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Group Man Goes to War: Elements of Propaganda in John Steinbeck's *Bombs Away*

Perhaps the best place to begin a discussion of *Bombs Away*, a 1942 recruiting text Steinbeck wrote on assignment for the Army Air Force, is with a few cold facts about air operations in World War II. Between 1939 and 1945, for instance, winged warfare grew to dimensions nothing short of frightening. By the end of the war, huge sections of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Tokyo had literally been incinerated or obliterated, while halfway across the globe, many once-beautiful towns and cities throughout Europe had been reduced to rubble by round-the-clock bombing campaigns conducted unrelentingly by United States Strategic Air Forces and Royal Air Force Bomber Command, whose combined operations dropped some 2,790,000 tons of bombs upon Axis targets, alone (Boyne 282). Moreover, not counting untold civilian casualties inflicted during these campaigns, Allied bomb wings suffered nearly unthinkable losses of their own. Ironically, less than a year after the publication of *Bombs Away*, the U.S. Eighth Air Force was experiencing casualties in excess of eight percent, which meant that from a mathematical standpoint, no one would live to complete the standard 25-mission tour of duty (Boyne 306).¹ Sadly, by V-E Day, American aircrews serving in Europe had lost some 79,625 lives, while their British counterparts suffered 79,281 deaths, an aggregate amount nearly triple that of total American deaths during the entire Vietnam War (Boyne 284).

Bald-faced facts such as these, then, suggest the sobering reality of aerial combat missions in total warfare. But when such brute statistics are juxtaposed with the frequently-voiced, lofty conceptions of flying sprinkled throughout *Bombs Away*, a fundamental paradox arises. For instance, consider the following observation Steinbeck makes in a chapter aptly entitled, "The Pilot":

It is a strange, almost mystical thing that happens to flying

men. It is as though the experience had cut them off so that they can only communicate with their own kind, can only be understood by other flying men. . . . They have been through something that has the impact of religion, and while most of them are never able to say it, never want to say it, they all understand it. . . . once a man has entered the brotherhood it is a rare thing for him to leave it. A flying man remains a flying man until some force outside himself drags him down from the sky. (*Bombs Away* 123-24)

Though eloquently stated, such comments may seem a bit puzzling, especially when this dreamy vision of mystical brotherhood and spiritualism is considered against the bleak backdrop of indifferent killing and indiscriminate destruction that formed the very essence of aerial warfare in World War II. Indeed, to perceive the central contradiction inherent in such perceptions, one need only be reminded of the terrifying Allied raid at Dresden, which during a 24-hour span in 1945 killed 250,000 men, women, and children in an apocalyptic, bomb-induced firestorm that produced hurricane winds and temperatures up to 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit (Ambrose 307).

Of course, this seemingly irreconcilable gap between romance and reality in part accounts for the lack of sustained critical interest *Bombs Away* has received to date. When the work is discussed at all, frequently it is either treated within its historical context as a hastily assembled product of Steinbeck's patriotic commitment to the war effort, or as an inferior work that heralded the decline of the author's artistic powers after the composition of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Foremost among the historical assessments, for example, are those provided by Jackson Benson and Roy Simmons, whose thorough background discussions provide the details of how Steinbeck first got involved in the project through the ministrations of General "Hap" Arnold and President Franklin Roosevelt, as well as intriguing details of the hectic composition and favorable initial reception of the book (Benson 504-13; Simmons 111-51).² But among those who have devoted critical attention to artistic elements contained in the work, most have responded negatively. Lester Jay Marks, for instance, notes a "pathetic" quality in *Bombs Away*, not so much because of its blatant Air Force propaganda, but because in making it, Steinbeck intruded upon his ethical and esthetic standards (85, 87). Likewise, Richard Astro finds that the central flaw in the work is that in capitulating to political expediency, Steinbeck abandoned the "whole picture" view

that characterized great works such as *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath* (149). Similarly, Warren French contends that *Bombs Away* is a key to understanding the slow decline in the artistic power of Steinbeck's work after 1940 because he realized that his talents could be as easily channeled into the production of propaganda as into art (10). Elsewhere, in perhaps the most damning statement of all, John Ditsky variously refers to it as Steinbeck's "weakest book" and as a "hurriedly written hack work with a patently propagandistic purpose" (5). On a more positive note, however, Robert Morsberger provides at least one sympathetic voice by arguing that though *Bombs Away* is Steinbeck's most neglected work, it also contains his most elaborate treatment of his so-called "phalanx" theory and what happens when people work together as a group (191).³

