

"WHEN THE GREAT PLANES CAME AND MADE ASHES OF OUR CITY . . .": TOWARDS AN ORAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE DISASTERS OF WAR.

Kenneth Hewitt[†]

Introduction: The Recovery of Extreme Experience

Several questions in the geography of armed violence are addressed here: the impact of acts of war upon civilian populations, the extreme experience of "ordinary" citizens in their home places, and a human ecology of disaster that emerges when its victims speak for themselves. We will explore these issues mainly through the personal testimony of survivors of violent events, especially women, in industrial cities during the Second World War. The bombed civilians of that war virtually alone provide sufficient sources. However, the bombing of occupied settlements continues to represent a widespread predicament.

Though confined to this century's wars, aircraft, airships and guided missiles have bombed populous cities in more than a hundred international conflicts. They have caused death and destruction for civilians when attacking other targets in cities, through innumerable raids by colonial or state air forces within their own territories, and in undeclared wars (Divine, 1966; Higham, 1972; Small and Singer, 1982; Nietschmann, 1987; Hewitt, 1992). Most towns of the Old World have undergone some bombing. The main built-up areas in hundreds of large cities have suffered extensive or complete devastation, especially their congested residential districts and old historic cores (Hewitt, 1983; Hohn, 1991). Countless small settlements have suffered similar destruction, including much of Latin America and the Pacific Islands. In the process, air war has played a major role in the increasing and often greater proportions of civilian war casualties (Sivard, 1991). Globally, aggregate raid deaths and injuries number in the millions, the bombed-out in tens

[†] Geography Department, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

of millions (Uranlis, 1971; Elliot, 1972). It is a civil predicament with implications reaching well beyond air war concerns and military geography, and involving the more usual interests of settlement geography (Wisner, 1986). However, to recognize that and to examine bombing as civilian experience is to consider persons generally ignored in air war studies, and issues usually redescribed from state/military and war fighting perspectives.

Air War: The View from Below

A vast literature is devoted to air war, but deals largely with warfare, air forces, weapons and raid stories, or how leadership, science and other conditions of war relate to them. It represents the world as seen from the war rooms of government, the Operations Room and cockpit. Air power is preoccupied with the large, geostrategic space of economic warfare and modern strategy, as the arenas where it is uniquely significant. Air operations depend upon high and often secret technologies of violence, upon aerial surveillance techniques and electronic communications. Air force descriptions define a target geography of factories, airfields and other "vital" points. They zone cities for built-upness, inflammability and population density.² The air photo, what it shows and cannot show, is a characteristic data source. In such masterful visions of the earth's surface, the domestic and communal conditions with which most civilians remain concerned disappear or seem trivial.

By contrast, a civilian view is mainly one from under the bombs with actions mostly confined within the small compass of a home area. In wartime, civilians must make do with reduced equipment, a greater burden of manual work in the domestic and civic tasks left to them, and getting about on foot or bicycle. For them, there is no equivalent to the revolutions in air weapons and war technology. Civilians know and respond to air raids mainly through evidence of their own senses and local services. This is apparent throughout the home front literature (Marwick, 1965; Calder, 1969; Havens, 1978).

Air war studies have been almost wholly the province of men writing about men in uniform, and decisions or actions seen from their viewpoint. Civil and urban concerns relate mainly to persons not in uniform, at least half of whom are women. Politically and legally, air attack is assumed to be about "the fight." Civilians are, by definition, non-combatants. Home front propaganda may turn this around, talking of people's war and even suggesting the "little people" somehow lead the struggle from their kitchens and school rooms (Calder, 1969). In any concrete sense, they are uniquely unable to fight back against aircraft and missiles. Given the totalitarian methods of government adopted by all states in wartime, even civilians in war work have little or no say in

the conduct of war, least of all its remote technical realm of air power. Meanwhile, if civilian slaughter and terror are acknowledged, they are carefully placed in the no-man's-land of indiscriminate or collateral damage, the "unfortunate" side-effects and sacrifices of war. The people at risk, their knowledge and actions, land uses and social geography, political and cultural conditions, if not ignored altogether, are commonly treated as incidental or accidental factors. In this literature we encounter an assumed air weapon or fighting war determinism of what happens or what is significant in cities under fire (Quester, 1966; Bond, 1984; MacIsaac, 1986).

