

# NORMAN LANE JR. MEMORIAL PROJECT

“FOR THOSE WHO FIGHT FOR IT, LIFE HAS A  
FLAVOR THE PROTECTED NEVER KNOW.”

Al Claiborne, Ph.D., Chair  
5254 Shoal Creek Lane  
Winston-Salem, NC 27106  
Phone: 336.529.2105  
E-mail: [alc@csb.wfu.edu](mailto:alc@csb.wfu.edu)



February 27, 2024

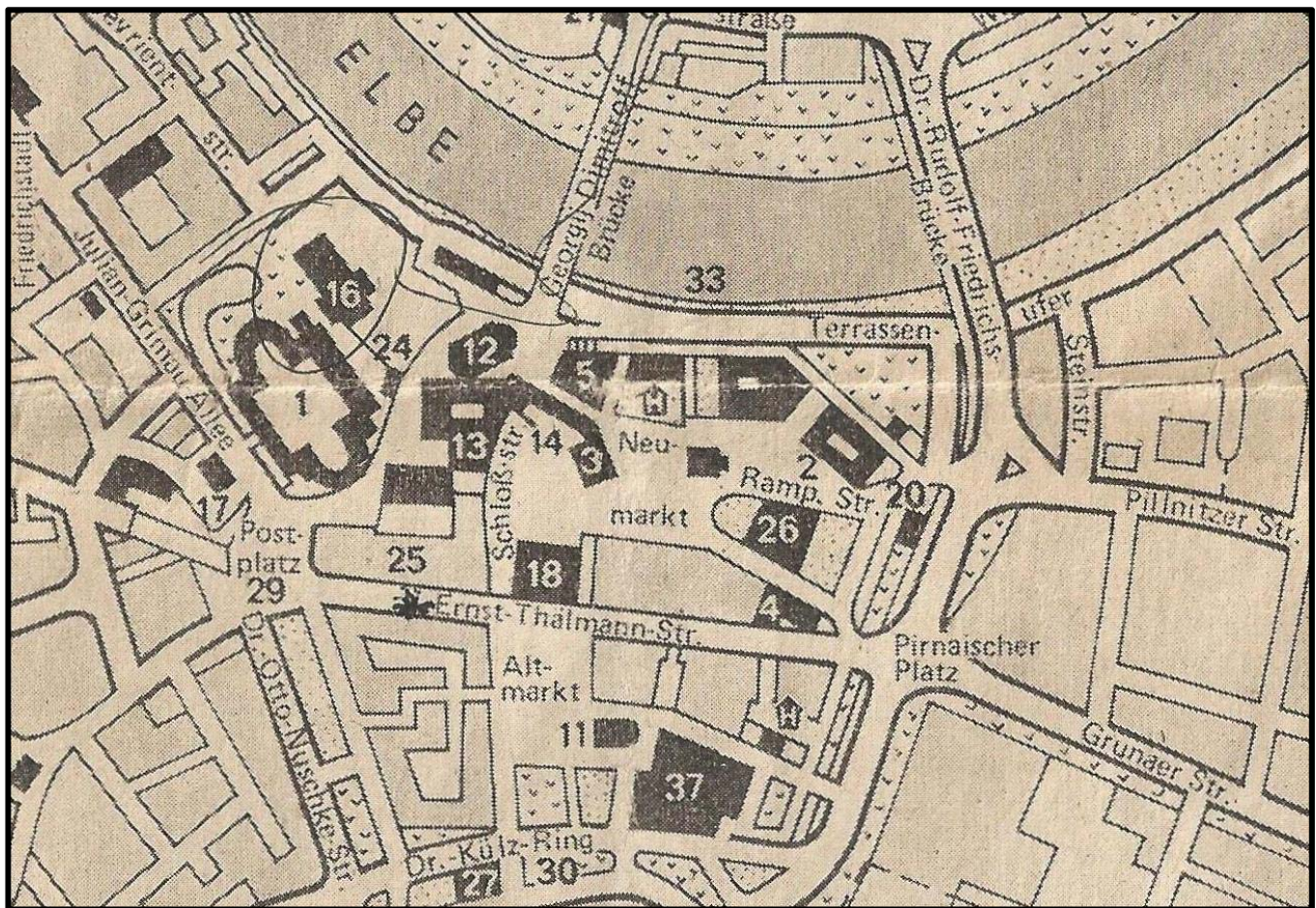
In July 1990 my wife Terry and I visited a professional collaborator of mine in Freiburg, West Germany, where he was a professor at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität. The Berlin Wall had come down in November 1989, but formal reunification of the two Germanys was still three months away. I enjoyed the three years of German I took in college, especially the third year of German literature with Prof. Dieter Sevin. Classroom discussions were held in English, but all reading was from the German texts. The first semester course was titled *The Age of Goethe . . . Goethe (Die Leiden des jungen Werthers, Faust [Urfaust]), Schiller (Maria Stuart), and other writers.* (Schiller also wrote *Wilhelm Tell*, which was adapted by Rossini for the opera of the same name 25 years later. You may never have heard the opera, but anyone who grew up with the *Lone Ranger* knows the finale of the overture.) I still have the book we used for the course, *The Age of Goethe*, edited by Stuart Atkins. That same fall of 1972 the film version of

<http://www.normanlanejrmemorialproject.org/>

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* came out; I saw it, and it made a lasting impression on me. That film probably provided the first awareness I ever had of the firebombing of Dresden, Germany, over February 13-15, 1945. I later learned that Kurt Vonnegut was an American soldier who was captured by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944-January 1945. With a group of POWs, he was moved to Dresden, and his experience there during and after the firebombing provided the basis for his novel, as well as the title.

Back to July 1990 . . . with my being something of a Germanophile and given the elimination of travel restrictions, Terry and I traveled by train from Freiburg, through Frankfurt, to East Berlin. I think the entire trip took the better part of a day, maybe 10 hours or so. The one strong impression I had, as the train crossed the border into East Germany, came from the first railway station we passed. It was as though, in my imagined frame of reference, World War II had ended the day before. My second impression, in East Berlin, was that we were not welcomed enthusiastically. Had we spoken Russian, things would have been better . . . but American English, no. We stayed three nights in East Berlin, July 25-27, at Hotel Unter den Linden; the hotel was located on the boulevard of the same name, which I have seen referred to today as the "*Champs-Élysées*" of Berlin. Extending our visit to East Germany, we traveled to Dresden by train on July 28, and we stayed two nights at Hotel Newa on Prager Strasse. Other than what I knew about Dresden from having seen *Slaughterhouse-Five* almost 20 years earlier, I don't recall having done much research before our trip. If you think back on the development of the internet, you realize that 1990 was prehistory.

The following is part of the map of Dresden that was provided by the Dresden Tourist Information office while we were there (see text, page 3, top, for legend).