Notwithstanding the validity of many of these comments, criticism of this sort perhaps misses the point. To begin with, judging *Bombs Away* largely on artistic merit is a bit unfair, especially given the purpose of the book. *Bombs Away* never was, nor was it intended to be, another *Grapes of Wrath* or *In Dubious Battle*, nor was it designed to provide the sort of extended parable found in books like *Of Mice and Men* or *Tortilla Flat*. Rather, Steinbeck's real purpose was to detail the training of a bomber crew from the time of induction until becoming a full-fledged flying team, not to document the plight of migrant workers in search of community or on a westward trek to the promised land. As a result, the most productive place to begin any critical assessment of *Bombs Away* is to judge it not by what it ought to be, art, but by what it is, propaganda. Or, to borrow a few terms from Steinbeck's own lexicon, to view the book using a *non-teleological* rather than a teleological framework.⁴

To that end, I shall start with a definition of what propaganda means in the context of this essay. Furthermore, I shall also apply the research of Leonard Doob, whose seminal, *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique*, provides the framework for my analysis of elements of propaganda relevant to the communication situation addressed in *Bombs Away*. And although there are many definitions, the one I shall use here is provided by contemporary rhetoricians Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, who define propaganda as the "deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (16). Accordingly, the central concern of propaganda, as opposed to other forms of communication, is to manipulate behavior and manage public opinion to exert what Terence Qualter calls "control" (15). Consequently, propaganda works to promote the objectives of a writer

or speaker in ways that may or may not be in the best interests of the audience. Generally, the most common way propagandists promote objectives is by using *suggestion*, which Doob defines as systematic “manipulation of stimulus-situations in such a way that, through the consequent arousal of pre-existing, related attitudes there occurs within the mental field a new integration which would not have occurred under different stimulus-situations” (54). For Doob, *stimulus-situations* are special circumstances or conditions that either influence people to take action or produce an intellectual and emotional response because the agent or action that causes the response somehow becomes isolated from the competing background of ideas, objects, and persons. Doob further adds that successful use of suggestion is based on the manipulation of four central principles: *perception; simplification; auxiliary attitudes; and repetition* (98).

According to Doob, the *principle of perception* is one in which the propagandist makes the “stimulus-situation stand out from the competing ground” (98). Conceptually, the idea is akin to the Gestalt principle of *figure-ground segregation*, or the theory that one of the ways that the mind configures experience and organizes perceptions into holistic patterns is by perceiving objects or “figures” as they stand out from their background (Koffka 177-210; Rock 65-66).⁵ As Max Wertheimer explains:

The fundamental “formula” of Gestalt theory might be expressed in this way: There are wholes, the behavior of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole. It is the hope of Gestalt theory to determine the nature of such wholes. (2)

In the following illustration, for instance, one can easily read that the individual elements are X’s. However, the holistic figure the viewer perceives in all the X’s is a rectangle:

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X X X X X X X X X
X                X
X                X
X X X X X X X X X

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Thus, Gestalt theory tries to understand how viewers perceive wholes

in groups of individual elements, and how those wholes emerge from other elements. When applied to propaganda situations, however, the assumption Doob makes concerning the principle of perception is that audiences, even those in isolated circumstances, are constantly bombarded by several stimuli which may be said to present a ground against which the propagandist must make the stimulus situation stand out as a significant “figure” (95). Put another way, to be successful, the propagandist must find a way to make his message—if you will, the “rectangle”—emerge from the noise of competing information, the “X’s.”

