



Learning Curve

WORLD WAR II

WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: HAMBURG

HAMBURG: TASK INSTRUCTIONS

The key question: Why did the RAF bomb cities?

Your task

To select source material to prepare for a class debate that covers the following viewpoints:

- A: The bombing was justifiable given the circumstances at the time
- B: The bombing was an effective weapon against Nazi Germany
- C: The bombing was ineffective and cost too many lives of civilians and aircrew
- D: The bombing was morally unjustifiable and should be seen as a war crime.

You must **select one source** for each viewpoint to encourage a lively debate. Use the debate summary table to record your choice of sources.

Why did the RAF bomb cities?

When war broke out in 1939 the British government and RAF commanders were convinced that they should not bomb civilian targets. However, by February 1942 they changed their minds. They decided that they would use 'area bombing'.

This basically meant bombing cities to destroy housing, factories, transport facilities and workers. By 1945 much of Germany was just a pile of rubble. What had caused this change of mind, and was it justified?



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

Photographs that show the effects of Allied bombing on the German city of Hamburg, 1943

Catalogue ref: AIR 34/615

Source a





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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

Source b



What is this source?

These are reconnaissance photographs of Hamburg taken in November 1943. The main raids on Hamburg had taken place towards the end of July 1943.

Other photographic evidence showed that even by the end of the war in 1945 very little of Hamburg had been rebuilt. It was the same for most German cities.

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. He then attacked the USSR in the summer of 1941. This became the main campaign of the war. However, Britain was anxious to try and help her Soviet allies. Britain did not have the resources to attack Germany on the ground but they did have a fleet of heavy bombers that could attack Germany by air.



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

When the USA joined the war in December 1941 they also had heavy bombers. From 1942 until the end of the war they pounded German targets. The bombing continued even after the D-Day landings in June 1944.

It's worth knowing that...

The bombing campaign was controversial at the time and it still is today. There were moral objections to bombing civilian targets. There were also concerns that bombing simply did not have much effect. There was also concern about the high casualty rates among bomber crews.

Some commentators claim that the bombing was a war crime. The head of British Bomber Command, Sir Arthur Harris, accepted that there might be a case for this.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. Try and think of 5 words to describe the scenes in these photographs.
2. Does this source suggest that bombing was effective?
3. The photographs were taken about 4 months after the raid that did the damage. Does this help you to answer question 2?
4. What extra information would be useful in helping us to interpret this source?
5. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?

Use the debate summary table to record your choice of sources.



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Extracts from a secret government memorandum dated July 24th 1943 relating to Hamburg

Catalogue ref: PREM 3/11/08

Extract a

2. Before we can express any opinion I think we must clear up a question of fact.

At 'X' of his minute Sir Henry Tizard says that apart from submarines and shipping Hamburg is not industrially important.

The Ministry of Economic Warfare on the other hand rate the "overall economic importance", i.e. the contribution to the war effort, of Hamburg as being fourth of all the cities of Germany, the first three being Berlin, Duisburg and Bochum/Gelsenkirchen. The M.E.W. give Hamburg the following key points:-

(a) Priority 1+ (highest possible)

One liquid fuel (or substitute) target
Two ship building targets

(b) Priority 1

Four transportation targets
One public utility target
Two liquid fuel targets
Two non-ferrous metal targets
One shipbuilding target
One engineering and armament target
One textile target, and
One rubber target.



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Extract b

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(c) Priority 2

Four public utility targets
One solid fuel target
One liquid fuel target
Four non-ferrous metal targets
Five aircraft and aero engine targets
Two shipbuilding targets
Six engineering and armament targets
Four chemical and explosive targets
Four foodstuffs targets.

(d) Numerous fuel, engineering, chemical and foodstuffs targets in Category 3.

From the above it seems abundantly clear that Hamburg is much more than a dormant centre of peace-time commerce and if so I certainly do not think we should refrain from bombing it.

What is this source?

This source is a secret government memorandum. It is a document sent from one government department to another.

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. He then attacked the USSR in the summer of 1941. This became the main campaign of the war. However, Britain was anxious to try and help her Soviet allies. Britain did not have the resources to attack Germany on the ground but they did have a fleet of heavy bombers that could attack Germany by air.



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

When the USA joined the war in December 1941 they also had heavy bombers. From 1942 until the end of the war they pounded German targets. The bombing continued even after the D-Day landings in June 1944.

It's worth knowing that...