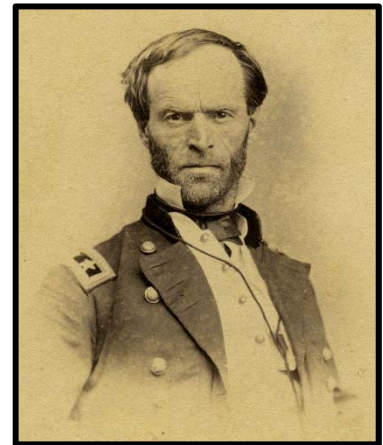
Dresden is often referred to as “Florence on the Elbe.” Among the more notable structures and sights are the Zwinger, present-day home to some of the Dresden State Art Collections (1), the Albertinum (2), which is home today to two of the city’s most illustrious art and sculpture museums, and the Johanneum (3), now home to the Dresden Transport Museum. Joining the Albertinum and the Johanneum in the Neumarkt square, and located between them, is the Frauenkirche Dresden (not numbered but represented by a dark square, with a “cap” on the right side). Other notable sights include the Semperoper opera house (16), the Katholische Hofkirche, or Dresden Cathedral (12), the Residenzschloss, Dresden’s royal palace (13), the Kulturpalast (18), built during the era of the German Democratic Republic [GDR], the Kreuzkirche, or Church of the Holy Cross (11), and the Rathaus, or Town Hall (37). Today the Altstadt (Old Town) remains the historical center of Dresden, and it represents the center of city life as well, including Neumarkt and Altmarkt squares, Postplatz and Prager Strasse (not shown).

But beginning on the night of Tuesday, February 13, and continuing through Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, and Thursday, February 14 and 15, 1945, the Altstadt was but a target for hundreds of RAF and 8th Air Force heavy bombers.

### Dresden, Tuesday-Thursday, February 13-15, 1945

In a chapter of *Masters of the Air* titled “Terror Without End,” author Donald Miller begins with an excerpt from a letter written by Union general William Tecumseh Sherman on August 20, 1863, from his camp on the Big Black River in Mississippi. The commanding general of the 15th Army Corps, Army of the Tennessee, wrote to Gen. J.W. Tuttle, who commanded Sherman’s 3rd Division but was at the time a candidate in the Iowa gubernatorial election. It is a multifaceted letter, touching on Tuttle’s prospects, the two-party system, government, and war. On the latter subject, Sherman concluded:

Still, we have not yet killed enough, we must make this War so fatal and horrible, that a Century will pass, before new demagogues and traitors will dare to resort to violence and war, to achieve their ends.



\* \* \*

As Donald Miller describes, Operation Thunderclap was introduced by the British Chiefs of Staff in July 1944. But it would be February 1945 before a modified plan of action would be executed. As originally conceived, a continuous four-day blitz from the air on Berlin, waged night and day by heavy bombers from the RAF and 8th Air Force, would result “in so many deaths, the great majority of which will be key personnel.” “[It] cannot help but have shattering effect on political and civilian morale all over Germany.” These were the words of British Chief of Air Staff Charles Portal. But there was opposition from American commanders at the headquarters of both the Army Air Forces in Washington and the 8th Air Force near London. There were objections to the “purposeful targeting of civilians,” although this had been an integral part of the October 10, 1943 Münster mission, but voices were also raised against deviating from the accepted strategy of bombing military targets and destroying German economic capacity.

Events on the ground, however, over December 1944 and January 1945 contributed to renewed consideration, in British quarters, of Thunderclap. Though the Battle of the Bulge was concluded in the Allies’ favor, it was a very costly engagement (with more than 19,000 American dead and more than

23,000, including Kurt Vonnegut, taken prisoner) and led to a pause in the advance to the Rhine. At the same time, the mid-January offensive by Soviet forces in occupied Poland resulted in the capture of Warsaw on the 17th (see map, below). Two weeks later, on January 31, Marshal Georgi Zhukov's mechanized forces were at Kostrzyn, on the Oder River, a little more than 50 miles from Berlin.



The Vistula-Oder offensive began on Friday morning, January 12, 1945. The graphic outlines the advances of Marshal Georgi Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front (1B-5B) and Marshal Ivan Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front (1A-5A). Zhukov launched his offensive from the Pulawy (1B) and Magnuszew (about 14 miles northwest of Koziencice [1B] bridgeheads, while Konev began from the Sandomierz bridgehead (1A); all three were along the Vistula (Wisla) River. On January 17, Zhukov took Warsaw (2B), and his forces took Lodz (3B) on the 19th. On the same day, Konev secured Krakow (not shown, about 75 miles southwest of Kielce). On about the 25th, elements of Zhukov's Front encircled Poznan (4B) and put the city under siege, while Konev crossed the Oder (Odra) River near Wrocław (4A). On January 31 Zhukov's main force was at Kostrzyn (5B), on the Oder 52 miles from Berlin. Konev reached Lubsko (5A), about 85 miles from Berlin, on February 13.

Stalag Luft III, the POW camp that Joseph Carter and thousands of others evacuated on January 28, was only about 80 miles northeast of Dresden. The Soviet offensive covered 300 miles in less than a month.

There were other factors driving the possible implementation of a modified Thunderclap plan over eastern Germany. War was still raging in the Pacific, and an earlier end to the war in Europe would provide more resources for that theater. The assault on Iwo Jima would begin on February 19. The Yalta Conference, which would bring President Franklin Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Premier Josef Stalin to the Black Sea resort in the Crimea, would be held February 4-11. According to Donald Miller, the Russians were given advance notice of this planning, prior to the conference. The author adds that "later, at the Yalta Conference, Stalin himself asked that Dresden be bombed, along with Leipzig and Berlin." A modified Thunderclap plan, which would still carry the label of "targeting civilians" while supporting the military objectives of the advancing Soviet Army and bringing Germany closer to surrender, was therefore approved by British and American political and military leaders. And on the evening of Tuesday, January 30, 1945, at his headquarters near London, 8th Air Force commanding general Jimmy Doolittle received the urgent order from Gen. Carl Spaatz, commander of US Strategic Air Forces in Europe. As Donald Miller paraphrases the directive, "The aiming point of the Eighth Air Force's next mission was the center of Berlin."

Roger Freeman, in *The Mighty Eighth*, gives this description of the February 3, 1945 bombing of Berlin:

The Luftwaffe did not contest the Fortresses [1,003 B-17s of the 1st and 3rd Air Divisions] or their escort and bombing was visual in good conditions, with the 2,265 tons of bombs making this so far the Americans' heaviest concentration on the centre of the Reich capital. . . . The German

press and radio reported between 20,000 and 25,000 civilian casualties in the “terror raid,” and while enemy propaganda made much of such figures, on this occasion neutral sources reported exceptionally heavy loss of life.

Donald Miller writes:

Early estimates by the Eighth Air Force and Swedish reporters put the number of dead at around 25,000, while a respected German historian has recently [published in 2006] arrived at a much lower figure, approximately 3,000. . . . What is known for certain is that an astounding 120,000 people were made homeless by the February 3 bombing.

Elsewhere in his chapter, “Terror Without End,” the author adds this perspective:

It has been argued that the March 1945 Tokyo raid was a historic turning point in American military policy, the abandonment of long-standing restraint against the indiscriminate killing of noncombatants. [On March 9, a fleet of B-29 heavy bombers would carry out a low-level incendiary raid against Tokyo that would kill at least 100,000 people and burn 16 square miles of the city.] But that moral threshold had been crossed on the morning of February 3, 1945, when the entire Eighth Air Force appeared in the freezing skies over Berlin.