Operationally, Steinbeck achieves figure-ground segregation in two ways—through his own words, and through the accompanying photographs supplied by John Swope. Therefore, the basic ideas found in *Bombs Away* first are anchored rhetorically by what amounts to a loose form of expanded definition. As a result, Steinbeck begins with a general term, “Air Force,” then classifies, and subsequently differentiates the term from other members in its class by using explanations and illustrations. Consequently, while the words establish fundamental concepts Steinbeck wishes to advance, the photographs illustrate the ideas graphically. Accordingly, Steinbeck classifies the Air Force variously as “a team” and as “an association of experts” that is “far above the normal in intelligence, in health, and in strength” (152, 16). Then, he attempts to clarify this assumption through an expanded definition that establishes one of his primary themes—that the Air Force is a unique entity that is different from other branches of the military because its lines of authority have evolved in more democratic fashion, along horizontal, rather than vertical lines. Moreover, all members of the air crew, even the ground crew mechanic, share authority and responsibility. As Steinbeck puts it:

Necessity and intelligence have created a relationship between men in the Air Force which is unique in the armed forces. The necessity lies here—an individual in artillery, if he fails in his duty, may be responsible for a shell missing a target. The responsibility of an officer of infantry is much greater than that of a private. But in the Air Force the error or dereliction of a ground crew man, his failure to carry out his job intelligently, can bring a ship down as surely as a bad pilot can. (152)

Even though this distinction greatly oversimplifies interservice functions, it does successfully highlight the credulous notion that the Air Force requires a particular brand of teamwork, intelligence, and expertise not found

in other military organizations.

Yet another rhetorical tool Steinbeck employs to establish figure-ground segregation is the use of careful arrangement of materials. Although *Bombs Away* does not contain a plot in the conventional sense, it is structured in such a way as to produce a concentrated communication of theme through the emphasis of particular functions performed by each member of the bomber team. In doing so, the book is organized into 11 chapters, counting the preface, with each chapter providing both an individual and collective emphasis that coalesce into a central image of a particular entity, the bomber team. Functionally, these chapters also form three larger groups which outline the contours of the discussion. The first group includes the "Preface" and "Introduction," which establish the purpose of the work and chime the overarching teamwork motif. In the introductory chapter, for instance, Steinbeck flatly states, "It is the intention of this book to set down in simple terms the nature and mission of a bomber crew and the technique and training of each member of it. For the bomber crew will have a great part in defending this country and in attacking its enemies. It is the greatest team in the world" (16-17). Next, the middle sections describe the key members of the team, including the bomber, bombardier, gunner, navigator, pilot, aerial engineer, and radio engineer, respectively. Significant to this discussion is the order in which each position is treated. Normally, one might expect the most commonly recognized member of the team, the pilot, to be the first person discussed. However, Steinbeck deliberately delays his treatment of this vital crew member in order to underscore his conception of an aircrew as a democratic organization. As Steinbeck explains:

With the development of the importance of the bomber, the pilot too has changed his status. He is no longer individually the most important man in the Air Force. Just as the ship is a highly complicated unit, so the air crew is considered as a unit, each member of which is equally important. (114)

Finally, Steinbeck uses his concluding chapter, "The Mission," not only to dramatize the principles demonstrated in each of the preceding chapters, but also to highlight the central concept of the entire work, ultimately depicted thusly as "this cross section, these men from all over the country," who "had become one thing—a bomber crew. They were changed but they had not lost what they were, they were still individuals" (184).

