

British Air Marshal (Document A)

In February of 1945, Air Marshal Arthur Harris, commander of the British Air Force, ordered the bombing of the German city of Dresden. After the bombing, Harris came under attack for ordering the raid. In this report, he explains why he ordered the bombing of the city.

“In February of 1945, with the Russian army moving towards the heart of Germany, I ordered the attack on Dresden. This was considered a target of great importance to support the Russian offensive. Dresden had become the main center of communications for the defense of Germany. It was also by far the largest city in Germany that had never before been bombed. As a large center of war industry, it was also of the highest importance.

An attack on the night of February 13th-14th by over 800 aircraft utterly overwhelmed the Germans. It appears a firestorm resulted from the bombing, and its impact on German morale was extremely effective.

Attacks on cities, like any other act of war, are intolerable *unless they are strategically justified*. And they are strategically justified because they shorten the war and preserve the lives of Allied soldiers. In my mind we have absolutely no right to stop doing them unless it is certain that they will not have this effect (*shorten the war*). I do not personally believe all the remaining cities of Germany are worth as much as the bones of one British Grenadier (*soldier*). The anger over Dresden can be easily explained. Dresden was a beautiful city and a center of culture and art. But Dresden was also the location of weapons factories, an important government center, and an important transportation point. It is now none of these things.”

Source: Report of Air Marshal Arthur Harris, March 29, 1945

Churchill's Memo (Document B)

Following the bombing of Dresden, many newspapers reported that the Allies had resorted to the same cruel tactics as the Germans. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, quickly spoke out against the bombing raid. The following is a memo he sent to the British Air Force Command shortly after the attack on Dresden.

“It seems to me that the time has come for the bombing of German cities simply for the sake (*purpose*) of increasing terror should be reviewed. Otherwise we shall come to control an utterly (*completely*) ruined land. For instance, we will not be able to use any materials from Germany for our own rebuilding needs because we will need to use all our resources to rebuild Germany itself. The destruction of Dresden raises serious doubts regarding the conduct of the Allied bombing command.

The Foreign Secretary has spoken to me on this subject, and it is my opinion that, from now on, military objectives must be more precisely identified. These objectives should be such things like oil refineries and communications centers, not mere acts of terror and reckless destruction, no matter how impressive these attacks might be.”

Source: memo from Prime Minister Winston Churchill to the commanders of the British Royal Air Force, March 28, 1945.

Eye-Witness Accounts (Document C)

The following are several excerpts of eye-witness accounts from the bombing of Dresden. Both British and German witnesses have been included. They describe the results of the bombing.

“It struck me at the time, the thought of the women and children down there (*in Dresden*). We seemed to fly for hours over a storm of fire – there was a terrific red glow with thin fog over it. I found myself making comments to the crew: ‘Oh God, those poor people.’ It was completely uncalled for. You can’t justify it.”

Source: Roy Akehurst, a member of the British Royal Air Force bombing crew that took part in the raid on Dresden.

“The firestorm is incredible. There are calls for help and screams from everywhere and all around there is one giant inferno (*intense fire*). To my left I suddenly see a woman. I can see her to this day and shall never forget it. She carries a bundle in her arms. It is a baby. She runs, she falls, and the child flies into the fire.

Suddenly, I saw people again. They are right in front of me. They scream and wave their hands, and then - to my utter horror - I see them faint and they burn to ash. Insane fear grips me and from then on I repeat one simple sentence to myself over and over again: ‘I don’t want to burn to death’. I do not know how many people I tripped over. I know only one thing: that I must not burn.”

Source: Margaret Freyer was living in Dresden at the time of the bombing, February 13th 1945.

U.S. Air Force Historical Report (Document D)

Following the end of WWII, the Soviet Union started using the bombing of Dresden in anti-Western propaganda. In 1953, the United States Air Force launched its own historical investigation into the bombing of Dresden, hoping to put the controversy to rest. The following is an excerpt of the U.S. Air Force’s conclusion.

- “Dresden was a legitimate (*justifiable*) military target.
- The Russians requested that the Dresden area be bombed by Allied air forces.
- The specific target objectives of the Dresden bombing were the Dresden city area, including industrial factories, communications, military installations, and railway facilities.
- The immediate and actual result of the Dresden bombings was the destruction of 85% of the city area and the total disruption of the city as a major communications and industrial center

- The Dresden bombings were in no way a deviation (*change*) from established (*normal*) bombing policies set forth in official bombing directives (*orders*).
- The Dresden bombings accomplished the strategic objectives that brought about the attack and were of great importance to both the Allies and the Russians.
- Casualties among the Dresden populace were inevitably very heavy as a result of the fires that swept over the city following the bombings. But these casualties were not excessive considering the importance of the strategic objectives.”