The concerns of air war are surely important, perhaps the decisive questions, but they present a partial and misleading picture of the majority of those whose bodies, families, homes, and neighborhoods have been destroyed in urban raiding. Moreover, long before its threat of nuclear winter, strategic air war was a field whose leaders and professionals, ". . . determined in fundamental ways who can speak and who cannot; who can be an expert and who cannot . . ." (Curry, 1986:260). The radical dilemma is to recognize and escape such dominating paradigms.

Missing Persons

Unquestionably, in Britain, Germany, Italy, China and Japan during the Second World War, civilians were the main direct victims of strategic urban bombing (Iklé, 1976; Bidinian, 1976; Hewitt, 1983). Home front literatures have focused more upon the evacuations, which appear large in total numbers. Yet they only involved a small fraction of the urban populations at risk. In most cities, more than 80 percent of their prewar residents were present during the worst of the bombings. As a result, in the hardest hit places and most devastating raids, more women were killed than men and, usually, disproportionate numbers of children and the elderly. The scale of resident civilian deaths, their distribution by age and gender – where available – and numbers of persons bombed out of their homes provide an initial indication of who was most at risk (Table 1). Meanwhile, if war studies have stressed so-called essential workers, far more non-essential personnel were present and harmed. Rarely were more than a third of the bombed in full-time employment. Of these, most were not engaged in war work but in domestic life and serving the civil community. "Housewife" was the single largest category of raid casualty reported from Coventry and Belfast, to Torino, Hamburg and Hiroshima (Hewitt, 1987; 1990). In all cases, the inner, older districts, especially working class and slum neighborhoods suffered the most (Hewitt, 1993).

These social and demographic aspects define the distribution of those

Table 1 Civilian death tolls, bombed out and urban area razed for selected cities in Britain, Germany and Japan.¹