Naturally, each of these central concepts—teamwork, intelligence, specialized mission—figure prominently in the photographs. However, the predominant way in which these photos effectively compliment the text is in their manifestation of another Gestalt principle, the rule of *proximity*. Simply stated, the basic rule of proximity posits that when an area “contains a number of equal parts, those among them which are in greater proximity will be organized into a higher unit” (Koffka 164-65). Thus, when words or pictures, or both words and pictures, are placed in the same vicinity on the page, they are typically perceived as related in some way. Consequently, the relationship of text and photographs in *Bombs Away* helps unify groups of information while also lending line and definition to the key concepts elucidated in the text. For example, the central symbol, the bomber, is featured in five of the first seven photographs found in the book. However, two of these photos, which depict respective ground and air profiles of the B-17 Flying Fortress and the B-24 Liberator, are placed on the same pages as Steinbeck’s preliminary description of the bombers’ primary role. Elsewhere, too, the same practice is used to unify and outline other crucial concepts. In each case, however, the photographs are also located in close proximity to the ideas they illustrate. Discussions of specialized missions and training such as bombing or navigating, for instance, are accompanied by illustrative photographs which depict everything from training devices and navigational equipment, to practicing with the octant and conducting bombing runs. Totally, *Bombs Away* includes 60 such photos, of which well over half depict specialized mission and training requirements and techniques. The remaining pictures either illustrate teamwork, such as, “Baseball teams sprout from the fields,” or “A bomber crew learns how to identify all types of airplanes,” or suggest qualities of intelligence, such as



Consolidated B-24, commonly known as the Liberator

“Preliminary examination at the Induction Center,” or “Navigation classroom” (42, 169, 38, 95).

In addition to helping Steinbeck establish proximity, the photographs also do much toward the assertion of yet another precept of propaganda, one Doob identifies as the *principle of simplification*. As Doob



“Baseball teams sprout from the fields...”

explains it, the propagandist uses this perceptual principle to “simplify his stimulus-situation to bring it within range of perception” (98). Essentially, the idea is to present intricate and subtle materials in such a way that even laymen believe they understand them. Thus, abstract principles such as leadership are sharply imaged in photographs such as “The Commanding Officer of a Bombardment Group,” which features the likeness of a cigarette-toting, seasoned warrior with strong features such as a prominent nose, chiseled chin, rolled up sleeves, and sweat-stained shirt (173).

Elsewhere, the complexity of the human-machine interface is made accessible in a variety of snapshots, including, “The crew chief directs the engine changes of a B-24” (142), featuring an aerial engineer surrounded by dismantled engine parts, and in the only photograph of a woman in the text, “Mid-section of a B-24 on the assembly line” (31), which depicts a young woman performing intricate wiring procedures on the fuselage of a bomber. As well, the heroic is strongly suggested in photographs like, “Cadet starts his training to be a pilot” (110), which shows the pointed silhouette of a healthy young man staring with fixed gaze over the nose of an aircraft, and in “Aerial gunner practicing with a flexible gun mount” (68), which forms a veritable outline of the modern version of the medieval knight, appropriately clad in leather, helmet, and goggles, aiming confidently down the smooth barrel of a machine gun.

Besides using photographs, one of the primary ways in which Steinbeck condenses his focus and simplifies his theme is through characterization. However, the figures who people *Bombs Away* actually bear closer resemblance to allegorical



A bomber crew learns how to identify all types of airplanes

types than realistically-rounded human beings. Nonetheless, although most of the characters are cardboard, they do effectively serve the propagandist's aims by suggesting an easily apprehensible range of human temperaments aptly suited to Steinbeck's purposes. Of special significance, too, is the fact that virtually all of these crew members come from either Midwestern or Western rural and small-town stock, which connects them closely to mythic American ideals of agrarian frontier expansion and mass democracy.⁶ For example, there is Bill, the bombardier from Idaho, an average Joe whose vitality,



The Commanding Officer of a Bombardment Group

hard work, and faith are the product of what Steinbeck refers to as the "alert" democracy of the West (47). The taciturn son of a railroad engineer, he is the inheritor of a tradition that values responsibility, teamwork, maturity, and perspective, all of which are repeatedly discussed in the chapter devoted to his function. Then there is Al, the gunner, a sometime soda jerk from the