Hamburg was an important target for many reasons. Within Hamburg's submarine pens, U boats, so dangerous to British ships, were built and repaired. Hamburg was also comparatively near to Britain and was therefore an easier target.

Perhaps the main reason to use area bombing against Hamburg was that precision bombing was so inaccurate. A report in 1941 showed that most bombs did not fall within five miles of their target. Also, daylight raids on well defended targets led to huge losses of aircraft and aircrew. As a result, the RAF Bomber Command chief Sir Arthur Harris decided to use area bombing. Basically, this meant destroying the whole city so that the industrial targets would be destroyed and so would civilian housing.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. Were the British officials all agreed that Hamburg was a good target?
2. Do you find the arguments convincing that Hamburg played a key role in the German war effort?
3. Instead of destroying the entire city do you think that the RAF should have tried to destroy just the targets listed? What were the problems with this approach? (Study the notes)
4. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

Extract from a report by the Turkish ambassador on the effects of raids on Hamburg

Catalogue ref: HW 1/1919

MOST SECRET.

X

TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY: NEVER TO BE REMOVED FROM THE OFFICE.

TURKISH AMBASSADOR, BERLIN, REPORTS ON BOMBING OF
HAMBURG.

No: 120303

Date: 4th August, 1943.

From: Turkish Ambassador, BERLIN.

To: Foreign Ministry, ANGORA.

Date: 2nd August, 1943.

Further to telegram No.176 [not received].

Reports on the bombing of HAMBURG by RIFAT AKDENİZ and BELBEZ, who have been sent to the city and returned to BERLIN the same day, will be transmitted to you by courier of 6th August. It has been learnt both from Germans and from travellers that HAMBURG has been reduced to [? ruins]; all industrial installations there, including the dockyards, have been completely destroyed, 200,000 persons have been killed within a week, life in the city is entirely [? disrupted] and administration has passed into the hands of the army. Although [? everything in the neighbourhood] of our [? Consulate] was burning, it was saved from the conflagration through the intervention and assistance of German soldiers, and only the windows and doors were [? destroyed]. The torrents of water, gas and — have made it uninhabitable. The Consul's wife and two children were living in an apartment 25 kilometres out of the city and so escaped this — and —.



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What is this source?

This is a telegram written by the Turkish ambassador in Berlin back to his government in Ankara, Turkey.

British agents intercepted this telegram. This is why some parts of it are missing or have question marks in brackets.

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. For a while the main attack on Britain was by air. He tried to destroy the Royal Air Force. When this failed he switched to bombing British cities. From then until 1944 the only way to attack Germany was by air. The RAF and USA air forces did this relentlessly.

One of the first targets for a really major raid was Hamburg, because of its ports and industries. RAF bombers attacked the city for almost a week in July-August 1943. As a result the city was flattened and it was still in ruins at the end of the war in 1945.

It's worth knowing that...

The heavy losses in Hamburg were the result of a firestorm. This is when the fires caused by bombing become so hot they burn everything and also use up all the available oxygen. Thousands of Germans died in cellars from suffocation as the fires took up all the oxygen. This also happened at Dresden in a raid there in 1945 when 40 000 were killed.

There is still intense debate about the bombing today. Critics argue it had limited effects on the German war machine and did not weaken German morale. On the other hand German production did not rise and resources had to go into anti aircraft defences. Also, after the war 91% of Germans said the worst aspect of the war was the bombing.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. What happened to the Turkish consulate?
2. Were they hit harder than the rest of the city?
3. What information can we gain from this source about the bombing?
4. Do you regard this as a reliable source?
5. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

Extracts from a government report on bombing and propaganda,
July 1941

Catalogue ref: INF 1/894

Extract a

B.

THE EFFECT OF BOMBING ON CIVILIAN MORALE.

5. The R.A.F. offensive - our chief offensive weapon.

It is assumed that our only (or our chief) offensive weapon during the next months will be the R.A.F. The effect of the R.A.F. offensive against Germany can be considerably enhanced if a) it is planned not only with a view to military and industrial damage, but also to achieving the maximum demoralisation both of the civilians in Germany and of their relatives in the armies abroad, and (b) if it is accompanied by propaganda designed to increase its effect.



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Extract b

D. THE NECESSITY OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL ESCAPE FOR THE GERMAN PEOPLE.

II. The limitations of "fear propaganda".

If the above plan were accepted, it should not be put into operation without a propaganda campaign carefully designed to offer the German people some escape from its doom. "Fear propaganda" such as that advocated in the plan is only effect ^{live} if :

- a) It canalises the German hatred away from the British to their own central and local Government.
- b) It offers the German people some way of escape from destruction.

