

# Allied Bombing of Germany

The RAF had begun bombing raids on military targets only, such as docks and shipyards, in March 1940. Under an agreement made by the French and British, on the insistence of the then neutral Americans, German cities including residential areas would not be bombed.

Although the RAF did undertake a bombing raid on Berlin in August 1940, as retaliation for a lone German raid on London, it was not until February 1942 onwards that the British bombing campaign against Germany widened its scope, to include industrial areas and the residential areas associated with them. It was a strategic bombing programme helped by the introduction into service of the AVRO Lancaster bomber which had a larger payload than other bombers of the time and could accommodate the huge heavy bombs now being used by the RAF.

The British efforts were bolstered by the arrival on British soil of the American air force which occupied over 200 airfields at the height of the bombing campaign. Many of those aerodromes were in East Anglia, notably at Eye, Horham and Thorpe Abbots. The headquarters for both bomber commands however was at RAF Daws Hill, near High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire.

Each American airbase could house up to 2,500 military personnel, often dwarfing the smaller populations of the villages around them. Their influences on nearby local communities was therefore quite profound, effects which can be observed even today.

Both air forces, as part of Allied strategic bombing, aimed to damage German war production by bombing industrial sites, many of which were in the large German cities.

Initially precision bombing of targets was attempted in daylight, but huge casualties meant bombing raids had to take place under the cover of darkness. Lack of suitable navigational aids however meant precision bombing was not possible, therefore it was decided to implement a policy of carpet bombing. Inevitably civilian casualties were high and the destruction was devastating. By the end of the war some German cities had almost been obliterated from the map, notably Dresden and Hamburg, where firestorms were created.

Evidence has suggested that this aerial bombardment of German cities failed to break the morale of the German people. Indeed some commentators have stated that it actually stiffened their resolve to fight to the end. However it has also been suggested that the sheer volume of bombing raids tied up such a large proportion of the German war machine - notably personnel, ammunition, and anti aircraft guns - all over the country, to ward off the attacks, that it was a major reason for the defeat of Nazi Germany. Albert Speer who was Hitler's Armaments Minister conceded this in his 1959 autobiography. It tied up personnel and armaments that otherwise could have been sent to the Eastern front.

The Allied bombing of the Ruhr, Germany's main centre of industrial production, was also a major turning point in the war, witnessed by a reduction in metal processing (an integral part of armaments production) of 46.5% in 1943 and 39% in 1944. Moreover by 1944 successful American raids on synthetic oil producing plants meant that the Luftwaffe had insufficient fuel to provide air defences to repel the bombers. The Allies therefore had by then gained air superiority and could fly in daylight.