Midwest, who is transformed through training into the modern antecedent of the Kentucky rifleman, the western Indian fighter, and the frontiersman. Just as Arthur had his Excalibur, Thor his hammer, and Davy Crockett his Betsy, so Al has his .50 caliber machine gun, which helps him find his single warring purpose, to become one of Steinbeck's so-called "executioners of the air" (70). As well, less prominent characters such as Abner, the Aerial Engineer from a small town in California, represent the "restless intelligent man" (143), the innovative, mechanically minded jack-of-all-trades ideally suited to nursemaid a crew or



Mid-section of a B-24 on the assembly line



Aero-gunner carrying his ammunition for his first aerial practice

repair broken bomber engines. There are several other examples as well, not the least of which include the pilot, Joe, from California, and the navigator, Allan, from Indiana. While the former represents alertness, strength, and coordination, all needed to successfully fly airplanes, the latter exemplifies controlled thinking and exactness, skills required for highly technical jobs like navigation.

By using simplified characters, careful arrangement of materials, and photographs, Steinbeck was thus able to manipulate form and organization so as to sharply outline the rhetorical focus of his training scenario. In so doing, he

also creates “resonance” with his audience, a concept closely associated with Doob’s third precept, the principle of *auxiliary attitudes* (98). As Doob describes, this principle is tantamount to “baiting” the audience with an attractive object, symbol, or idea that induces them to perceive that which the propagandist wishes. In this case, the bait includes a variety of appeals, most of which are introduced in the opening chapters and subsequently repeated throughout the length of the text through photographs and words. For example, the second chapter is obviously devised in order to introduce the central symbol, the bomber, which embodies not only group effort, but also a host of other democratic values including vitality, integrity, hard work, faith, and practicality. Occasionally, however, Steinbeck also entices his audience by suggesting auxiliary attitudes that resonate closely with individual rights guaranteed by the Constitution. At one point, for example, he dangles this



Aerial gunner practicing with a flexible gun mount

rhetorical carrot, which sounds almost as if it could have come from a National Rifle Association pamphlet:

And we may be thankful that frightened civil authorities and specific Ladies Clubs have not managed to eradicate from the country the tradition of the possession and use of firearms, that profound and almost instinctive tradition of Americans. . . . Luckily for us, our tradition of bearing arms has not gone from the country, and the tradition is so deep and so dear to us that it is one of the most treasured parts of the Bill of Rights—the right of all Americans to bear arms, with the implication that they will know how to use them. (29-30)

Implicit in such statements, too, are attitudes that are primarily paternalistic. Bearing arms may be a Constitutional right, but in 1942 it is one that exists largely for boys and men. So, too, are flying combat missions and serving on bomber teams. Man's business or not, however, the bomber-as-democracy attitude has behind it Steinbeck's philosophical and scientific theory of groups, particularly his belief that everything, humans included, is ultimately part of a single organism (Ross 173). In a 1933 letter to George Albee, Steinbeck articulates the idea thusly:

We know that with certain arrangements of atoms we might have what we would call a bar of iron. Certain other arrangements of atoms plus a mysterious principle make a living cell A further arrangement of cells and a very complex one may make a unit which we may call a man He also arranges himself into larger units, which I have called a *phalanx* [emphasis added]. (*Life in Letters* 79)

Steinbeck also speaks in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* about individual “pelagic tunicates,” each of which is an “individual animal, but the colony is another individual animal, not at all like the sum of its individuals” (136). Accordingly, even individual members of a bomber crew—radio operator, crew chief, navigator, etc.—are like cells with specific, specialized functions. Thus the bomber crew is part of a flight, a flight is part of a squadron, a squadron part of a wing, a wing part of the Air Force, and the Air Force an extension of a supra-phalanx, the allied powers, who form a united front against Axis tyranny and oppression.

