and later implicitly, by Churchill.

THE bomber offensive can never be equated morally with the Nazis' crimes. It may have been mishandled. I think it was. But, from beginning to end, it was intended solely as a military means of contributing to the defeat of Germany. The RAF did not kill civilians as a deliberate act of barbarity, but because analysts believed that the destruction of Germany's cities would contribute mightily, if not decisively, to preventing Hitler from continuing the unspeakable war that he had inflicted on the world.

For the Queen to visit Dresden this year would be to acknowledge the need for a gesture of atonement for the bomber offensive, matching so many of its kind made by the Germans for the Holocaust since 1945. This seems to me, as it would seem to the survivors of the young men who flew for Bomber Command, a gratuitous acknowledgment of guilt, for which there is no justification.

Harris deserves his statue, not for himself, but because of what its unveiling will mean, symbolically, to the veterans of Bomber Command. There were two groups of victims of the strategic air offensive: the people of Germany and the aircrew of the RAF. It is for each society separately to mourn its dead and honour those who remain. There is nothing wrong with the Mayor of Dresden weeping for his city. There is certainly nothing wrong with the British people today acknowledging the courage and devotion of our wartime bomber aircrew, by commemorating Harris, their leader and their



AIR CHIEF
MARSHAL
'BOMBER' HARRIS

BOMBER COMMAND
DINNER.

1979.



● Remembering: Former members of 49 and 576 Squadrons with their new memorial at Fiskerton. (1579-23).

Memorial to RAF fallen

THERE is a little bit of Lincolnshire that is forever the RAF.

And yesterday more than 150 people stood on the windswept disused airfield near Fiskerton to pay tribute to the members of 49 and 576 Squadrons who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of others.

The crowd stood with heads bowed as a representative of each squadron unveiled the stone-mounted plaque which will ensure the memories of those who served at RAF Fiskerton, near Lincoln, during the Second World War live on.

But the stone memorial and flowering chestnut tree are dedicated not just to the airmen but to the local people who took them to their hearts.

Tom Gatfield of the 49 Squadron Association told the crowd: "This is not only a memorial to those who flew from Fiskerton but to the co-operation between the RAF and the people of the village which continues today.

"For it was that co-operation which built



● Unveiled: Tom Gatfield (left) and Eric Norman reveal the new memorial. (1579-10).

this memorial."

Chairman of the Association L. J. (Uncle Will) Hay thanked the owner of the land, farmer Geoff Stubbins and his family, for making the memorial possible.

Former Flight Lieutenant Eric Norman of 576 Squadron said: "It is a splendid memorial to our friends who died and so appropriate not only that it is on the airfield itself but that it is made from Lincolnshire stone."

Ex-Warrant Officer Len Bradfield of 49 Squadron added: "I think it is especially nice as five of my own crew didn't make it back."

It was Mr Bradfield's nostalgic landing in the field two years ago, to mark the 50th anniversary of his plane being shot down over Germany, which once again raised public interest in RAF Fiskerton and prompted Mr Stubbins' donation of land for a memorial.

A LETTER FROM THE DAILY TELEGRAPH JULY 1996

Sir

This mania for television reappraisal of wartime and other events prompts me to offer my feelings in verse:

When the bravest of the brave
Lie silent in the grave
The time has come to mount,
By men of no account,
An attack upon their name.
Is this a sense of shame
That drives them to deride
What others hold with pride,
While in their hearts they know
A fear they dare not show:
That when we go to war
With brave ones to the fore
It is they, and they alone,
Who'd creep beneath a stone.

AVM Sir Laurence Sinclair GC

IN MEMORIAM

My brief sweet life is over,
My eyes no longer see,
No Christmas tree
No summer walks
No pretty girls-for me.
I've got the chop - I've had it
My mighty Ops are done
Yet in another hundred years
I'll still be twenty one.

LISTEN TO THE WIND

Inscribed on the 49 Squadron Memorial on the edge of the old Fiskerton airfield.

Stranger, pause here a little while
And listen to the west wind's sigh
With its tale of long gone men
Earth shall never see their like again.

Stand by this stone and lend an ear
And I'll show you ghosts of yester year
The windsocks creak, the cold winds moan
Long dead men crowd around, we're not alone.

Look on this lonely empty place
Unseen do shadows still cross my face
Listen, far off thunder or a Merlin's roar
Born on the wind from times distant shore.

Abandoned, quiet, here I lie
Time stands still, though years roll by
Runways broken, dispersal's gone
The only sound a skylark's song.

Half a hundred years have passed
Half a century since I saw them last
Lancasters black against the sky
Aircrews, young, so many soon to die.

They came from England and many country shores
Volunteers each one, to defend liberty's just cause
These runways know how many went
Silent witness to youth's blood spent.

I was created from the earth for which they fought
My rich dark soil with their sacrifice they bought
In Lincoln cathedral yonder their names are to be found
And know this, by their blood, you stand on hallowed ground.

Let the tangled weeds that cover me remain
Shrouding my memories of joy and pain
And as I return slowly to the land
Let this proud stone in permanent homage stand.

So, Stranger, continue now upon your way
But forget not those who, it seems but yesterday,
Gave all their tomorrows that you might live
For your freedom, they gave all they had to give.

AFTERTHOUGHT

I am not ashamed to write that one night in the winter of '43, climbing for height over the North Sea and heading towards a German target I made a profound request to the Deity.

From that night I asked for a further seven years of life. Although that date escapes me now I did remember it seven years on and waited, rather stupidly I suppose, for something to happen. It didn't.

Perhaps my religious outlook has changed somewhat since those hectic days although at times of desperate need many resort to prayer as their only means of solace. That night, so long ago, I joined their ranks.

Every year since then - 1950 - I have considered a bonus year. 46 bonus years to date.

I have every reason to be grateful that perhaps, somewhere, someone listened to my request and even granted my a very liberal extension of time.

PART 5

REFERENCES

If you have not been too bored with the above, I would like to recommend some easily read books, all dealing with the Bomber Command offensive.

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| A Thousand Shall Fall | Murray Peden | } I have read these |
| The Berlin Raids | Martin Middlebrook | |
| Bomber Harris. | Max Hastings | |
| To Fly Lancasters. | Clive Roantree | |
| | | (This book was not published for public reading but I have a copy. Contains much information on No. 49 Squadron) |
| The Hardest Victory. | Denis Richards. | From Libraries |
| The Great Ingratitude | James Fyfe | I have read this |
| Beware of the Dog at War | John Ward | (No 49 Squadron's official history. I own a copy.) |

Places of interest to visit.

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|------------------------------|---|
| Hendon RAF Museum | Lancaster 'S' Sugar (over 100 raids) Valiant Jet Bomber of 49 Squad. (This type used in dropping of Britain's atom bomb when testing at Christmas Island) Both above aircraft static exhibits. |
| RAF Coningsby, Lincs | Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. |
| RAF Museum East Kirby, Lincs | Much 49 Squadron memorabilia (including photographs of my crew) Also static display Lancaster. |
| Fiskerton. | Plaque to memory of all who served on the aerodrome and also glass display cabinet containing 49 Squad. memorabilia. Both items in the village church. On the site of the aerodrome a stone memorial tablet. |
