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# Primary and Secondary Sources Activity

##  World War II and the Holocaust

###  The Dresden Bombing

#### Background

In World War II, destroying enemy industrial and military fortifications was not the only objective. Cities and civilians were also targets. Bombers, fighter-bombers, and powerful new weapons brought destruction to residential areas at an intensity not seen in previous wars. One example of devastation wreaked on civilians is the Dresden bombing. From February 13 to 15, 1945, Allied bombers dropped more than 7,000 tons of bombs on the German city. The bombing created an enormous firestorm, which resulted in the deaths of 25,000 and the reduction of 13 square miles of city to smoldering ashes.

Allied military forces had identified the city as a communications and transportation center and thus as a military target. However, there was outrage in the both the military and public sectors. Dresden, often called the “Florence on the Elbe,” was a major cultural center and included many artifacts, documents, and architectural wonders. Some thought the obliteration of the historic city was morally wrong. The controversy continues to this day.

**Directions:** The following selections are eyewitness accounts of the Dresden bombing. Read the selections. Then, using information from the excerpts, answer the questions.

I saw only burning houses and screaming people . . . all I could hear was the roaring of the flames. I could hardly see, due to the flying sparks, the flames and the smoke. . . . What I saw is so horrific that I shall hardly be able to describe it. Dead, dead, dead everywhere. Some completely black like charcoal. Others completely untouched, lying as if they were asleep. Women in aprons, women with children sitting in prams [strollers] as if they had nodded off. Many women, many young girls, many small children, soldiers who were identifiable as such only by the metal buckles on their belts, almost all of them naked. Some clinging to each other in groups as if they were clawing at each other.

— Margaret Freyer, 24-year-old nurse, 1945, as quoted

*in Battlefields in the Air*

The streets of the city were a fantastic latticework of fire. It was as though one was looking down at the fiery outlines of a crossword puzzle; blazing streets etched from east to west, from north to south, in a gigantic saturation of flame. . . .

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I told Dig to turn starboard, to the south of the city. He swung the aircraft away from the heart of the inferno and when we were beyond the fringe of the fires I pressed the bomb release. I hoped the load would fall in open country; I couldn’t forget what we had been told at briefing, or the old newsreels of German dive-bombing atrocities.

— Miles Tripp, bomber-aimer, RAF Bomber Command, 1945,

as quoted in *The Eighth Passenger*

1. **Analyzing Primary Sources** Identify and record phrases that suggest that a firestorm was the result of the bombing.
2. **Comparing and Contrasting** Compare the Dresden bombing on-the-ground account with the account from the aircraft.
3. **Drawing Conclusions** Do you think that the bomber-aimer found this bombing run to be difficult? Support your answer.
4. **Create an Argument** Create an argument either for or against the bombing of cities and civilians as a war strategy. Use the primary sources and your own opinions. Be sure to support your points.