

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: HAMBURG

Extract from a report by the Turkish ambassador on the effects of raids on Hamburg

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MOST SECRET.

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TURKISH AMBASSADOR, BERLIN, REPORTS ON BOMBING OF
HAMBURG.

No: 129303

Date: 4th August, 1943.

From: Turkish Ambassador, BERLIN.

To: Foreign Ministry, ANGORA.

Date: 2nd August, 1943.

Further to telegram No.176 [not received].

Reports on the bombing of HAMBURG by RIFAT AKDENIZ and BELBEZ, who have been sent to the city and returned to BERLIN the same day, will be transmitted to you by courier of 6th August. It has been learnt both from Germans and from travellers that HAMBURG has been reduced to [? ruins]; all industrial installations there, including the dockyards, have been completely destroyed, 200,000 persons have been killed within a week, life in the city is entirely [? disrupted] and administration has passed into the hands of the army. Although [? everything in the neighbourhood] of our [? Consulate] was burning, it was saved from the conflagration through the intervention and assistance of German soldiers, and only the windows and doors were [? destroyed]. The torrents of water, gas and — have made it uninhabitable. The Consul's wife and two children were living in an apartment 25 kilometres out of the city and so escaped this — and —.

WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: HAMBURG**What is this source?**

This is a telegram written by the Turkish ambassador in Berlin back to his government in Angora, Turkey.

British agents intercepted this telegram. This is why some parts of it are missing or have question marks in brackets.

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. For a while the main attack on Britain was by air. He tried to destroy the Royal Air Force. When this failed he switched to bombing British cities. From then until 1944 the only way to attack Germany was by air. The RAF and USA air forces did this relentlessly.

One of the first targets for a really major raid was Hamburg, because of its ports and industries. RAF bombers attacked the city for almost a week in July–August 1943. As a result the city was flattened and it was still in ruins at the end of the war in 1945.

It's worth knowing that...

The heavy losses in Hamburg were the result of a firestorm. This is when the fires caused by bombing become so hot they burn everything and also use up all the available oxygen. Thousands of Germans died in cellars from suffocation as the fires took up all the oxygen. This also happened at Dresden in a raid there in 1945 when 40 000 were killed.

There is still intense debate about the bombing today. Critics argue it had limited effects on the German war machine and did not weaken German morale. On the other hand German production did not rise and resources had to go into anti aircraft defences. Also, after the war 91% of Germans said the worst aspect of the war was the bombing.

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

1. What happened to the Turkish consulate?
2. Were they hit harder than the rest of the city?
3. What information can we gain from this source about the bombing?
4. Do you regard this as a reliable source?
5. Can this source be used to support any of the viewpoints A–D for your debate?