Collectively, then, the contours of Steinbeck's message are sharply etched by photographs and words that make the figure-ground boundaries unmistakable. Moreover, the propagandist's appeal in *Bombs Away* is an encouraging one for Americans. The motto for the bomber crew, though borrowed from *The Three Musketeers*, is "All for one and one for all" (156), an attitude reflective of the kind of teamwork Steinbeck says Americans are "best capable of maintaining" (23), and one which he is confident will surely spell defeat for the Axis powers. However, to reinforce the message and ensure it resounds clearly with the audience requires *repetition*, Doob's fourth principle, one that assumes the more often an idea is presented, the more likely it is to be perceived as the propagandist intended it. Thus, for plangency, Steinbeck employs repeated motifs, including images, words, objects, phrases, and actions. The ubiquitous "team" mantra, for example, is first mentioned in the early chapters, where Steinbeck at one point says of the crew, "this is truly a team, each member responsible to the whole and the whole responsible to the members" (23). Subsequently, the idea is repeated in every chapter until the end, where it receives a sort of rhetorical crescendo in passages like this:

This crew, once established, will remain as a unit. The men will know one another as few men ever get acquainted, for they will be under fire together. They will play together after a victory. They will plan together and eat and sleep together on missions. And finally there is the chance that they may die together. (154-55)

Here the repetition of theme is also amplified by a rhetorical device known as *anaphora*, the technique of repeating the same word, in this case, "they," at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences, a technique Steinbeck also uses in several other chapters such as "The Aerial Engineer," where in successive sentences, Abner is described in this fashion, "He was bound to be an aerial engineer. . . . He was the proper kind of man for the job. . . . He wanted to know things. He studied navigation in his spare time" (146).

Elsewhere, Steinbeck combines anaphora with other related rhetorical devices such as *conduplicatio*, in order to achieve emphasis on succeeding words and clauses through the repetition of words and images. In the chapter, "The Bomber," for example, the complexity and capability of the bomber are nicely captured in the following:

The long-range bomber is an intricate and marvelous machine capable of climbing to great altitude, capable of tremendous range, capable of carrying great bomb loads; but it is still only as good as its bomber crew. It is only a machine. It can only fly as well as a pilot can fly it and only arrive at the point toward which its navigator can direct it. (28)

In this instance the word “capable” is repeated severally to signify the performance characteristics of the bomber. As well, on occasion Steinbeck also relies on *parataxis* to convey movement and arrange words and phrases in coordinate relationships. Such a practice is clearly evident in passages like this one, which describes some of the rigors of pilot training, “they studied air flow and pressure distribution on the wings, lift and induced drag and equilibrium in flight. . . . They studied fuels and lubricants and what kind are used and why, fuel systems and carburetor systems, superchargers” (133). Here, the repeated use of the “and” connective helps Steinbeck highlight and enumerate the content of the cadet training regimen.

To sum it up, though *Bombs Away* was written during a particularly chaotic time in John Steinbeck’s life, and according to tight three-month deadline that forced him to rely on dictation instead of his customary longhand technique (Benson 505),⁷ the book is, nonetheless, a noteworthy piece of propaganda that exhibits thoughtful manipulation of that technique in service to a worthy cause. Furthermore, when judged on its own terms as a specialized piece of rhetoric, the propaganda that obtrudes in *Bombs Away* can be justified as a reasonable response to an unreasonable threat, and through its pragmatic focus on how the practical results of human activity can improve the human condition. As such, it represents a significant, directed, and responsible action designed to protect the democratic phalanx against an ominous threat, the cancerous growth of fascism, which in 1942 threatened to infect and destroy common humanity with a false vision of ultimate causes, absolute origins, and infallible truths. Truly, in a figurative sense, Steinbeck’s hands ultimately would be awash in the blood of the aircrews he championed, but perhaps it would have been a greater sin had he done nothing to oppose the establishment of perverted totalitarian rule throughout the world. When considered in such a context, then, the book is significant, not because it has any great artistic merit, but because it represents Steinbeck’s first full-blown face-to-face confrontation with technology, warfare, and its interconnectedness with the American myth of mass equality, faith in the

common man, and effective action. And although Steinbeck's efforts would prove costly in terms of lives sacrificed to a greater good, and certainly in terms of his artistic career, the outcome of the war strongly asserts that his efforts were not in vain.

