



Was Churchill responsible?

In 1992 the Queen Mother unveiled a bronze statue of Arthur Harris, the head of Bomber Command during World War 2. The event caused international criticism and people attacked the statue. They were protesting against the deaths and destruction caused by the bombing of Dresden.

As head of Bomber Command, Harris was responsible for bombing operations. However, he and his colleagues questioned and double-checked the decision to attack Dresden. Harris wrote in his autobiography: 'I know that the destruction of so large and splendid a city at this late stage of the war was considered unnecessary even by a good many people who admit that our earlier attacks were as fully justified as any other operation of war. Here I will only say that the attack on Dresden was at the time considered a military necessity by much more important people than myself, ...'. (Bomber Offensive, 1947, p. 242)

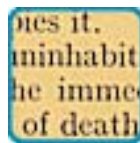
Some very senior commanders believed that area bombing was an effective way to disrupt cities, damage infrastructure and so end the war. Bombing of German cities (such as Berlin) had been going on since 1940 when Charles Portal was head of Bomber Command (and Harris's boss).

Winston Churchill was the Prime Minister and also the Minister for Defence when the policy of area bombing took place. He had a major input into military strategy. Historians debate whether he was directly involved in the decision to bomb Dresden. He wasn't consulted about every bombing raid, but there is some suggestion he supported the decision to attack Dresden, perhaps as a result of a request from Britain's allies, the Russians.

Examine these sources to find out more:



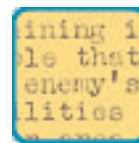
View of Arthur Harris on Dresden, 1945



Extract from Harris on Bomber Command, 1945



Letter from Churchill on area bombing, 1945



Response to Churchill's letter, April 1945



Air Ministry comments on the views of Harris