| Place | Total | Civilians Killed | | Bombed Out | Urban Areas Destroyed | |
|-----------------------|------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| | | Female (%) | Children (%) | | Total (km ²) | (Percent) |
| <i>United Kingdom</i> | 60,595 | 49 | 5.6 | 750,000 | c.17 | — |
| London (Metro) | 28,935 | — | — | — | 5 | — |
| London (County of) | 17,811 | 51.0 | 10.0 | — | 4 | — |
| Liverpool | 2,568 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Birmingham | 2,150 | 48.5 | 9.5 | 50,000 | — | — |
| Glasgow-Clydeside | 1,828 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Clydebank | 448 | 51.0 | 35.0 | 20,000 | — | — |
| Bristol | 1,238 | — | — | 30,000 | — | — |
| Plymouth | 1,172 | — | — | 15,000 | — | — |
| Kingston-u-Hull | 1,156 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Coventry | 1,061 | 43 | 17.5 | 20,000 | — | — |
| Belfast | 863 | 50.8 | 26.1 | — | — | — |
| <i>Germany</i> | 550,000 | — | — | 7,500,000 | 333 | 39 |
| Berlin | 35,000 | — | — | 1,688,000 | 26 | 33 |
| Hamburg | 55,000 | 54.0 | 10.0 | 325,000 | 25.1 | 75 |
| Dresden | 50,000 (?) | — | — | — | 6.8 | 59 |
| Köln | 20,000 | — | — | — | 8.0 | 61 |
| Pforzheim | 17,600 | — | — | — | 2.2 | 83 |
| Magdeburg | 16,000 | — | — | 244,500 | 3.1 | 44 |
| Kassel | 13,000 | — | — | 100,000 | 5.5 | 69 |
| Darmstadt | 12,300 | 60.0 | 31.0 | 76,000 | 2.0 | 69 |
| Nordhausen | 9,000 | — | — | 20,000 | — | 74 |
| Wuppertal | 7,150 | — | — | 245,000 | 7.8 | 75 |
| Stuttgart | 6,782 | 60.0 | 9.0 | 237,970 | 4.6 | 46 |
| Hannover | 6,782 | — | — | 325,000 | 6.1 | 60 |
| München | 6,750 | 54.5 | 10.0 | (506,920) ³ | 6.2 | 42 |
| Essen | 6,627 | — | — | — | 5.3 | 50 |
| Heilbronn | 6,530 | — | — | — | 1.4 | 82 |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|------|------|-----------|------|---------|
| Dortmund | 6,341 | — | — | — | 3.7 | 54 |
| Nürnberg | 6,191 | 59.0 | 8.8 | — | 4.6 | 51 |
| Düsseldorf | 5,863 | — | — | — | 8.1 | 64 |
| Frankfurt-a-M | 5,559 | 54.0 | 10.0 | 325,000 | 4.6 | 52 |
| Würzburg | 4,200 | — | — | 56,000 | 1.8 | 89 |
| Leipzig | 3,200 | 55.0 | 12.0 | 51,000 | 2.5 | 20 |
| Freiburg-i-B | 2,783 | 60.0 | 13.6 | 50,000 | 1.0 | 37 |
| Kiel | 2,515 | 49.0 | 14.8 | 167,000 | 2.9 | 50 |
| Ulm | 1,665 | 63.0 | 20.0 | — | — | — |
| Münster | 1,595 | 54.3 | 3.4 | — | 2.6 | 65 |
| Bonn | 1,569 | — | — | — | 1.0 | 34 |
| Augsburg | 1,504 | 50.0 | 12.0 | — | 1.8 | 29 |
| Karlsruhe | 1,412 | 49.0 | 14.4 | — | 1.6 | 32 |
| <i>Japan</i> | c. 500,000 | — | — | 8,300,000 | 425 | (c. 50) |
| Tokyo | 100,000+ | — | — | 2,861,900 | 155 | 40 |
| Hiroshima | c. 125,000 ² | 48.1 | 21.6 | 200,000 | 25.0 | — |
| Nagasaki | c. 65,000 ² | — | — | 128,000 | 5.0 | — |
| Osaka | 13,973 | — | — | — | 43.0 | 37 |
| Nagoya | 8,240 | — | — | — | 34.6 | 32 |
| Kobe | 7,051 | — | — | — | 22.6 | 56 |
| Fukuoka | 4,625 | — | — | 180,000 | 3.5 | 21.5 |
| Yokohama | 4,616 | — | — | — | 22.8 | 44 |
| Hamamatsu | 3,239 | — | — | 120,000 | 6.3 | 70 |
| Kagoshima | 2,417 | — | — | 100,000 | 5.5 | 44 |
| Toyama | 2,149 | — | — | 110,000 | 4.8 | 90 |
| Kure | 1,967 | — | — | — | 3.3 | 40 |
| Wakayama | 1,932 | — | — | 100,000 | 3.4 | 53 |
| Shizuoka | 1,764 | — | — | 125,000 | 5.8 | 66 |
| Okayama | 1,745 | — | — | 102,000 | 5.5 | 63 |
| Fukui | 1,584 | — | — | 70,000 | 4.1 | 85 |
| Akashi | 1,529 | — | — | 55,000 | 2.0 | 57 |

NOTE:

1. The data are based largely on documents in the major archival sources quoted in the text, updated for German and British cities from city archives. See also Hewitt, 1982, 1983, 1990; USSBS 1945a etc.
2. These are estimated "bomb time" deaths, and exclude the more than 100,000 attributed to the bombing but occurring months and years later.
3. Figure includes temporary bombed out immediately following raids.

who actually felt “. . . the noise, the earth shaking . . . huddled in the cellars . . .” [housewife, Hamburg].³ But many were persons who do not write things down; most would never be published or get a hearing in the corridors of power. In such contexts, personal, especially oral testimony, is of singular value. Elsewhere, it has opened the academic ear to the voices of women, children, the elderly, more particularly from disadvantaged groups, minorities and other cultures. Specially relevant for the civilian experience of air raids is how oral testimony enables us to “. . . give voice to the voiceless, to value the lives that contemporary ideology renders deficient, trivial or invisible . . .” (di Leonardo, 1981). Nor is this simply to broaden the data base, or a moral question of giving them equal time. These lives are often closest to and most severely affected by the phenomena of interest. Thus, it has been concluded that, “. . . personal involvement is . . . the most sensitive measure of the severity of raids for the individual . . .” (USSBS, 1947a).