\* \* \*

The next Thunderclap mission was the three-day blitz of Dresden, “Florence on the Elbe,” over February 13-15, 1945. February 13 was also the date that Marshal Ivan Konev’s 1st Ukrainian Front reached Lubsko, Poland (see map, page 4), 85 miles from Berlin. It was also Shrove Tuesday, or Mardi Gras, as the observance of Lent would begin the next day. Two primary sources are used to bring the raid, which took place 79 years ago this month, into the consciousness of the present. *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden 1945*, edited by Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang (2006), provides an overview of the attacks. The eyewitness account is provided by Götz Bergander, as translated in *Voices from the Third Reich*, by Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter (1989).

\* \* \*

A. The Bombing of Dresden—Overview (Sönke Neitzel, in *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden 1945*, edited by Paul Addison and Jeremy Crang)

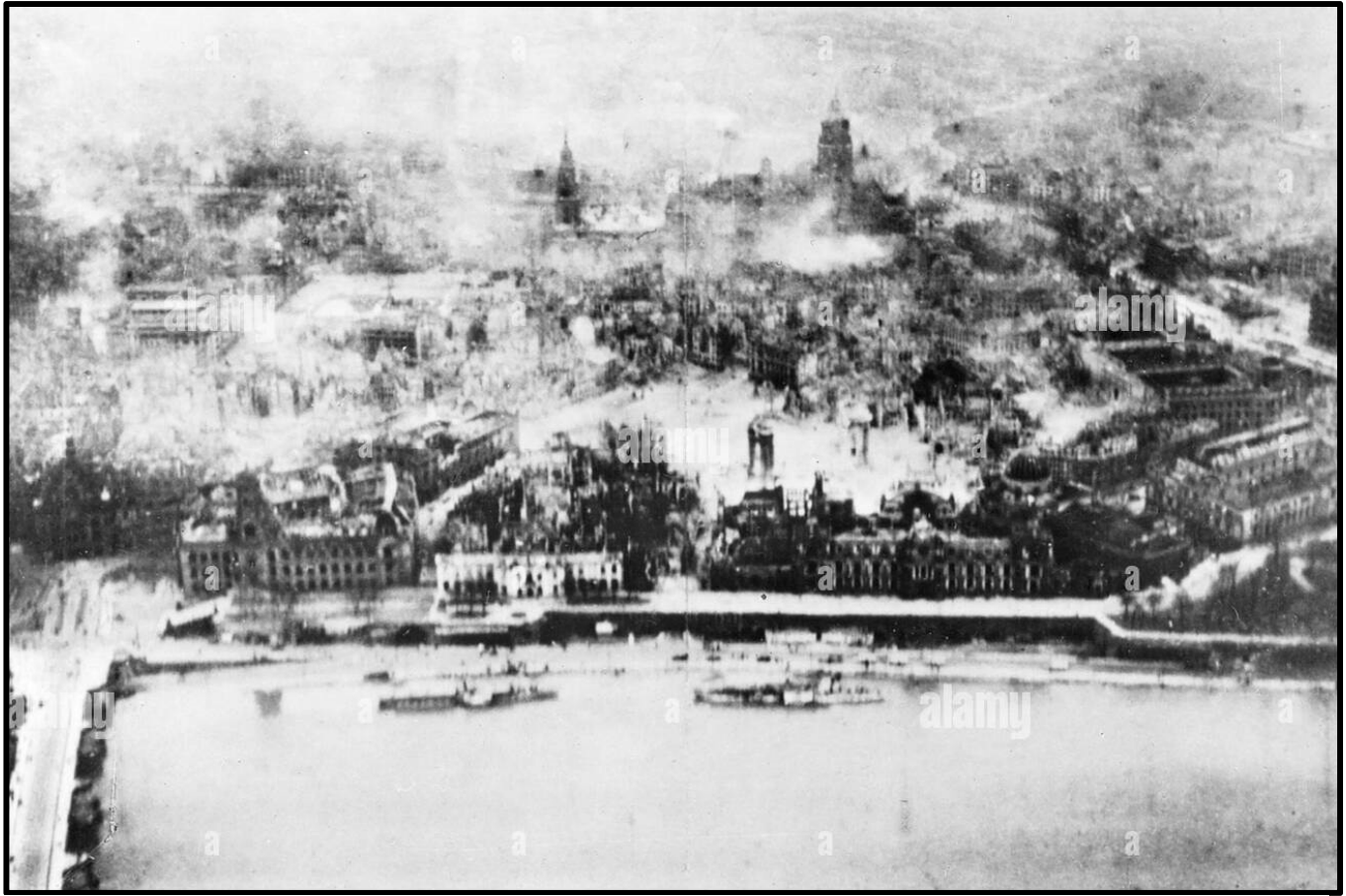
Sixteen months had passed since the bombing of Münster, on the third day of “Black Week,” in October 1943:

At 10.13 p.m. on 13 February the first [RAF] bomber wave reached Dresden. For the people on the ground a desperate struggle for survival began. . . .

The first attack caused severe damage in the city centre and started numerous fires. The 1,000-strong fire brigade had severe problems in bringing these blazes under control. Most of their vehicles were soon put out of action. The headquarters of the civil defence organisation lost control of the situation because its lines of communication broke down. Meanwhile most Dresdeners hunkered down in their cellars. According to Georg Feydt, the head of the city’s maintenance service, who was in the city centre shortly after the attack, this helped the fires to spread among the tall, densely packed buildings. . . .

Fire brigades from the surrounding regions rushed to the city. No reliable documents from the firefighting operations have survived because so many firemen were killed during the night.

But it was clear there was a great deal of confusion. Several big fires were already developing into a firestorm [see pages 7-8]. Nevertheless, the civil defence authorities still hoped to prevent a catastrophe. Then the second wave of bombers [also RAF] arrived at 1.20 a.m. and delivered a mortal blow to Dresden. The number of areas set on fire was extended and soon the centre of the city was engulfed in one huge firestorm. Firefighting efforts came to a complete standstill. For the Dresdeners in the centre of the city it was an experience of unimaginable horror [see the Götz Bergander account, pages 9-14]. . . .



Dresden 1945 after the 13-15 February bombing by the RAF and USAAF (photo and caption from Alamy). The photo was taken from the air, across the Elbe River from the city center. The bridge at left and two tall structures are not identified, but they may appear in the map on page 2.

Those who managed to escape from their cellars faced the hell of the conflagration. People were literally sucked into the mouth of the firestorm as they tried to flee the city centre. . . .

[Some, like Berthold Meyer] eventually reached the relative safety of the meadows beside the Elbe [see map, page 2]. Many were not so fortunate. Some poor souls threw themselves into the water tanks constructed for the city's firefighters and were literally cooked to death. Others floundered as the tar on the streets began to melt. Those who tried to wade through the morass wearing loose-fitting shoes soon lost their footwear. Their bare feet became so badly burned that they could not continue and perished. The choice of shoes that one had made that morning meant the difference between life and death. Such was the horror of that night.

On 14 February there was no morning in Dresden: it remained dark. When the Eighth Air Force attacked Dresden at noon on that day the burning city lay under a thick smoke screen. The American bombs pounded the western districts around the marshalling yards in Dresden-Friedrichstadt [see map, page 2, "Friedrichstadt" is indicated near the top left corner]. . . .



Devastated Dresden: Bodies in the street after the allied firebombing of Dresden, Germany, February 1945 (photo and caption from Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images).

