



## Source 4

**Extracts from the response of Chief of Air Staff Charles Portal to Churchill's letter on area bombing, 5 April 1945**

(Catalogue ref: CAB 120/303)

### Questions

1. Look at the directives (orders) given to Bomber Command in January 1943 and in September 1944. In what ways did the orders change?
2. Given the new directive of September 1944, should the Dresden raid have taken place? Give reasons to support your answer.
3. What reasons does the Chief of Air Staff give for continuing area bombing?
4. What will and will not be main targets for the bombing from now on? Why?



# HEROES & VILLAINS

Churchill & Dresden > Was Churchill responsible?

## Source 4

TOP SECRET

AREA BOMBING

Note by Chief of the Air Staff

The primary object of the Combined Bomber Offensive laid down in the Casablanca directive of the 21st January, 1943, was

"the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic systems and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened."

The current Combined Chiefs of Staff directive OCTAGON 29 dated 16th September, 1944, states the primary object to be

"the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic systems and the direct support of land and naval forces."

4. In spite of recent advances in our ability to make precise attacks at night, the operational considerations which have in the past necessitated area attacks still exist. Nevertheless, it is recognised that at this advanced stage of the war no great or immediate additional advantage can be expected from the attack of the remaining industrial centres of Germany, because it is improbable that the full effects of further area attacks upon the enemy's war industries will have time to mature before hostilities cease. Moreover, the number of targets suitable for area bombing is now much reduced as a result of our past attacks and of the rapid advance of the Allied armies. For these reasons, and since allied superiority in military resources is already overwhelming, the effort of the Strategical air forces is being directed primarily to secure the most immediate effect upon the enemy's ability to resist the Allies' advance into Germany. This is being achieved by draining the enemy's oil resources to the lowest possible level, by disrupting communications vital to the enemy's resistance and by affording direct support to the armies as necessary.

5. There may still be occasions, however, when the disintegration of enemy resistance can best be brought about through the medium of area bombing.



# HEROES & VILLAINS

Churchill & Dresden > Was Churchill responsible?

6. We appreciate the importance of refraining from the unnecessary destruction of towns and facilities which will be needed by our own troops or for Allied reconstruction purposes. If, however, we were to restrict our bomber forces to visual precision attack we should certainly reduce the contribution which they can make towards hastening the collapse of the enemy. It is considered that area attacks are still justified strategically, insofar as they are calculated to assist in the advance of the Allied armies into Germany or in shortening the period of the war. Any incidental further destruction of German cities which is likely to be involved in the time remaining will certainly be small in comparison with that already accomplished.