Notes

1. Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* contains a superb fictional treatment of this absurd phenomena. Also noteworthy is the fact that the workhorses of the American bombing campaign—the B-17 and B-24—fell in large numbers. Totally, in the U.S. Eighth Air Force, 6,537 B-17s and B-24s were lost, along with 3,337 fighters (Ambrose 299).

2. As Benson and Simmons point out, when the United States entered World War II in 1941, Steinbeck voluntarily served in a number of governmental agencies. In addition to working as an unpaid consultant for the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI), a precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), he was also a foreign news editor for the Office of War Information, and he worked for the Writer's War Board. However, the genesis of *Bombs Away* occurred in 1942, when he was appointed special consultant to the Secretary of War and assigned to Army Air Force Headquarters. The story began in May of that same year, when Steinbeck was summoned to Washington for an interview with General Henry A. "Hap" Arnold, who subsequently outlined an ambitious plan to have him write a book detailing the training of a bomber crew from induction until qualification as a full-fledged bomber team. Arnold also suggested that if the first book were successful, there would be an opportunity for a sequel that followed the newly-trained crew into combat. At first, Steinbeck was wary of the project, mainly because he did not want to be held responsible for someone going to war and getting killed. Nonetheless, he was ultimately persuaded to do the job, partly through the combined ministrations of General Arnold and Steinbeck's close friend, actor Burgess Meredith, but primarily as a result of a mandatory meeting with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, during which the President affably, yet assuredly, commanded him to take on the task.

3. Contrary to more recent critical examinations, immediately after the 27 November 1942 publication of *Bombs Away*, initial newspaper and magazine reviews were mostly favorable, probably as a result of the patriotic fervor after the U.S. entrance into the war. Clifton Fadiman, a writer for the *New Yorker* who had negatively viewed Steinbeck's earlier work, *The Moon is Down*, called *Bombs Away* an "extraordinary fine job of recruiting propaganda" (*Contemporary Reviews* 262). Elsewhere, the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Joseph Henry Jackson referred to it as "a dramatic, admirably told, crystal-clear narrative," while S.T. Williamson of the *New York Times Book Review* and William Bradford Hue of the *Saturday Review* respectively described it as "a careful, fulsome report" and "as exciting as any Steinbeck novel" (*Contemporary Reviews* 259, 264-65). However, a lone dissenting voice came from *New Republic*, which scorned *Bombs Away* as a work of dangerously debased ideas that bear "about the same relationship to literature that a recruiting poster does to art" (*Contemporary Reviews* 267).

4. See, for example, Chapter 14 of *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, where Steinbeck observes, "non-teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually 'is'—attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions *what* or *how*, instead of *why*" (112).

5. In *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, Peter Lisca points out that Steinbeck believed that all phenomena exist in a *Gestalt* or field. Within this field exist biological traits, including the propensity for war, which strike deep, unconscious roots in our species (183, 188).

6. See Frederick Carpenter's seminal essay, "The Philosophical Joals," for an excellent discussion of how *The Grapes of Wrath*, like *Bombs Away*, attempts to blend transcendental ideals with visions of mass democracy and realistic pragmatism.

7. As Simmons suggests, the major problem was that Steinbeck had seen so much and had been expected to assimilate a great deal, not only all the unrelenting flying, but also the psychology tests, navigation classes, and demonstrations of various sorts. Steinbeck had difficulty sorting it all out and had to resort to dictating into an ediphone, a totally new experience for him. So he dictated from his notes and within a week or two was able to produce a phenomenal four thousand words a day. Unfortunately, the new way of working didn't always produce great prose, primarily because he simply didn't have the time to read and revise in order to create the sophisticated texture and rhythms of his more mature work (127-28). Steinbeck's own impression, as he told Webster Street, was this: "It isn't very good, but it is the only thing of its kind and with the time they gave me it was the best I could do" (130)

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Photographs appear courtesy of Mark Swope, the son of John Swope, who was Steinbeck's photographer.

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