Force, which carried out missions on February 14 and 15, consisted of a total of about 530 aircraft, which dropped an additional 1,235 tons of bombs.

Although the Dresden blitz of February 1945 is correctly associated with the term, “firebombing,” Dresden was not the first case in which a German city was “nearly annihilated” by this deliberate tactic. About two-and-a-half months before Münster, there was Hamburg; Donald Miller tells the story in *Masters of the Air*. The port city of nearly two million people was subjected to a continuous blitz from the air, waged day (July 25 and 26) and night (July 24-25) by the 8th Air Force and the RAF, respectively. Author Miller describes the events of the second RAF night raid of the blitz, the evening of July 27-28, 1943:

July 27 was a beautiful summer night in Hamburg. The city was quiet—no flak, no sirens. Perhaps it was over, the optimists speculated. Then at 1:00 A.M. the British bombers—over 700 of them—could be heard approaching. “Suddenly there came a rain of fire from heaven,” recalled a Hamburg firefighter. “The air was actually filled with fire. . . . Then a storm started, a shrill howling in the street. It grew into a hurricane so that we had to abandon all hope of fighting the fire.” . . .

The weather, unusually hot and dry for this part of Germany, provided near perfect atmospheric conditions for what turned into a city-consuming cyclone of fire. Within twenty minutes after the raid began, a column of turbulent, heated air rose more than two and a half miles into the night sky. Superheated air raced through the city at speeds in excess of 150 miles per hour, sending terrified people scurrying to air raid cellars, their shirts and dresses lit up like torches. Inside the shelters, thousands suffocated as the voracious fire sucked oxygen out of the atmosphere. The bodies of other victims were baked and reduced to ashes by radiant heat. “It was as though they had been placed in a crematorium, which was indeed what

Meanwhile Dresden continued to burn: the major conflagrations were not extinguished until the 15th.

A day later (15 February, see pages 17-20), 210 B-17 bombers that had failed to reach their designated target - a synthetic oil plant [at Ruhland, about 30 miles north of Dresden] - bombed Dresden as a secondary aim point. They dropped another 461 tons of bombs on the ailing city.

The RAF force that carried out the first two waves of bombing consisted of almost 800 Avro Lancaster heavy bombers, which dropped a total of almost 1,500 tons of high explosive bombs and almost 1,200 tons of incendiary bombs and flares. The B-17 heavy bomber force from the 8th Air



Firebombing of Hamburg: Two corpses in a street of Hamburg after an attack by RAF bombers (Operation Gomorrah 25 July-3 August, 1943). (Photo from ullstein bild via Getty Images.)

each shelter proved to be,” said a secret German report. “The fortunate were those who jumped into the canals and waterways and remained swimming or standing up to their necks in water for hours until the heat should die down.” . . .

In shelters hit by fire sticks—small, highly lethal incendiary bombs—children “yelled like animals,” reported another witness. . . .

The fire storm, the first ever created by bombing, was a deliberate act, achieved by a lethal combination of high-explosive and incendiary bombs. Enormous 4,000-pound blast bombs were then dropped into the inferno to blow craters in the roads in order to impede the firefighters. “A wave of terror radiated from the suffering city and spread throughout Germany. Appalling details of the great fires were recounted and their glow could be seen for days from a distance of a hundred and twenty miles,” reported a German air commander. “[News of] . . . the Terror of Hamburg spread rapidly to the remotest villages of the Reich,” the horrific details carried by over a million people who escaped the city, many of them in a wild stampede.

\* \* \*

Kurt Vonnegut (see page 2) published his *New York Times* best seller (fiction), *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in 1969. As told by the narrator in chapter 8, his protagonist Billy Pilgrim remembers his experience as an American POW in Dresden during the February 1945 firebombing:

He was down in the meat locker on the night that Dresden was destroyed. There were sounds like giant footsteps above. Those were sticks of high-explosive bombs. The giants walked and walked. The meat locker was a very safe shelter. All that happened down there was an occasional shower of calcimine. The Americans and four of their guards and a few dressed carcasses were down there, and nobody else. The rest of the guards had, before the raid began, gone to the comforts of their own homes in Dresden. They were all being killed with their families.

So it goes.

The girls that Billy had seen naked were all being killed, too, in a much shallower shelter in another part of the stockyards.

So it goes.

A guard would go to the head of the stairs every so often to see what it was like outside, then he would come down and whisper to the other guards. There was a fire-storm out there. Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn.

It wasn't safe to come out of the shelter until noon the next day. When the Americans and their guards did come out, the sky was black with smoke. The sun was an angry little pinhead. Dresden was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighborhood was dead.

So it goes.

\* \* \*



This is the first of two photos of the ruins of the Frauenkirche (see photo, page 9, and map, page 2). At the front is the base or pedestal for an 1885 statue of Martin Luther, which was later restored and returned to the site. The date of this photo is given as March 16, 1946, 13 months after the firebombing of the city. Two major remnants of the Frauenkirche structure stand among the rubble, and the dome of the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts is seen in the background (Getty Images).



B. The Bombing of Dresden—Eyewitness Account of Götz Bergander (in *Voices from the Third Reich*, by Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter)

Götz Bergander (1927-2013) published “the first critical study of the bombing of Dresden,” *Dresden im Luftkrieg* (German language) in 1977 (a revised edition was published in 1994, after documents became available from the former GDR). Donald Miller cites the book as a “scrupulous account of the bombing.” As an 18-year-old Dresdener, Bergander was heading home on a tram with his mother on February 13, 1945, as the first wave of RAF heavy bombers was streaming toward the city. Interviewed for a story in the *Guardian*, published on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the attacks, he described his family’s second-floor flat in Friedrichstrasse (within the Friedrichstadt district of Dresden, see map, page 2, and text, page 6) as one of the few equipped with a proper air-raid shelter. “It had steel doors and rubber curtains,” he told the reporter.

Five years before the second edition of Bergander’s historical account was published, he provided a detailed retrospective on the bombing of Dresden for a German language collection of oral histories from Germans who endured the Second World War. The original editors also published an English language translation, *Voices from the Third Reich*, in 1989. Götz Bergander’s translated 1989 retrospective follows, in full.

---

There had been two American daylight attacks on Dresden, one in October 1944, one in January 1945. The latter was somewhat heavier and we knew that Dresden wasn’t going to come out of it untouched. Nevertheless, we had no idea what we were in for; we didn’t have the experience they had in Hamburg, Berlin, Kassel, or the Ruhrgebiet [Ruhr area].

I got myself a grid map of Germany. You could listen in on a radio channel—we called it the flak channel but it actually came from the headquarters near Berlin—which transmitted coded air intelligence. Whenever I was home I listened to this channel and marked the flight paths on the large map which I’d covered with onionskin paper. I still have this map.



Second view (undated, possibly later in 1945) of the Frauenkirche ruins (see previous photo, page 8). The base of the Martin Luther statue can be seen at far right, and the Academy of Fine Arts dome is clearly seen. These photos from 1945-1946 can be compared with our photos from 1990, on page 17. (Photo from Deutsche Fotothek/picture alliance via Getty Images.)

And that’s how it was on the evening of February 13, which happened to be Mardi Gras. You could determine the approach of a massive raid far into central Germany, beyond Leipzig. When the alarm sounded, it was approximately 20 minutes before 10:00 P.M. [The first wave of RAF bombers reached Dresden at 10:13 p.m.]