If we employ "fear" propaganda by itself we shall be in danger of positively strengthening German morale by giving the German people the impression that there is nothing for it but to stand together and fight to the last man.

What is this source?

This is a secret government report produced by the Ministry of Information. This department was in charge of all aspects of information, including government propaganda.

In the early stages of the war the RAF dropped leaflets as well as bombs, trying to turn the German people against the Nazis.



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What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. During the Blitz, German bombers attacked British cities, killing thousands of civilians. By the summer of 1941 Hitler had attacked the USSR. Britain could do little to help the Soviets, but one option they considered was a bombing offensive.

When the USA joined the war in December 1941 they also had heavy bombers. From 1942 until the end of the war they pounded German targets. The bombing continued even after the D-Day landings in June 1944.

It's worth knowing that...

Propaganda was a key factor in the Second World War. The British were aware that many Germans were not enthusiastic about the war and resented the Nazis. Clearly the Ministry of Information had thought carefully about this issue and hoped that bombing would lead to more resentment of the Nazis.

One of the controversies about bombing is whether it increased discontent with the Nazis or whether it actually made Germans pull together and support the war effort even more. This is certainly what happened when British cities were bombed.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. What does the document reveal about how effectively Britain can attack Germany in 1941?
2. What does this document suggest should be done as well as dropping bombs?
3. Does this seem like a sensible strategy?
4. Why does "fear propaganda" have its limitations?
5. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?

Letter from Churchill on area bombing, 1st April 1945

Catalogue ref: CAB 120/303



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TOP SECRET**PRIME MINISTER'S PERSONAL MINUTE**
10, Downing Street,
Whitehall.**SERIAL NO. D. 89/5**GENERAL ISMAY FOR C.O.S. COMMITTEE
C.A.S. (Copy sent).

It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of the so called "area bombing" of German cities should be reviewed from the point of view of our own interests. If we come into control of an entirely ruined land, there will be a great shortage of accommodation for ourselves and our Allies: and we shall be unable to get housing materials out of Germany for our own needs because some temporary provision would have to be made for the Germans themselves. We must see to it that our attacks do not do more harm to ourselves in the long run than they do to the enemy's immediate war effort. Pray let me have your views.

W.S.C.

1.4.45.



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What is this source?

This is a letter written in April 1945 by Prime Minister Winston Churchill after the bombing of Dresden.

What's the background to this source?

In February 1945, the last year of World War 2, Britain sent 300 Lancaster bombers to attack the crowded German city of Dresden. This attack was not the precision bombing of specific military targets. It was deliberate bombing of a whole area. The city was devastated.

Eleven square miles of Dresden were consumed by a firestorm. Thousands of Germans died from suffocation.

It's worth knowing that...

The decision to bomb Dresden came as a surprise to some because there was little industry of importance in the city, though Dresden was being used in the transport of troops. RAF commanders had queried the decision. However, it went ahead.

There is still intense debate about the bombing today. Critics argue it had limited effects on the German war machine and did not weaken German morale or make Hitler surrender. On the other hand, German production did not rise and resources had to go into anti-aircraft defences. Also, after the war 91% of Germans said the worst aspect of the war was the bombing.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. According to the source, why is Churchill concerned about "area bombing"?
2. What reasons might Churchill have had for writing this letter?
3. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?

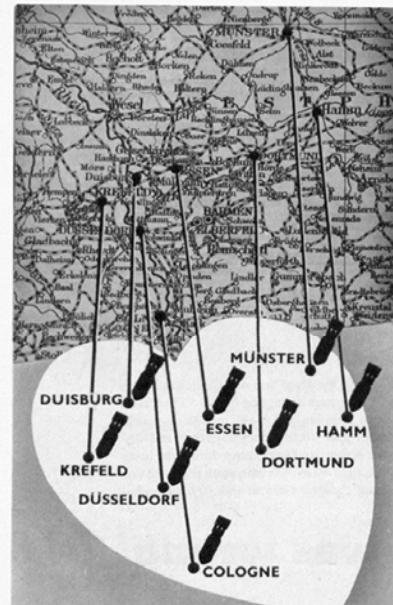
Use the debate summary table to record your choice of sources. Find out more about the bombing of Dresden on the following link:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/heroesvillains/g1/>



WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: HAMBURG

Extract from a pamphlet relating to bombing issued by the Ministry of Information, 1942–1943

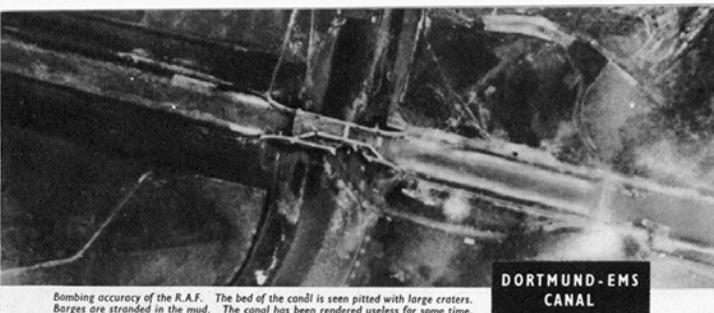
Catalogue ref: INF 2/8



**That spring and summer—
April to September 1941
the R.A.F. dropped
20,000 tons
of bombs on Germany and
German-occupied territory**

ALL R.A.F. RAIDS have in view the destruction of specific war objectives. They may be directed on oil refineries, or on the synthetic-oil plants which are so vital in the German war economy, an aircraft factory or key electrical equipment. At other times they are directed to warehouses and shipping.

Germany cannot practise decentralisation as much as she would like because arms factories need to be as near as possible to coal mines, heavy industry and transport. Eighty-five per cent. of Germany's essential mines and services connected with war industry are concentrated



DORTMUND-EMS
CANAL

Bombing accuracy of the R.A.F. The bed of the canal is seen pitted with large craters. Barges are stranded in the mud. The canal has been rendered useless for some time.

in the Ruhr! Germany could not transfer her factories on a large scale even if she would, as her most able men are tied down by army service. The labour sent to Germany from the occupied territories is insufficient to man the factories, let alone to move them. German factories must face the bombing of the R.A.F.

For internal transport, Germany has always placed much reliance on the canal system, and with the demand on rail transport for military purposes the maximum use of the canals is of great importance. The attacks of the R.A.F.

on the celebrated Dortmund-Ems canal have succeeded in interrupting the traffic for long periods and throwing back the load upon the already overburdened railways.

By the end of 1941, the Ruhr's great railway centre, Hamm, had been bombed over eighty times by the Royal Air Force!

Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover and the Rhine-land are other centres of war industry which are frequently visited by the R.A.F. Hamburg—bombed 89 times by the end of April 1942—is also a port and has important refining plant for Germany's precious synthetic oil.



This is an early reconnaissance photograph. Duisburg is the principal river port from which products of the Ruhr are sent down the River Rhine.

DUISBURG



HAMM

Since the photograph below was taken, Hamm, great railway centre of the Ruhr, has been successfully attacked in bombing raids on over eighty occasions.



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What is this source?

This is an extract from a pamphlet produced by the Ministry of Information. The pamphlet contained several other double pages of information about German bombing of Britain and Europe and British resistance to bombing in 1940-41.

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. For a while the main attack on Britain was by air. He tried to destroy the Royal Air Force. When this failed he switched to bombing British cities.

The bombing of U.K cities by Germany, better known as the Blitz, ended in 1941. From then until 1944 the only way to attack Germany was by air. The RAF and USA air forces did this relentlessly.

It's worth knowing that...

The Germans had bombed British cities heavily in 1940-41. As a result there was strong support for the RAF to bomb German cities. This material was clearly designed to explain British policy.

There is an interesting contrast between this source and the other pamphlet about bombing that you can find in the box of sources. Britain was sensitive to criticisms of carrying out terror raids and therefore being as bad as the Nazis. This is why the government also produced pamphlets like this that explained the purpose of the Allied bombing raids.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