Moreover, to redeploy the classic defense of oral history, one turns to personal testimony for the purpose of “broadening the basis” of geography by the “recovery of subjective experience” and an effort to present “. . . issues as they appear to the actors” in their habitat or settlements (Samuel, 1981). It is to personalize the, so often, impersonal discussions of resources and population, social geography and, in the present case, disaster and survival. It is to accept that these are fully meaningful only in terms of persons whose worlds they involve, who *enliven* them or witness their destruction. Concerning air power, it is to challenge elite, professional knowledge, with the voices of those who have felt the consequences of its actual deployment.

To listen to civilian victims presupposes a concern with who they are and where their experiences take place. To focus on their words implies that, without the recovery of experience in other places and times, social geography and history are hardly possible. To pay close attention to what they say, their stories and concerns, gives them direct entry into our discussions, rather than as mere sources of data. The evidence is already verbalized, composed and communicative, with all that implies. It cannot be merely subjective, though its intersubjective nuances require careful attention.

A small number of geographers have pioneered the use of personal testimony and struggled with our failure to develop it to the extent of historians (Rowles, 1978; Brownhill, 1984; Porteous, 1989; Rose, 1990). In *Antipode*, especially, some have developed the epistemological and ethical groundwork for the sort of people’s geography implied, a geography that could actually be peopled by the persons of interest – not merely their “figures” whether in the landscapes of the humanist, or census data and scores of positivist discourse. Rarely, however, has it involved listening to and giving their words space in our literature.

Orwellian Projects: Morale Bombing and the Morale Division

Ordinary civilians may be the missing persons and hidden lives of air war accounts but they were not ignored in air raid planning, nor unheard by home governments. The strategic bombing campaigns against cities were designed as, or became primarily assaults upon civilian morale (Bond, 1946; USSBS 1947a, 1947b).⁴ A widely quoted book on air power had predicted that under heavy bombing “. . . the people themselves, driven by the instinct of self-preservation, would rise up and demand an end to war. . . .” In particular, it suggested this form of warfare would be most effective “. . . against a highly civilised people living in large centres of population” (Douhet, 1942:58; 259). Leading airmen among the Allies followed Lord Trenchard, Marshall of the Royal Air Force, who regarded cities as “. . . the points at which the enemy is weakest . . . [whose] personnel [*sic!*] are not armed and cannot shoot back. They are not disciplined . . .” (Webster and Frankland, 1961, v. 1:73). The “masses,” specifically working class people, were viewed as especially unstable and likely to rebel (Snow, 1961; Smith, 1984; Sherry, 1987). This reasoning turned lethal for civilians as the bombers proved unable, much of the time, to hit essential war-making elements, or not without unacceptable losses. The US Air Force faced similar problems, and their fire bombing and A-bomb attacks on Japanese cities are rooted in the same logic.⁵

Meanwhile, governments developed elaborate systems for surveillance, analysis and reporting of morale among their own people (McLaine, 1979). At the war's end came some massive studies of bombing effectiveness. I draw especially on the United States Strategic Bombing Survey's Morale Division (USSBS, 1947a; MacIsaac, 1976; Daniels, 1981). Their archive contains extended interviews with civilians from German and Japanese cities.⁶ Neglected and until recently secret, the original transcripts contain first-hand testimony from thousands of civilians. The interviews combined open and general questions – intended to put the respondents at ease and deceive them as to the real purpose! – with questions on specific aspects of bombing experience (see Appendix).