The city was already filled with refugees; everything was a dull, war gray. The train stations were bursting with people. I had already participated in some so-called refugee aid there. We received refugees from Silesia and tried to get them and their baggage out of the city as quickly as possible. [Silesia is a historical region that is now in southwestern Poland. As indicated on the map, page 4, the four principal Polish districts are Lubuskie,

Dolnoslaskie, Opolskie, and Slaskie (not shown).] They were taken to old dance halls, ballrooms, and cinemas in the suburbs, but some always remained in the city center—those who'd just arrived and had not yet been accommodated.

According to certain city documents, Dresden had approximately 640,000 inhabitants, and I'd estimate that there were perhaps a million people in the city, so there were about 300,000 refugees. There were no bunkers at all—not one public air raid shelter. At Dresden's main train station, luggage storage rooms and basements had been set up as shelters.



This photo is also dated March 16, 1946, within the first year of the Soviet occupation of Dresden and eastern Germany. The Town Hall (*Rathaus*, see map, page 2) appears in the center background. The new Town Hall was inaugurated in 1910. The tower reached a height of 100 meters, and a viewing platform was added 30 meters below the top of the tower, affording a wonderful view of “Florence on the Elbe.” On the platform were installed 16 sculptures that gave allegorical descriptions of virtue, all created by four noted sculptors of the late 19th and 20th centuries. The figures were arranged in pairs, such as Wisdom and Goodness (*Weisheit* and *Güte*), Love and Hope (*Liebe* and *Hoffnung*), etc. Dresden sculptor August Schreitmüller (1871-1958) completed his sculpture, *Güte*, in about 1909.

Though badly damaged in the Allied bombings, one can see the tower and the platform that encircles it. Though some sculptures were destroyed, one can see the outlines of two figures, contrasted against the grey sky. Above the platform, one can see the dial of the large town hall clock. And atop the tower, the weeping figure of *Goldene Rathausmann* still tries to raise his hand in blessing.

People thought Dresden would be spared. There were rumors that the British thought a great deal of Dresden as a cultural center. The story also went around that an aunt of Churchill's lived in Dresden, and in 1945 the rumor circulated that the Allies intended to use Dresden as their capital. Even by then, we expected partition; we thought the Russians would occupy the eastern half and the others the western half. Finally, people said, Dresden is full of hospitals.

All of this was wrong. All these claims, including the one that Dresden was protected because it was a “hospital” city, were false. Dresden was completely unprotected. The flak had been withdrawn during the winter. Half the guns were sent to the Ruhr to strengthen the air defense there, only to be lost when the Americans overran the area. It was ridiculous. The Dresden anti-aircraft troops weren't killed in Dresden, but died fighting against the Americans.

As I listened to the flak channel, I had a feeling of ever-increasing dread, but layered with excitement. You could compare it to what every soldier feels before he has to leave the trench. You're afraid, yet at the same time very excited, wondering what's going to happen. Talk about butterflies! I took my radio down to the air-raid shelter and tried to tune into the flak channel. Our shelter warden was outside.

While I was still fiddling with the radio dial he came running down into the cellar and called, "It's getting light, it's getting light, it's bright as day outside! They're coming, they're coming, the dive bombers are here!" I told him: "But that's impossible, dive bombers can't fly at night." He said: "I saw them, they came right over the Friedrichstadt hospital." After the war we found out that he had really seen Mosquitos [RAF "light" fighter-bombers] come down with target flares. They dropped the target markers about 500 yards from where we lived, and the markers exploded in the air before they hit the ground. The so-called "Christmas trees" came down by parachute. Everything was quiet for awhile, until we heard the bombers [RAF Lancaster heavy bombers], and the first explosions.

It was as if a huge noisy conveyor belt was rolling over us, a noise punctuated with detonations and tremors. It lasted for about 25 minutes before it gradually ceased. Then there was absolute quiet.



End of the War—Destroyed Dresden, 1945: The photo, by famous German photographer Richard Peter, shows the view from the tower of the Town Hall (see photo and caption, page 10), southwards over the moonscape of Dresden, with the surviving *Güte* (Goodness) sculpture. The date of this photo is given as September 17, 1945. (Photo by Deutsche Fotothek/picture alliance via Getty Images.)

I had tuned in to the local air raid broadcasts, and their last announcement had been, "Attention! Attention! This is your local air defense office. Bombs in the city area. Citizens, keep sand and water ready." Then it was cut off.

I went outside after this first attack because our warden told us we had to look for incendiaries. We didn't find any, but coming out of the cellar was unforgettable: the night sky was illuminated with pink and red. The houses were black silhouettes, and a red cloud of smoke hovered over everything. I left our courtyard and climbed onto the roof of the factory next door with my camera. I thought, "You have to take a picture of this."

People ran toward us totally distraught, smeared with ash, and with wet blankets wrapped around their heads. These people made it out of

the burning areas without too much difficulty, because the firestorm only developed about half an hour to an hour after the first of the two night attacks. All we heard was, “Everything’s gone, everything’s on fire.”

In the meantime, many people had gathered in our courtyard. They had all come to our house because it was still intact. Everyone talked at once until someone yelled, “They’re coming back, they’re coming back!” Sure enough, through the general confusion we heard the alarm sirens go off again. The alarm system in the city had ceased to function, but we could hear the sirens from the neighboring villages warning of a second attack. [The second wave of RAF bombers arrived at 1:20 a.m.] That’s when I was overcome with panic, and I’m also speaking for the rest of my family and those who lived in our house. It was sheer panic! We thought this couldn’t be possible, that they wouldn’t do such a thing. They wouldn’t drop more bombs on a city that was already an inferno. We were a target not even the worst shot could miss. We rushed into the cellar, and the second attack began just like the first one.

The first raid was flown by the famous 5th Bomber Group which had been specially preselected for the initial incendiary attack. The rest of the bomber groups came in for the second attack. The British really put everything they had into the air that night, though not all of it was used against Dresden. Approximately 800 planes were deployed against Dresden, and another 300 went against a refinery near Leipzig.



Dresden Centre Devastated by Bombing: Aerial view of Dresden city centre, the area around Pirnaischer Platz (see map, page 2), devastated by the Anglo-American bombing of the 13th and 14th of February 1945; the wreck of the Kaiserpalast, that would be pulled down in 1951, is still standing. Undated, but leaves on trees indicate no earlier than spring 1946. (Photo by ullstein bild via Getty Images.)

This attack left exhaustion and tension in its wake, a feeling of utter helplessness and terror. Since high-explosive bombs came down in our immediate vicinity, we had no idea of what it looked like outside. Neither did we hear the slapping sound of incendiaries. There was an indescribable roar in the air: the fire. The thundering fire reminded me of the biblical catastrophes I had heard about in my education in the humanities. I was aghast. I can't describe seeing this city burn in any other way. The color had changed as well. It was no longer pinkish-red. The fire had become a furious white and yellow, and the sky was just one massive mountain of cloud. The blaze roared, with intermittent blasts of either delayed-action bombs or unexploded bombs which were engulfed by the flames.

In the morning [Wednesday, February 14] I turned on my radio and listened to the BBC. On the seven o'clock news, the BBC reported: "Last night, Dresden, one of the few German cities thus far to be spared, was attacked by RAF bombers with great success."