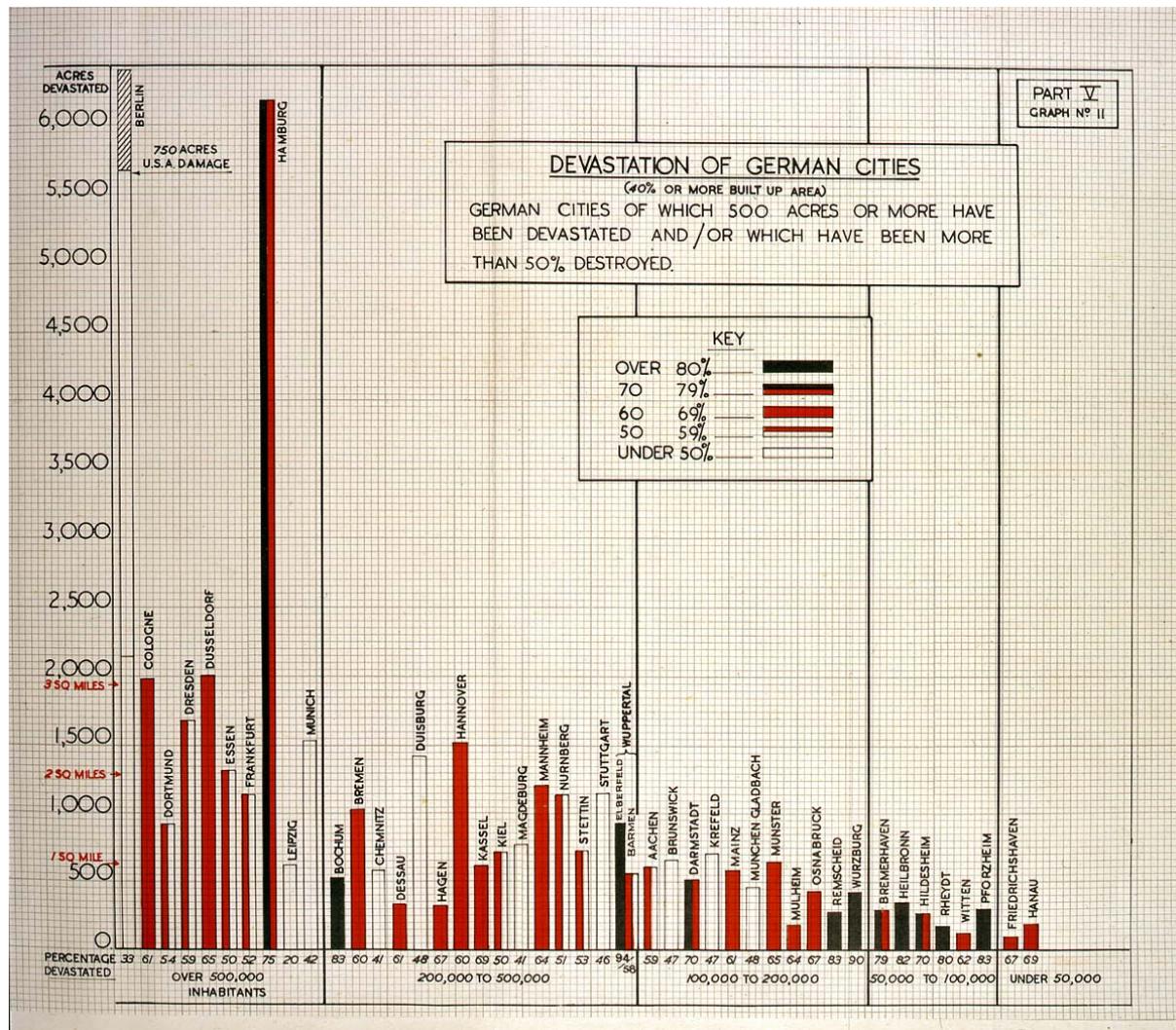
1. According to this source, what is the main justification for British bombing?
2. How does this pamphlet get its message across?
3. Do you think that the British people would have supported the view of this source at the time?
4. Compare this source to the other pamphlet about bombing in the source box (artwork).
5. In 1941 a British government investigation showed that very few RAF bombs fell even as close as five miles to their target. Does that information come through in this source?



6. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG
Graph to show devastation of German cities

Catalogue ref: AIR 16/487


What is this source?

This graph comes from a detailed report about war operations from 23rd February 1942 to 8th May 1945 by Air Chief Marshal, Sir Arthur Harris.

It shows the devastation of German industrial towns. The towns are compared according to the number of acres destroyed through the effects of bombing.



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. He then attacked the USSR in the summer of 1941. This became the main campaign of the war. However, Britain was anxious to try and help her Soviet allies. Britain did not have the resources to attack Germany on the ground but they did have a fleet of heavy bombers that could attack Germany by air.

The content of Sir Arthur Harris's report covers the course of war in terms of bombing technique, tactics and types of bomb. The report also includes a summary of the bombing effort and its results.

It's worth knowing that...

