

Remembering Dresden: 70 Years After the Firebombing

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In the last months of World War II, Allied bombers from the British Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force conducted several major bombing raids on the eastern German city of Dresden. Beginning on the night of February 13, 1945, more than 1,200 heavy bombers dropped nearly 4,000 tons of high-explosive and incendiary bombs on the city in four successive raids. An estimated 25,000 people were killed in the bombings and the firestorm that raged afterward. More than 75,000 dwellings were destroyed, along with unique monuments of Baroque architecture in the historic city center. The scale of the death and destruction, coming so late in the war, along with significant questions about the legitimacy of the targets destroyed have led to years of debate about whether the attack was justified, or whether it should be labeled a war crime. The city of Dresden will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the firebombing beginning Friday night. **Warning: Several of these photographs are graphic in nature.**

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- This digital composite image shows a statue on the tower of City Hall looking down at the ruins of the city center wrought by the Allied firebombing of February 13, 1945 as well as the same scene on February 12, 2015. The area, as well as the vast majority of the city, was devastated by the Allied firebombing of February 13-14, 1945. The city of Dresden will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the attacks on February 13. #

Sean Gallup, Richard Peter, Sr./Getty Images

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- In this British Official Photo, on the night of February 13 and the morning of February 14, 1945, Lancasters of R.A.F. Bomber Command made two very heavy attacks on Dresden, Germany. Heavy bombers of the U.S. 8th Air Force attacked this target the following day. The smoke from fires still burning drifted across Dresden on February 14, 1945. The fires involved an engine roundhouse, the central goods depot and any wagons in the heavily loaded yard. #

British Official Photo/AP

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People collect the dead bodies of the victims in the rubble of the Altmarkt in Dresden, Germany, after the 1945 fire bombing. #

Walter Hahn/Library of Congress

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The demolished city of Dresden, after the allied forces air raids on February 13 and 14, 1945. #

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On the left, two men with a tipcart on top of rubble in Dresden, Germany, after the fire bombing. Pictured at right: one of the many victims. #

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After the firebombing, tens of thousands of dead were piled in the streets of Dresden in high stacks, in some cases without identification, their bodies burned. #

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View taken in January 1952 from Dresden's Muenzgasse street showing people working on the removal of debris in front of the ruins of the Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady). The church was reduced to rubble during World War II allied bombings. #

AFP/Getty Images

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A digital composite shows women in 1946 carrying bricks outside the Martin Luther church in a neighborhood still wrecked from the February 13, 1945 Allied firebombing, as well as the same area today on February 12, 2015. #

Fred Ramage, Keystone, Sean Gallup/Getty Images

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This digital composite shows the ruins of the city center, including Prager Strasse, following the Allied firebombing in 1945, as well as the same view on February 7, 2015. #

Evening Standard/Getty Images, Sean Gallup/Getty Images

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A digital composite shows a portion of the Zwinger art museum in 1946 still in ruins from the Allied firebombing of February 13, 1945, and on February 12, 2015, in Dresden, Germany. #

William Vandevent, The LIFE Picture Collection, Sean Gallup/Getty Images

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A digital composite image shows the ruins at Theaterplatz square in 1946 still wrecked from the Allied firebombing of February 13, 1945, as well as the square today, including the Catholic Hofkirche church (center) and Residenzschloss Dresden palace (right), on February 7, 2015. #

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This digital composite of Dresden shows Moritzstrasse and the Juedenhof palace in 1946 still wrecked from the Allied firebombing of February 13, 1945, as well as the same area today on February 7, 2015. #

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A digital composite shows the ruins of the Frauenkirche church and the empty pedestal for a statue of Martin

Luther in 1946, as well as the reconstructed church and statue on January 22, 2015. #

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Visitors stand on the viewing platform of the new 360-degree panorama 'Dresden 1945—Tragedy and Hope of a European City' by Berlin-based artist Yadegar Asisi in the Asisi Panometer in Dresden, Germany, on January 28, 2015. The panorama, which is over 30m-high and has a 100m circumference, shows the city of Dresden after the bombings in February 1945. #

Robert Michael/AFP/Getty Images

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A visitor looks at the new 360-degree panorama 'Dresden 1945—Tragedy and Hope of a European City' by Berlin-based artist Yadegar Asisi in the Asisi Panometer in Dresden, Germany, on January 28, 2015. #

Robert Michael/AFP/Getty Images

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A general view of the 360 degree panorama display depicting the city of Dresden in the aftermath of the 1945 Allied firebombing, pictured on January 23, 2015 in Dresden, Germany. #

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Visitors watch the 'Dresden 1945' 360 degrees panorama from a platform on January 26, 2015. The panorama shows the destroyed city of Dresden, Germany, after the bombing raids during World War II in February 1945, created by artist Yadegar Asisi at the Panometer in Dresden. #

Fabrizio Bensch/Reuters

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Landmarks in Dresden's historic city center, including Residenzschloss Dresden palace (left), the Catholic Hofkirche church (center-right) and Semperoper opera house (right, behind) are seen from the air on February 11, 2015 in Dresden, Germany. This photo was taken from a multirotor drone and with all necessary state, city and flight safety authority permissions. #

Sean Gallup/Getty Images

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Nora Lang, 83, who survived the February 13, 1945 firebombing by Allied planes of the city of Dresden, holds a plate on which one of the painted roses turned black from the heat of the fire in a photo taken on February 10, 2015 in Dresden, Germany. Nora's father rushed items from their apartment to the cellar in between successive raids and the plate is one of the few items that survived. "Behind us everything was burning, in front of us everything was burning." ("Hinter uns brannte alles, vor uns brannte alles.") she says of what she saw in her neighborhood after she emerged from a bomb shelter following the raids. #

Sean Gallup/Getty Images

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Anita John, 82, who survived the February 13, 1945 firebombing by Allied planes of the city of Dresden, points to where she lived in a photograph showing her street before the raids in a photo taken on February 10, 2015 in Dresden, Germany. She says that when she and her parents went to the cellar to take shelter during the raids her mother lay over her to protect her, and that only she survived. All 13 others, including her parents, suffocated. Anita says that when she emerged she did not know what had happened, and only realized her parents were dead when she found their bodies among so many others the next day, laid out in the street before the rubble of her former home. #

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Aini Teufel, 81, who survived the February 13, 1945 firebombing by Allied planes of the city of Dresden, poses holding a molten remain of her elementary school and the original identification tag she had to wear at school in case she might die in an air-raid in a photograph taken February 10, 2015 in Dresden, Germany. "The clouds saved my life" ("Die Wolken haben mein Leben gerettet"), she says of clouds that forced Allied bombers to delay their attack on the city of Dresden from daytime into the night of February 13, 1945. Aini's school was obliterated in the raid and she is certain she would be dead if the planes had attacked during the day when she was at school. #

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Karl-Heinrich Fiebiger, 83, who survived the February 13, 1945 firebombing of Dresden, poses for a photo on February 10, 2015 in Dresden, Germany. Fiebiger, then 13, was home alone when the attacks began and he fled across the burning city, and he remembers a sticky substance released by the bombs raining down and getting in his hair. He says the apartment building where he lived with his family was obliterated, that his older sister and her two small children died in the attacks and that he was not reunited with his mother until three weeks later. #

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