Destruction of Dresden, 1945: The file for this photo gives a date of January 1, 1946, but this cannot be confirmed. The location given is Johannstrasse. Dresden citizens in the Soviet sector of Germany attempt to get on trams amidst the ruins and chaos remaining since the city was reduced to ruins by Allied bombers. (Photo by Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis via Getty Images.)

Later, people arrived from the inner city asking if we still had water. We said yes and opened the hydrants. Several of them settled into our house, but many others told us, "Out, out, get out of the city. Get away from here," and went on. Some were speechless with horror. They only said, "My home and everything in it are gone."

Since the factory supplied its own power and water, it could be kept running. My father, who was the manager, had to decide whether work should continue. We produced yeast for baked goods. My father

said that food was important, so we'd have to keep operating. And the workers showed up too. I don't know if anyone can work like the Germans. It was amazing. Some even came on their bicycles between the two night raids. I still remember one of them pedaling up and my father asking him, "What are you doing here?" And he replied, "I just had to see if the shop's still in one piece."

The city was absolutely quiet. The sound of the fires had died out. The rising smoke created a dirty, gray pall which hung over the entire city. The wind had calmed, but a slight breeze was blowing westward, away from us. That's how, standing in the courtyard, I suddenly thought I could hear sirens again. And sure enough, there they were. I shouted, and by then we could already hear the distant whine of engines. We rushed down into the cellar. The roar of the engines grew louder and louder, and the daylight attack began. This was the American 8th Air Force, and their attack came right down on our heads. [This daylight attack came at noon on February 14.]

Normally, there were only 20 to 25 of us down in the cellar. But now, with many people off the street, including those who'd stopped over at our house, there were about 100 of us. Nevertheless, no one panicked—we were too numb and demoralized from the night before. We just sat there. The attack rolled closer, and then a bomb hit. It was like a bowling ball that bounced, or jumped perhaps, and at that moment the lights went out. The whole basement filled with dust. When the bomb carpet reached us, I crouched in a squatting position, my head between my legs. The air pressure was immense, but only for a moment. The rubber seals on the windows and the steel doors probably helped to absorb some of the impact. Someone screamed, and then it was quiet. Then a voice shouted, "It's all right, nothing's happened." It was the shelter warden.

Someone turned on a flashlight. We could see again, and that meant a lot. If it had remained dark, I don't know if the people wouldn't have jumped up and screamed to get out. However, after this flashlight went on everyone relaxed, and in spite of the loud crash that made me think the whole house was caving in on top of us, a loud voice shouted, "Calm down, calm down, nothing's happened." Although the drone of the bombers faded away, we heard another load of bombs explode in the distance. The entire episode lasted about 15 minutes.

We listened for it to become quiet again. The deathly silence that ensued was a stark contrast to the previous minutes. Our house was still standing, a true miracle. There were no more windows and the entire roof had been torn off and strewn about the street. In front of the house there was such an enormous crater that I thought, my God, it's not even 20 yards away, how did this house ever make it through as well as it did?

After a while, we began to clear the rubble out of our apartment. It was one big junk pile. We were so preoccupied with ourselves and the thought that we might be the next to go up in flames, it never occurred to us to go immediately into the city to help dig people out. Compared to those people still trapped in their cellars twelve hours after the night raids, waiting for someone to get them out, our problems were laughable.

---

Sönke Neitzel, writing in *Firestorm*, addressed both the damage and the loss of life caused by the firebombing:

The damage had been immense. In the centre of the city an area of thirteen square miles had been more or less completely destroyed. This included the destruction of no fewer than 75,000 apartments: about one-third of the city's stock. Only one in five apartments remained undamaged. Of the thirty most important cultural buildings in the city, eleven had been destroyed, such as the

Frauenkirche and the Semperoper [see map and text, pages 2-3], nine had suffered very heavy damage, such as the Zwinger and the Hofkirche, and ten had suffered heavy damage. Many hospitals and schools had been destroyed, the water system had broken down and the public transport system was paralyzed. The main military target, the marshalling yards at Friedrichstadt, was badly damaged by the American attack but after a few days some trains were running again in the city.

The official records of the municipal cemetery office reveal that 21,271 victims of the raids were buried by the local authorities in city cemeteries, 17,295 of whom were laid to rest in the Heidefriedhof (including the ashes of those [6,865 corpses] cremated on the Altmarkt) [see map, page 2]. A number of additional bodies were no doubt laid to rest in private burials. A further 1,858 bodies were found during the rebuilding of Dresden after the war. Although, on the basis of his observations at the time, Bergander [see pages 9-14] suggests that these figures underestimate the losses and that about 35,000 were likely to have perished, the best official estimate we currently have is that about 25,000 people died in Dresden on 13-14 February 1945.

\* \* \*

Forty-five years passed, and over July 28-30, 1990 Terry and I were in Dresden, East Germany (see pages 1-3). We had not done much planning, but fortunately we saved the photos we took there and identified several of them with notes on the backs. More recently, some structures were identified with Google Images. The first photo (below) is of the Zwinger (see map, page 2). Volumes have been written (e.g.,

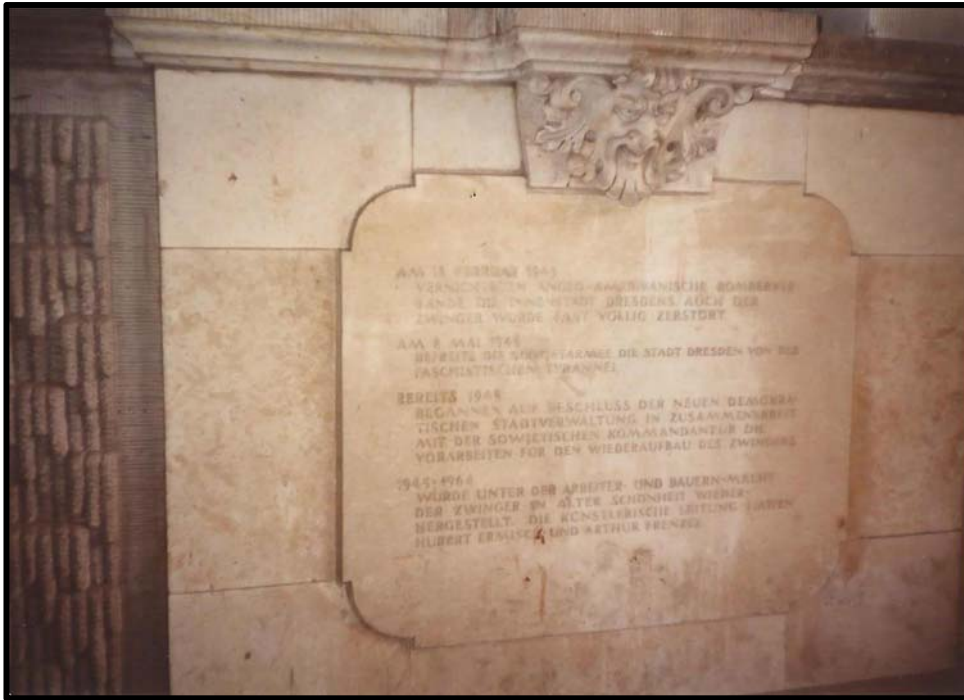


The Zwinger, Dresden, East Germany. Photo taken by Terry Claiborne over July 28-30, 1990.