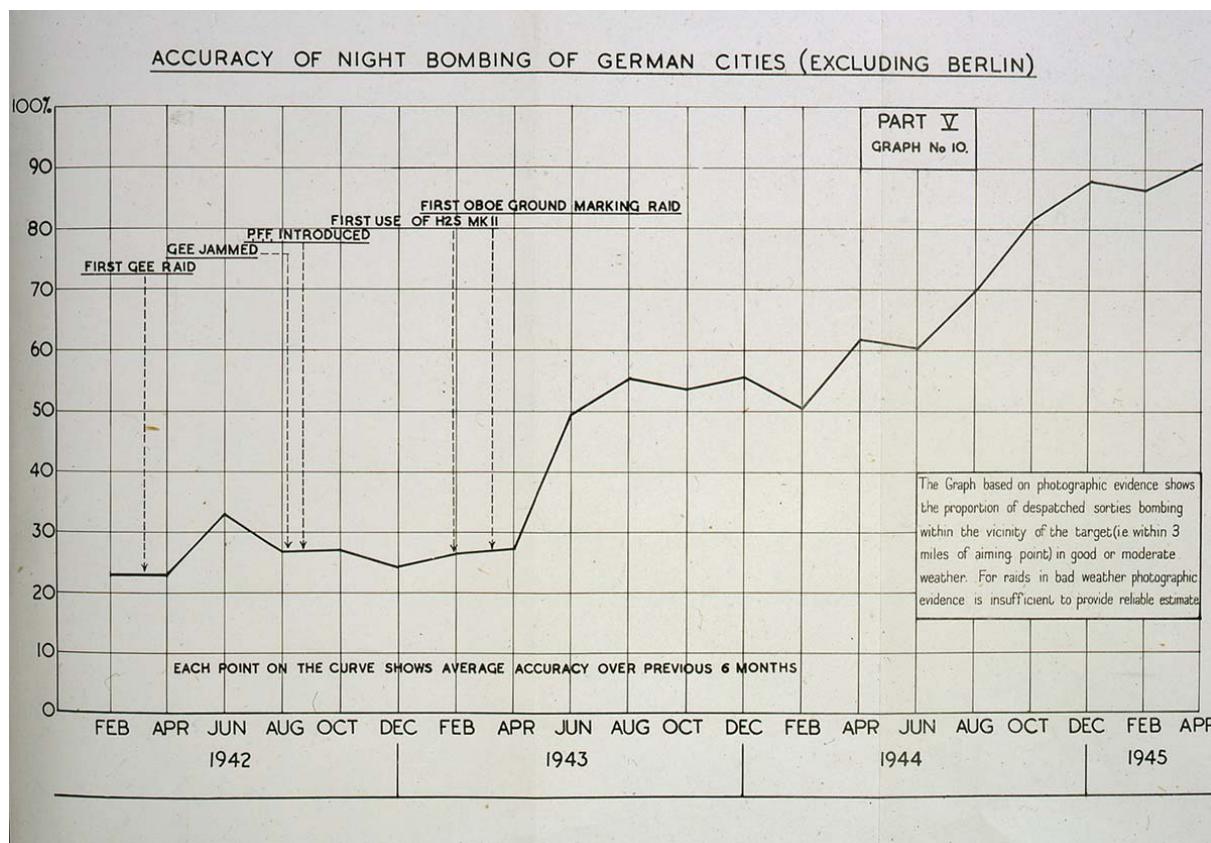
An earlier report in 1941 showed that most bombs did not fall within five miles of their target. Also, daylight raids on well defended targets led to huge losses of aircraft and aircrew. As a result, the RAF Bomber Command chief Sir Arthur Harris decided to use area bombing. Basically, this meant destroying the whole city so that the industrial targets would be destroyed and so would civilian housing.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. According to this graph what percentage damage did Hamburg experience? Approximately, how many acres of the city were destroyed?
2. Which smaller cities experienced over 80% damage?
3. What does this source suggest about the effect of the bombing strategy?
4. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG
Graph to show the accuracy of night bombing of German cities

Catalogue ref: AIR 16/487


What is this source?

This graph shows the accuracy of night bombing of German cities, excluding Berlin. It comes from a detailed report about war operations from 23rd February 1942 to 8th May 1945 by Air Chief Marshal, Sir Arthur Harris.

The graph shows the percentage of aircraft attacking their target area. These figures are based on photographic evidence that show bombers reaching within three miles of their aiming point. Various radar based navigation aids, like "GEE" are also shown on the graph. The "GEE" system had a limited range and from August 1942 the Germans were able to start jamming its signals. Other radar navigation aids such as OBOE and H.2S were developed to increase the accuracy of the bombing.



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. He then attacked the USSR in the summer of 1941. This became the main campaign of the war. However, Britain was anxious to try and help her Soviet allies. Britain did not have the resources to attack Germany on the ground but they did have a fleet of heavy bombers that could attack Germany by air.

The content Sir Arthur Harris's report covers the course of war in terms of bombing technique, tactics and types of bomb. The report also includes a summary of the bombing effort and its results.

It's worth knowing that...

An earlier report in 1941 showed that most bombs did not fall within five miles of their target. Also, daylight raids on well defended targets led to huge losses of aircraft and aircrew. As a result, the RAF Bomber Command chief Sir Arthur Harris decided to use area bombing. Basically, this meant destroying the whole city so that the industrial targets would be destroyed and so would civilian housing.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. According to this graph in what month/year does accuracy of night bombing seem to increase?
2. How can you explain this according to the graph?
3. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

Allied reconnaissance photograph of Hamburg, 1945

Catalogue ref: AIR 34/742

Submarine pens showing five of the many submarines which were in the final stages of assembly in the Hamburg dock area. Most of the submarines had been damaged by British bombs at some time during their construction but they had been repaired.



What is this source?

This is an intelligence photograph showing U boat construction in Hamburg.

The RAF would have had many photographs of Hamburg. Most would have been taken from the air.



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. He then attacked the USSR in the summer of 1941. This became the main campaign of the war. However, Britain was anxious to try and help her Soviet allies. Britain did not have the resources to attack Germany on the ground but they did have a fleet of heavy bombers that could attack Germany by air.

When the USA joined the war in December 1941 they also had heavy bombers. From 1942 until the end of the war they pounded German targets. The bombing continued even after the D-Day landings in June 1944.

It's worth knowing that...

Hamburg was an important target for many reasons. Within these submarine pens U boats were built and repaired. They were a huge threat to Allied shipping. Another factor was that Hamburg was comparatively near to Britain and was thus a slightly less difficult target.

Possibly the main reason to use area bombing against Hamburg was that precision bombing was so inaccurate. A report in 1941 showed that most bombs did not fall within five miles of their target. Also, daylight raids on well defended targets led to huge losses of aircraft and aircrew. As a result, the RAF Bomber Command chief Sir Arthur Harris decided to use area bombing. Basically, this meant destroying the whole city so that the industrial targets would be destroyed and so would civilian housing.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. Why was Hamburg chosen as a bombing target?
2. Why was the decision made to use area bombing against Hamburg? (See notes.)
3. What are the problems with this approach?
4. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

Aircrews in action

The crew of a Lancaster bomber preparing for duty

Catalogue ref: INF 2/8



What is this source?

This photograph was released by the Ministry of Information and shows the crew of a Lancaster bomber.

A Lancaster bomber usually required a crew of seven.



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. For a while the main attack on Britain was by air. He tried to destroy the Royal Air Force. When this failed Hitler switched to bombing British cities. From then until 1944 the only way to attack Germany was by air. The RAF and USA air forces did this relentlessly.

At first the British were determined not to bomb civilian areas. However, by 1941 they realised bombing was too inaccurate to hit pinpoint targets and the losses of aircraft and aircrews were terrible. So they switched to area bombing. This basically meant flattening cities, taking out industries and civilian homes.

It's worth knowing that...

There was strong support in Britain and the USA for the policy of bombing. However, the public were probably not aware of the terrible conditions and appalling losses suffered by bomber crews.

Losses among bomber crews were around 50%. This was a far higher rate of casualties than any other service in either the First or Second World Wars. US bomber crews were allowed to leave the service if they survived 25 missions.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. What clues does this source reveal about conditions in a Lancaster bomber?
2. Can these source(s) be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?



Lancaster bombers in action over Wangerooge, 25th April 1945

Catalogue ref: AIR 14/3647



What is this source?

This source was released by the Ministry of Information and was taken during a raid by RAF Lancaster bombers.



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

This photograph shows Lancaster bombers in action near Wangerooge, one of many Frisian Islands in the North Sea off the coasts of the Holland, Germany and Denmark.

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. For a while the main attack on Britain was by air. He tried to destroy the Royal Air Force. When this failed Hitler switched to bombing British cities. From then until 1944 the only way to attack Germany was by air. The RAF and USA air forces did this relentlessly.

At first the British were determined not to bomb civilian areas. However, by 1941 they realised bombing was too inaccurate to hit pinpoint targets and the losses of aircraft and aircrews were terrible. So they switched to area bombing. This basically meant flattening cities, taking out industries and civilian homes.

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Losses among bomber crews were around 50%. This was a far higher rate of casualties than any other service in either the First or Second World Wars. US bomber crews were allowed to leave the service if they survived 25 missions.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. What does this photograph tell the historian about the experiences of the bomber crews?
2. Can these source(s) be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?



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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

A poster produced by the Ministry of Information commenting on RAF and American bombing raids, May 1944

Catalogue ref: INF 2/47





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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

What is this source?

This is a British poster produced by the Ministry of Information in 1944.

This government department controlled all aspects of information, including propaganda.

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. He then attacked the USSR in the summer of 1941. This became the main campaign of the war.

However, Britain was anxious to try and help her Soviet allies. Britain did not have the resources to attack Germany on the ground but they did have a fleet of heavy bombers that could attack Germany by air.

When the USA joined the war in December 1941 they also had heavy bombers. From 1942 until the end of the war they pounded German targets. The bombing continued even after the D-Day landings in June 1944.

It's worth knowing that...

There were probably a number of different motives behind this poster. The main one was to show the public that the Allies were united in their struggle against Germany. Another aim was to answer criticisms that the USSR was doing most of the fighting and suffering most of the losses against Germany whilst the British Empire and US forces were relatively safe in Britain. The poster was published before the D-Day landings.

Another motive for the poster may have been to show that RAF bombing was not simply targeted at civilians. The poster is clear that the raids on Stettin were designed to help Soviet forces on the ground. Another justification was the appalling treatment of civilians and prisoners by German forces in the East. The USSR lost around 20 million dead during the war. In addition to that, 6 million Jews and other racial minorities were rounded up and killed in labour camps and death camps. By comparison, bombing did not seem so savage.



Learning Curve

WORLD WAR II



WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. Why have the RAF bombed Stettin?
2. In what ways was Stettin a different type of target from Hamburg?
3. Why would a raid like this be even more dangerous to aircrews than a raid on Hamburg?
4. Does this source prove that the bombing campaign was not simply a terror campaign against civilians?
5. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?

Use the debate summary table to record your choice of sources.



Learning Curve

WORLD WAR II

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

Pamphlet relating to bombing issued by the Ministry of Information, 1942-1943

Catalogue ref: INF 2/8



As Hitler sowed . . .



Learning Curve

WORLD WAR II

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

What is this source?

The Ministry of Information produced this pamphlet.

What's the background to this source?

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. For a while the main attack on Britain was by air. He tried to destroy the Royal Air Force. When this failed he switched to bombing British cities.

The bombing of U.K cities by Germany, better known as the Blitz, ended in 1941. From then until 1944 the only way to attack Germany was by air. The RAF and USA air forces did this relentlessly.

It's worth knowing that...

The Germans had bombed British cities heavily in 1940-41. As a result there was strong support for the RAF to bomb German cities. This pamphlet was clearly designed to generate support for the policy.

There is an interesting contrast between this source and the other pamphlet about bombing that you can find in the box of sources. Britain was sensitive to criticisms of carrying out terror raids and therefore being as bad as the Nazis. This is why the government also produced pamphlets that explained the purpose of the Allied bombing raids.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. According to this source, what is the main justification for British bombing?
2. How does the pamphlet get its message across?
3. Do you think that the British people would have supported the view of this source at the time?
4. Compare this source to the other pamphlet about bombing in the source box.
5. In 1941 a British government investigation showed that very few RAF bombs fell even as close as five miles to their target. Does that information come through in this source?
6. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?

Use the debate summary table to record your choice of sources.



Learning Curve

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WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

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...so shall Hitler reap!



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Learning Curve

WORLD WAR II

WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: HAMBURG

Why did the RAF bomb cities?

Debate summary table

Select source material to prepare for a class debate that covers the following viewpoints:

- A: The bombing was justifiable given the circumstances at the time
- B: The bombing was an effective weapon against Nazi Germany
- C: The bombing was ineffective and cost too many civilians and aircrew
- D: The bombing was morally unjustifiable and should be seen as a war crime

Explain how the selected source supports a particular viewpoint				
My selected source	Viewpoint A	Viewpoint B	Viewpoint C	Viewpoint D
[Name source]				