

Allied reconnaissance photograph of Hamburg, 1945

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Submarine pens showing five of the many submarines which were in the final stages of assembly in the Hamburg dock area. Most of the submarines had been damaged by British bombs at some time during their construction but they had been repaired.



What is this source?

This is an intelligence photograph showing U boat construction in Hamburg.

The RAF would have had many photographs of Hamburg. Most would have been taken from the air.

WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: HAMBURG**What's the background to this source?**

The war began in 1939 and went well for Germany at first. By 1940 Hitler controlled most of Western Europe, apart from Britain. He then attacked the USSR in the summer of 1941. This became the main campaign of the war. However, Britain was anxious to try and help her Soviet allies. Britain did not have the resources to attack Germany on the ground but they did have a fleet of heavy bombers that could attack Germany by air.

When the USA joined the war in December 1941 they also had heavy bombers. From 1942 until the end of the war they pounded German targets. The bombing continued even after the D-Day landings in June 1944.

It's worth knowing that...

Hamburg was an important target for many reasons. Within these submarine pens U boats were built and repaired. They were a huge threat to Allied shipping. Another factor was that Hamburg was comparatively near to Britain and was thus a slightly less difficult target.

Possibly the main reason to use area bombing against Hamburg was that precision bombing was so inaccurate. A report in 1941 showed that most bombs did not fall within five miles of their target. Also, daylight raids on well defended targets led to huge losses of aircraft and aircrew. As a result, the RAF Bomber Command chief Sir Arthur Harris decided to use area bombing. Basically, this meant destroying the whole city so that the industrial targets would be destroyed and so would civilian housing.

How does this source help us to understand why the RAF bombed German cities?

1. Why was Hamburg chosen as a bombing target?
2. Why was the decision made to use area bombing against Hamburg? (See notes.)
3. What are the problems with this approach?
4. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A-D for your debate?