Zwinger reopened in 1956, and the reconstruction project was completed in 1964. Judging from the scaffolding apparent in the photo, some renovation or other work was in progress more than 25 years later (1990).

The second photo (page 16, top) was also taken at the Zwinger that day. An authentic translation of the German text engraved on the plaque was provided by Professor Tina Boyer, Wake Forest University:

Nicola Lambourne, in *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden 1945*) on the postwar reconstruction of Dresden's historic monuments, particularly during the era of the GDR and the two Germanys. The bombing of Dresden left the 18th-century baroque complex with only its outer walls still standing. But the Zwinger was the first of the city's historic monuments to be reconstructed. Work began in October 1945, and a temporary roof was constructed. With the attention and support of successive local and national (GDR) administrations, parts of the



ON FEBRUARY 13TH  
1945

BRITISH AND  
AMERICAN AIR  
BRIGADES BOMBED  
DRESDEN'S INNER  
CITY. THE  
ZWINGER WAS  
ALSO ALMOST  
COMPLETELY  
DESTROYED.

ON MAY 8TH 1945  
THE SOVIET ARMY  
FREED THE CITY OF  
DRESDEN FROM  
FASCISTIC  
TYRANNY.

AS EARLY AS 1945

THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ZWINGER WAS  
STARTED BY THE ORDER OF THE DEMOCRATIC CITY GOVERNMENT IN  
COLLABORATION WITH THE SOVIET COMMANDER'S OFFICE.

1945-1964

THE ZWINGER WAS RECONSTRUCTED IN ITS FORMER SPLENDOR BY THE  
WORKERS' AND FARMERS' POWER [GDR]. ARTISTIC DIRECTION WAS LED  
BY HUBERT ERMISCH AND ARTHUR FRENZEL.

It seems likely that the plaque was installed with the completion of the Zwinger reconstruction project in 1964. The text gives a clear indication of how the reconstruction of Dresden's historic monuments was exploited for the purposes of anti-Western propaganda.

The ruins of the domed 18th-century Frauenkirche in Dresden (see photos, pages 8-9) followed a very different path during the postwar era, especially as compared to the reconstruction of the Zwinger. The current Frauenkirche Dresden website (<https://www.frauenkirche-dresden.de/home>) indicates that in 1966, after 20 years of relative inactivity, the city council of Dresden (still very much in the GDR era) formally declared the ruins as a "memorial for the victims of the bombing war." When we visited Dresden in the summer of 1990, the Frauenkirche ruins were still being used in this way, as the two pictures (page 17, upper) indicate. Two years after our visit, reunification and other changes led to initiation of the reconstruction project. Over 1993 and early 1994, the rubble was cleared, and the first stone was placed on May 27, 1994. The reconstructed Frauenkirche was consecrated on October 30, 2005.

As with the last two photographs (page 17, lower [see map and text, pages 2-3]) taken during our time in Dresden in July 1990, they give a historic view to the past. Today the Residenzschloss, or Royal Palace, is home to several museums of the Dresden State Art Collections. The Taschenbergpalais site is now the location of the Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski Dresden, a five-star luxury hotel.





Ghosts of February 13-15, 1945: Dresden, East Germany, July 28-30, 1990. *Top* (both panels), ruins of the Frauenkirche. *Bottom*, ruins of the Residenzschloss, or Royal Palace (left) and the Taschenbergpalais (right).

\* \* \*

But our visit to Dresden's past did not end there. It was August 1991, and Terry and I were visiting my parents in Brownsville, Tennessee, where Ned and Eleanor Rooks were two of their great longtime friends. The Rookses invited us for dinner one night. Eleanor in particular was always interested in travel, and I began to say something about our trip to Germany the year before. I happened to mention "Dresden" . . .

Sixty-seven-year-old Ned Rooks spoke up. "I was in Dresden," he said. Ned Rooks served as a sergeant gunner with a B-17 crew that flew 33 combat missions (all but two over Germany) with the 527th Bomb Squadron, 379th Bomb Group, over January 23-April 25, 1945, essentially the last three full months of the war in Europe. His fifth mission, on February 15, was over Dresden, on the third day of the three-day blitz by RAF and 8th Air Force heavy bombers. Staff Sgt. Ned Rooks' crew, which was led by pilot Walter Schultz, and their primary aircraft, *Connie*, are shown in the photo at the top of page 18.



Their nine-man crew included waist gunner Rooks (kneeling, second from left), who flew some missions as a nose gunner, pilot Walter Schultz (standing, second from left), copilot James Watters, navigator Neal Graham, bombardier



James Slattery, tail gunner Wayne Cross, engineer-top turret gunner Duane Johnson (kneeling, third from left), ball turret gunner Vito Scriptunas, and radio operator Jerome Geers, who died in an aircraft accident shortly after the war ended. Willard Rooks Helander recently recalled that her father had many good reunions with former members of his crew, beginning in 1978. The Schultz and Cross families visited the Rookses in Brownsville as early as the 1950s, and an article in the Brownsville newspaper reported on a September 1984 get-together that was hosted by Willard's parents. Wayne Cross, Vito Scriptunas, and the widow of Duane Johnson attended.

The photo at the top of page 19 was taken from their B-17, during an April 10 mission over Oranienburg, Germany. The official notation at the bottom of the photo gives the number of the bomb group (379), the date (10-4-45, for April 10, 1945), the target (Oranienburg), the last three digits of *Connie's* serial number, from which the photo is being taken (425), and their altitude (23,500 feet). On this mission one B-17 in the 379th Bomb Group formation had to abort, and Walter Schultz moved *Connie* into that vacant slot. Another B-17 moved in to take *Connie's* previous position. That B-17 was shot down by a Luftwaffe Me262 jet fighter, probably by a rocket fired from one of the underwing racks.

Willard's brother Robert, also a longtime friend of mine, maintains a collection of memorabilia from his father's combat experience in the European Theater. Included are pieces of the plexiglass dome and fragments of the shrapnel that penetrated it, entering Staff Sgt. Rooks' nose gun position on a mission over Berlin. There is also a copy of the mission diary that was kept by Duane Johnson. As a complement to the historical and eyewitness accounts of the Dresden bombing given previously (see pages 5-15), Sgt. Johnson's entry for the Dresden mission of February 15, 1945, is transcribed below, beginning on page 19.



---

MISSION #5 - Feb.15th, 1945

DRESDEN GERMANY -

Did not write up this raid but it was a rather famous one at that. We were loaded with 20-250# bombs - It was a terribly foggy overcast morning and as we pulled up to the runway it was only possible to see one runway marker ahead about (50 ft) fifty feet. We hoped & prayed they'd scrub the mission but no soap at least not until we had taken off. It was a treacherous takeoff completely blind in a bad crosswind. When we got to 50 mph the runway was invisible and at 90 mph we ran off of it and did the rest of our takeoff across the open fields at an angle to the runway. We took off at about 105 M.P.H. much too slow - only because there was nothing else to do. We sure sweated out hitting the buildings & hi tension wires before we gained a little altitude - We were all darn scared. After getting up a couple hundred ft it wasn't so bad tho & we all rather calmed down. - We climbed thru about 2000 ft of overcast before breaking out.