The network of correspondents for Mass Observation left comparable, more widely known records for British cities. Tom Harrisson's (1976) *Living Through the Blitz*, based on them, is a pioneering work in this style of enquiry. These sources can now be supplemented by letters, diaries, local histories, memoirs and recent oral history projects for most European and Japanese cities. Since most of these are available from libraries, only a few cases are cited to indicate how they reinforce material in the USSBS archive. However, a comparative approach is appropriate, not only looking at testimonies from different cities, but

from different sides in the war. Ordinary civilians and their homes were targeted by both sides. From a civilian perspective this was a general urban predicament. Although the scale and intensity of harm varied enormously between countries, cities and urban districts, large numbers of people in most British, German and Japanese cities suffered extreme experience and personal harm (Hewitt, 1986; 1990; 1993).

Voices from Under the Bombs

A woman of Hamburg recalls the experience of being bombed in the 1943 "Battle of Hamburg" raids:

. . . The July 25th attack came so suddenly that I could not get to the bunker. I remained in the entrance of the house. The windows and doors flew around my ears: everything was burning: the children were screeching. And when the pause finally came we attempted to extinguish the fires, and there was no water. So we carried water . . . all night . . . and the next day the airplanes came again before the fires were extinguished; and we had to run for the bunkers. Our house was completely destroyed . . .⁷

Known in that city as "The Catastrophe," the episode went down in air war history as the first massively "successful" raid against a great city, not least because it deceived the defenses and overwhelmed fire-fighting and rescue services. Mass fires burnt out some 25 square kilometers of Hamburg's inner districts, especially the firestorm, which swept working class residential areas (Brunswick, 1987). Some 40,000 civilians were killed, including about 25,000 women and 7,000 children. Of those bombed out, temporarily and permanently, about half a million were women (Hewitt, 1993). The experience quoted is unique in its life-threatening particulars for this woman, and in the authority it gives to her words. Yet, her testimony also speaks to the individual predicaments of tens of thousands of similarly placed women here, and in a host of other cities. A woman, 40, of Kobe in Japan:

. . . We were all in bed when we heard the air raid siren . . . We stayed inside until we saw some bombs fall in our neighborhood. I got my [baby] on my back and evacuated . . . with my sons . . . My husband sent the four of us to the open lot on the mountain . . . part of a temple. The temple was bombed too. When I saw the incendiary bombs fall in front of my eyes, I knelt down and couldn't move . . . I don't

know how I was able to evacuate to another place. When the bombing stopped I found myself in the park with my children. My husband stayed behind with the other men to fight the fire but it was useless . . .⁸

In this attack 7.5 km² of Kobe was burned, 242,500 persons bombed out and 2,700 civilians killed, the larger fraction women and children (Hewitt, 1987:460).

Given the lethal and massive destruction, it may seem surprising to find families together in the worst raids. However, governments would not risk making evacuation compulsory. It was even quietly discouraged in some of the worst-affected places. Most families, especially among the working class, found staying put the lesser evil. Hence, women, the principal carers, and their dependents, children, the elderly and disabled, were exposed to bombing in great numbers.:

. . . Having many children I was worried about them in air raids . . . [housewife in Ishaya, near Nagasaki]⁹

. . . I had to take my mother-in-law, who is 95 and can't walk since she fell, and carry her up and down [to the cellar] when the alarms came . . . [housewife (64), Pfungstadt]¹⁰

Many of the otherwise typical evacuees, young mothers and small children, stayed put. From Duisburg, a 25 year old woman recalls a night raid when:

. . . My sister and I put our babies into their carriages and ran for the bunker. Many phosphorous bombs were dropped and everywhere houses were in flames . . .¹¹

Some have blamed exceptional casualties in Germany and Japan on their failure to provide for adequate evacuation, but Britain's civil defense measures hardly did more to reduce the exposure of civilians in heavily raided cities, least of all in working class districts (Titmuss, 1950; Hewitt, 1990). At Birmingham, England, a woman of 25 with three children under 5 years, told Mass Observation in January 1941:

