



Source 5

Comments in 1948 from the Air Ministry about the account of Bomber Command written by Harris

(Catalogue ref: AIR 14/1252)



5a



5b

Questions

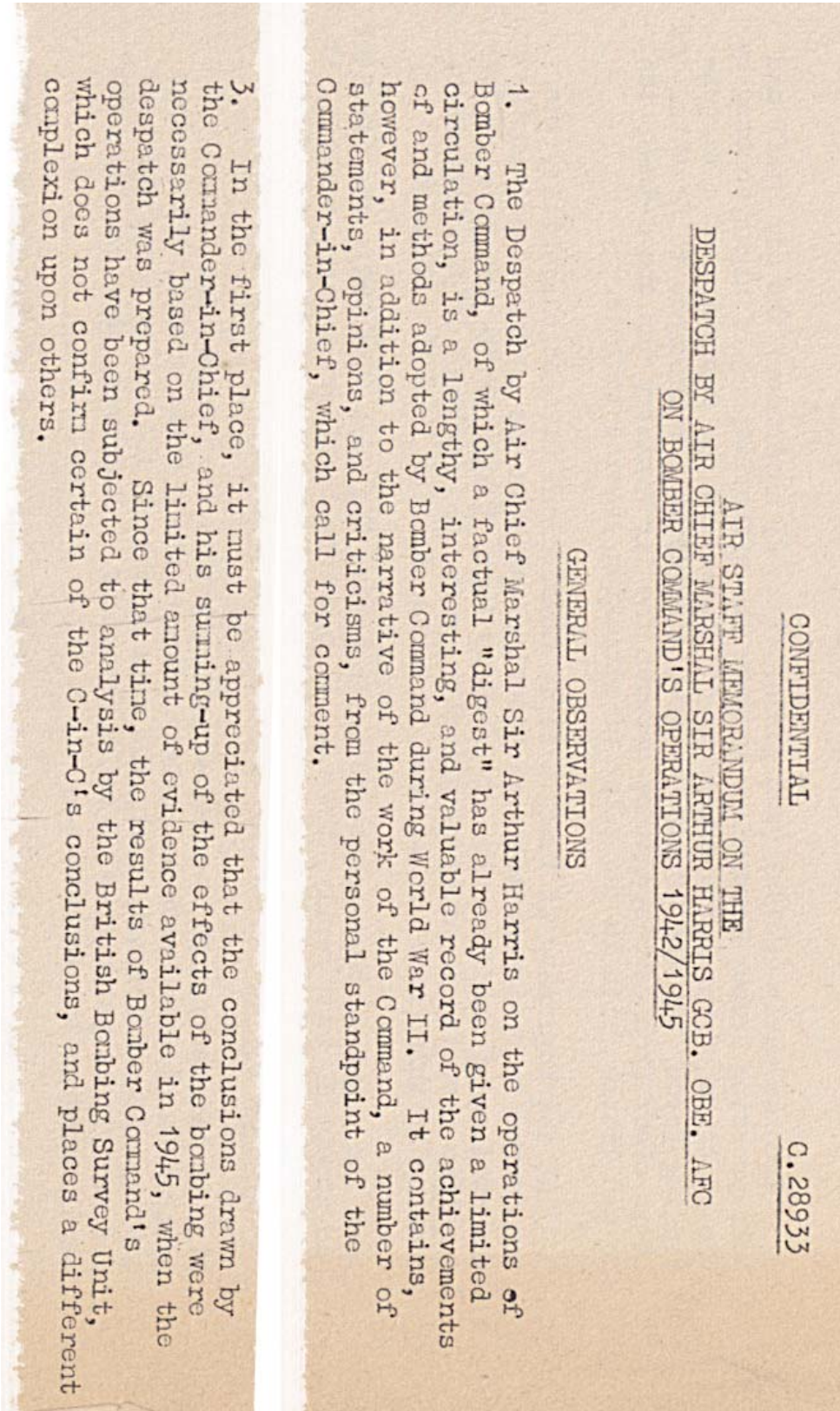
1. What criticisms does the Air Ministry make about the account of Harris?
2. Harris claimed that the main purpose of Bomber Command was area bombing. Does the Air Ministry agree?
3. How does the Air Ministry explain why area bombing was carried out?



HEROES & VILLAINS

Churchill & Dresden > Was Churchill responsible?

Source 5a





HEROES & VILLAINS

Churchill & Dresden > Was Churchill responsible?

Source 5b

6. The C-in-C, states, in paragraph 3, that his main task was "to focus attacks on the morale of the enemy civil population, and, in particular, of the industrial workers" through the attack of "certain major industrial centres.

7. It will be observed that similar emphasis on the attack of industrial centres is conspicuous throughout the despatch, and it is considered that the C-in-C's brief summary of the Air Ministry directive of February 1942 tends to obscure the fact that the Air Staff intention was always to return to the bombing of precise targets as quickly as the tactical capabilities of the bomber force, and the improvement of night bombing technique, would permit. The earlier directives to Bomber Command were, in fact, based on the attack of precise targets, but precise bombing in 1940 and 1941, owing to the development of enemy defences, became increasingly ineffective.

8. From as early as 1941 (see paras. 17 to 23 hereunder) the Air Staff had been pressing Bomber Command to improve the effectiveness of night bombing by the adoption of the large scale use of flares and the formation of a target-finding force, but the Command evinced considerable reluctance to do this, and it is clear from correspondence between the Air Ministry and the C-in-C. that he had little faith in the value of attacking precise targets.

9. At the beginning of 1942, a rapid development of tactical ability was considered to be immediately practicable, and this was envisaged and implied in the wording of the directive of February 14th, 1942. With this in mind, various specific targets, in order of priority, were also included in the Directive. No mention of this, however, is made in paras. 3, 4 or 5 of the despatch.

10. The point of these comments is to stress the fact that while the Air Staff had accepted, temporarily, the need to concentrate effort on area targets, it hoped later, when the bomber force had become large enough to achieve the requisite degree of concentration, and when night bombing technique had been sufficiently improved, to be able to revert to the attack of precise targets.