Source: U.S. Air Force Historical Division report, 1953

Document E

Source: RAF memo issued to airmen on the night of the attack on Dresden, Germany

Dresden, the seventh largest city in Germany and not much smaller than Manchester is also the largest un-bombed built-up area the enemy has got. In the midst of winter with refugees pouring westward and troops to be rested, roofs are at a premium, not only to give shelter to workers, refugees, and troops alike, but to house the administrative services displaced from other areas. At one time well known for its china, Dresden has developed into an industrial city of first-class importance.... The intentions of the attack are to hit the enemy where he will feel it most, behind an already partially collapsed front... and incidentally to show the Russians when they arrive what Bomber Command can do.

Document F. **David Pedlow, letter to *The Guardian* (14th February, 2004)**

Pedlow is drawing from his father, whom recorded the following to Pedlow.

My father was one of the "anonymous RAF meteorological officers (who) finally sealed Dresden's fate". A chronically short-sighted school teacher, he went into the Meteorological Office at the beginning of a war that he had hoped would not happen, but that he felt was utterly necessary. He knew he would be part of a process that sent young men out to risk their lives, and that inevitably - given the inadequacies of bomb-aiming and weather-forecasting techniques - would lead to a considerable number of civilian casualties.

The Dresden briefing was only one of many that he routinely attended, and even before the crews left the ground he was troubled because of one notable omission from the routine.

Normally, crews were given a strategic aiming point - anything from a major factory in the middle of nowhere to a small but significant railway junction within a built-up area. The smaller the aiming point and the heavier the concentration of housing around it, the greater would be the civilian casualties - but given that the strike was at a strategic aiming point those casualties could be justified.

Only at the Dresden briefing, my father told me, were the crews given no strategic aiming point. They were simply told that anywhere within the built-up area of the city would serve.

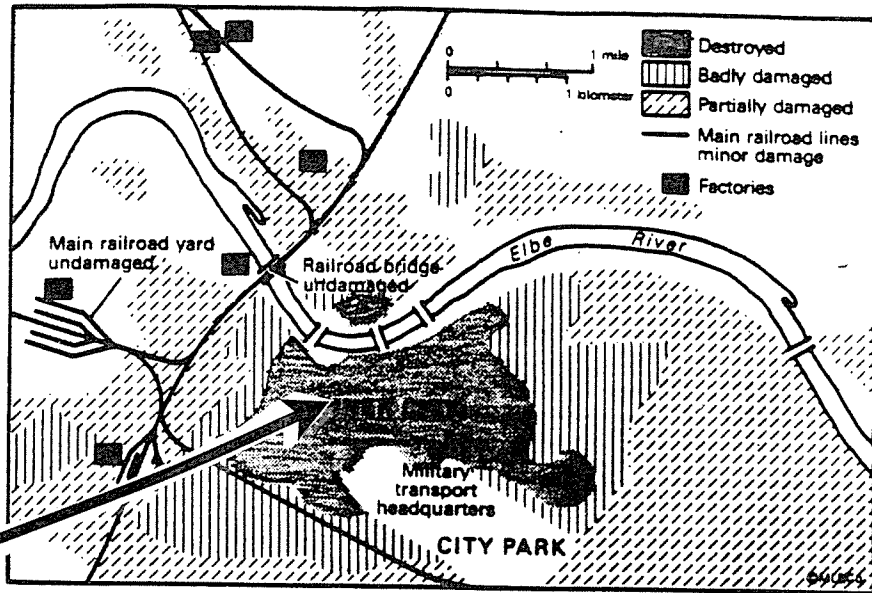
He felt that Dresden and its civilian population had been the prime target of the raid and that its destruction and their deaths served no strategic purpose, even in the widest terms; that this was a significant departure from accepting civilian deaths as a regrettable but inevitable consequence of the bomber war; and that he had been complicit in what was, at best, a very dubious operation.

Document G

Source: View from the Dresden City Hall Tower at the end of the bombing, 1945



Dresden, Germany, 1945



Document H
Bombing Result Map

INNER CITY

Was the bombing of Dresden justified?

Side one: YES! The bombing WAS justified

Evidence 1:

Evidence 2:

Evidence 3:

Side two: NO! The bombing WAS NOT justified

Evidence 1:

Evidence 2:

Evidence 3: