

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?

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

Catalogue ref: AIR 34/615

Source a



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.

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.