

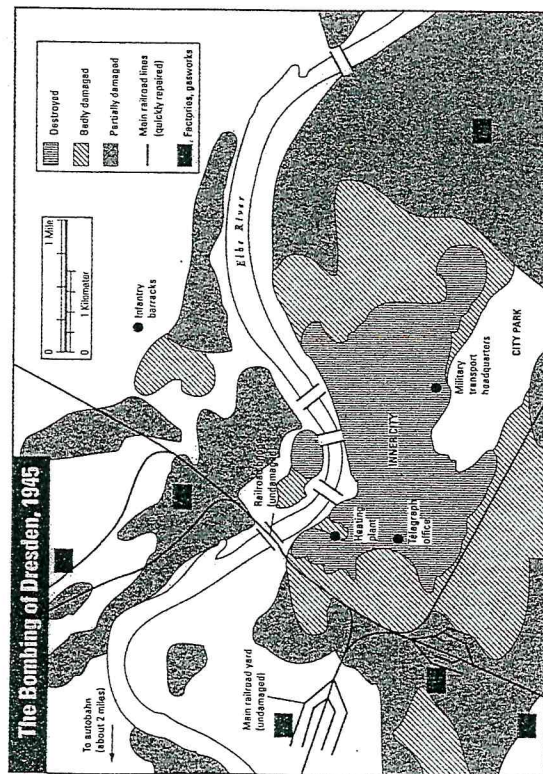
Bombing Dresden

One of the most controversial incidents of World War II was the Allied aerial bombing of Dresden late in the war. Located in eastern Germany near the Polish and Czech borders, Dresden was, according to writer Alexander McKee, a city with "fantastic architecture," with a town center "housing world-class collections of paintings, statues, and art objects of all kinds."

By means of a plan code-named Thunderclap, the Allies sought to deliver to Germany a "mighty blow"—the destruction of a major city to hasten Germany's surrender in a war it had no chance of winning. Eventually, Dresden was selected. The city's numerous military targets included an infantry barracks, an autobahn (expressway) skirting the city to the west and leading to the German front, a railway network, bridges, and a number of factories.

During massive night and day bombings by Allied aircraft between February 13 and 15, 1945, the heart of Dresden was almost completely destroyed. The bombing was so intense during one raid that the explosions created a firestorm in which thousands of people were suffocated as the fires consumed all the oxygen for blocks around. Estimates of the number of people killed in the raids range from 25,000 to 135,000. The exact figure will never be known, because at the time Dresden was teeming with thousands of refugees from other German cities.

Although some targets such as the autobahn were left intact, the physical damage was staggering. Out of 220,000 living units—houses and apartments—more than 90,000 were destroyed or made uninhabitable by the bombing.



1. What is the purpose of the map?

2. What part of Dresden was most heavily damaged?

3. What places in and around Dresden might the Allies have considered targets of military significance?

4. Which of these targets was completely destroyed?

5. In what parts of Dresden were most of these targets located?

6. On the basis of the map, what might you conclude about the purpose of Thunderclap?

7. Sir Arthur Harris, British commander of the Allied raids, wrote after the raids that "Dresden was a mass of munitions [guns and ammunition] works, an intact government center, and a key transportation center to the East. It is now none of those things." To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?

8. Why do you think the bombing of Dresden is controversial?