Saw considerable flak on the mission — matter of fact it seemed to come from every farm yard. Had a moderate amount of flak at the target but not too accurate. The town below was almost literally wiped out - with 30- to 50,000 casualties (dead) mostly refugees - In simple terms each man on each plane was

Town below was almost literally  
wiped out - with 30- to 50,000 casualties  
(dead) mostly refugees - In simple terms  
each man on each plane was  
responsible for the death of about  
10 people in that one raid. Frankly  
that bothers me some. I am thankful

"[The] town below was almost literally wiped out - with 30- to 50,000 casualties (dead) mostly refugees - . . . Frankly that bothers me some." Duane Johnson, on the bombing of Dresden, February 13-15, 1945.

responsible for the death of about 10 people in that one raid. Frankly that bothers me some. I am thankful tho that this dirty work is done in such a remote way that one does not realize the terrible loss of life incurred. We rec'd no flak damage & returned home safely.

The other crew in our barracks - Cebuhar's crew was shot down yesterday [February 14] in the mission to Dresden then - their plane was hit while crossing the enemy line. Some men bailed out but all are missing up until Feb 22nd - they're still missing - All of their clothes have been taken away & families notified - Tough luck & tough on our morale in the barracks but so it goes . . . maybe it could be worse.

---

Aside from the technical account of a challenging takeoff that day, Sgt. Johnson's diary entry for the mission describes enemy anti-aircraft defenses:

Saw considerable flak on the mission — matter of fact it seemed to come from every farm yard.  
Had a moderate amount of flak at the target but not too accurate.

Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) 12338 summarizes information on the status of 2nd Lt. Stanley Cebuhar's crew (see Johnson diary entry, pages 19-20, and below). On February 14, "Flak was described by returning crews as meager and very accurate." Lt. Cebuhar's B-17 was "struck by flak over the Moselle River behind the German lines." As to flak at the target, Götz Bergander (see page 10) stated that "Dresden was completely unprotected. The flak had been withdrawn during the winter. Half the guns were sent to the Ruhr to strengthen the air defense there." Bergander's recollection is supported by the fact that Lt. Cebuhar's bomber was the only one lost to enemy action from a force of 316 aircraft.

Sgt. Johnson's diary entry for the February 15 Dresden mission also reveals some feelings of remorse, or guilt, over the large numbers of mostly civilian deaths being caused on the ground during the blitz of the city. The "Final Night Extra" edition of the *London Evening Standard* for February 14 was already reporting on the first three waves of the Dresden blitz, with the banner headline (see image, page 21, top)

#### THE BLASTING OF DRESDEN



Tami Davis Biddle, in her chapter in *Firestorm* titled “Wartime Reactions,” cites a story that appeared in the February 16 issue of the *New York Times*. Correspondent Gladwin Hill quoted Swedish sources in estimating that 20-35,000 people had died, with some 200,000 having fled “in panic.” Given this context, it is not surprising that Duane Johnson was already aware of the casualty figures being estimated for the February 13 and 14 attacks on Dresden. His response was,

Frankly that bothers me some.

However, his diary entry seems to attribute all of the casualties to the February 15 mission. In fact, more than 1,100 RAF Lancaster and 8th Air Force B-17 heavy bombers, being flown by approximately 8,500 British and American airmen, carried out the first three waves of the blitz over February 13 and 14, before Sgt. Johnson’s mission. As to any feelings of guilt that Sgt. Johnson expressed, Kurt Vonnegut wrote, in his preface to the 25th anniversary edition of *Slaughterhouse-Five*:

The drama at Auschwitz was about man’s inhumanity to man. The drama of any air raid on a civilian population, . . . is about the inhumanity of many of man’s inventions to man.

Then, Sgt. Johnson turned to the losses in his own barracks just one day before. There were enlisted barracks, and there were officers’ barracks. The enlisted barracks housed men from two crews. The five enlisted men from Walter Schultz’s crew, who flew *Connie* into battle on the 15th, had shared living quarters at Kimbolton with the five enlisted men from Stanley Cebuhar’s crew. As summarized in MACR 12338 (see page 20), Lt. Cebuhar’s crew had dropped their bomb load over Dresden on Wednesday, the 14th, and were returning from the mission. At about 2:50 that afternoon, as they flew over the Moselle River in Germany, their Fortress was hit by flak. The right wing was on fire, the rudder was out of commission, and Lt. Cebuhar gave the order for the nine-man crew to bail out. Six were able to bail out successfully, but three enlisted airmen, Sgt. George Byers, Staff Sgt. Waldon Hardy, and Sgt. Francis Beam, though not injured, were trapped by centrifugal forces as the doomed aircraft went into a spin. The plane exploded, throwing Sgt. Beam free, and he was able to deploy his chute. George Byers and Waldon Hardy were not so fortunate, and they perished in the explosion. Of the five enlisted men who shared the barracks with Duane Johnson, Ned Rooks, and the other men from the Schulz crew on the night of February 13, two would be killed in action the next day, while the other three would become POWs. As Duane Johnson wrote his diary entry following the February 15th mission, these men were only known to him as missing in action; as he wrote in the diary, “their clothes have been taken away.”

\* \* \*

The next day was Friday, February 16, 1945. For the first time in four days, no bombs fell on Dresden. In a 2005 interview for the *Guardian*, 78-year-old Götz Bergander recalled walking toward the remnants of the main railway station:

It was a dead city. Everything had burned out. An extraordinary silence hung over everything. There was no traffic noise, no trams, nothing.

On that Friday, Götz and his brother Klaus walked across the entire city. At their old school, they found a boy sitting on the steps. He appeared to be asleep.

In fact, he was dead. After three days, rescuers had arrived at the school and opened up the cellar. Inside they found two or three dead children.

On that Friday, Ned Rooks and the Schultz crew flew another combat mission to Langensdreer, Germany, in the Ruhr area.

\* \* \*

Five months later, at 5:30 a.m. on Monday, July 16, the United States detonated the world's first atomic bomb in a nuclear explosion test on the Alamogordo Bombing Range, 210 miles south of Los Alamos, New Mexico (see top photo, page 23). The code name for the test was "Trinity," and the event is vividly represented in the 2023 film *Oppenheimer*.

The inhumanity of one of man's new inventions to man, to paraphrase Kurt Vonnegut, was soon to be demonstrated (see bottom photo, page 23).

\* \* \*

In his joint press conference in Tel Aviv four-and-a-half months ago, on October 13, 2023, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin made the following statement:

The president [President Biden] also underscored that democracies like ours are stronger and more secure when we uphold the laws of war. Terrorists like Hamas deliberately target civilians, but democracies don't.

In Act V, Scene V, the title character of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* has just learned of the death of the queen. Soon, a messenger will report to the king that

I look'd toward Birnham, and anon, methought,  
The wood began to move.

In his lament, Macbeth speaks:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.



*Above:* On July 16, 1945, the world's first atomic bomb was detonated approximately 60 miles north of White Sands National Monument. (White Sands Missile Range Photo, National Park Service.)

*Below:* Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku [Atomic bomb] Dome). During the war, this was the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotional Hall, which stood 160 meters from ground zero at 8:15 a.m. on Monday, August 6, 1945. (Photo taken by Al Claiborne in April 1999.)