. . . I've been bombed – first my bedrooms, – and we lived downstairs, – next the house altogether . . . I went to my mother-in-law's, – the walls of one side were blown in by another raid. So I went to the Park shelter. That was nearly hit and we were thrown down on the floor in confusion and darkness . . . I don't think I could stand another. The children

. . . don't seem to feel it as much as I do. My husband's in the army . . .¹²

So many women and children have died or suffered great privation in raiding from the First World War to the Middle East in 1993, it appears as an inevitable consequence of urban raiding. The severe constraints upon the evacuation of civilians in urban-industrial nations over a long war, became clear in World War Two. Moreover, in the course of this research I have spoken to many women in Britain and Germany who could have been evacuated but refused to go. Others recall the trials of living as evacuees, especially separated from family and friends, as the worst of wartime memories. And several gave that as the reason why, like some hundreds of thousands of others, they preferred to return to their city and face the bombs.

“ . . . those who did not survive . . . ”

The definitive “missing persons” are, of course, civilians killed. So often absent except for the casualty statistics, they are a constant presence as persons in the testimony of those who do survive. They are often referred to as *the* authority in survivors' minds; in deciding whether to speak at all, and, if so, what “truth” is to be conveyed (cf. Lifton, 1957; Miller and Touryan, 1982; Bravo et al., 1990). The number of folk whose bereavement overshadows all else may exceed the dead:

. . . As I lost my daughter in an air attack I no longer cared for anything . . . [housewife on farm (62), Pfungstadt near Köln]¹³

. . . my husband . . . was buried in the rubble. It was two days before I found his body. I also lost my father-in-law and sister-in-law in the same raid. I was indifferent and didn't care whether a bomb hit me or not . . . [housewife (47), Wuppertal-Barmen]¹⁴

The greatest burdens of survival fell on those with dependents they could not neglect, however grief-stricken themselves:

. . . My husband is dead [killed in] an air raid . . . I have five kids . . . under fifteen . . . and will have to work [*sic*] . . . My house is destroyed . . . everything is ruined . . .¹⁵

Multiple deaths in single families – which involved the greatest number of losses in the worst-hit areas from Belfast and Clydeside to Tokyo

– seem especially tragic (Hewitt, in review). Yet, a common sentiment was expressed by a housewife, 49, near Nagasaki:

. . . I was glad when evening came because my husband and daughter came home to be with me and my mother . . . Many casualties [of the atomic bomb] were brought here. I didn't want to die like [them] . . . but together as one family . . .¹⁶

A lonely meaningless death is, perhaps, even more terrible to contemplate than an untimely one.

"Poor possessions": The Civilian Face of 'Economic Warfare'

The survival of self and of those without whom one could not bear to survive, came first. But the loss of home and possessions was a grave concern, and critical for those who had to look after others. In their first raid, and even throughout, people struggled to protect or rescue their possessions at risk to life and limb:

. . . [We] tried to fight the fire. But we had no water and it always burned further down until the whole house collapsed . . . We saved about three pieces of furniture . . . [but] One is so distraught ("aufgeregt") he left things which ordinarily he would have taken out . . . [housewife (52), Ulm]¹⁷

Personal property was not just valued for its usefulness or the effort that had gone into acquiring it, but also as a psychological comfort and symbol of family survival. The loss of a home summarized the calamity for most folk:

. . . I was more or less used to the raids. But after [my] house was bombed I became more and more afraid . . . [woman (28) with three children, Kobe]¹⁸

. . . The apartment house . . . was destroyed . . . and I lost my nice home. I am so depressed about it that I continuously cry . . . [housewife (55) with two older children, Frankfurt]¹⁹

This reminds us that raid-related problems did not begin nor end with actual attacks. Over the wartime, the cities from which these testimonies come had between 800 and 2,000 air raid alerts. Rarely did more than one alert in ten presage a raid; most cities saw only one or two catastrophic attacks affecting large numbers. But civilians never

knew in advance which it would be. Although she lost no property nor family members a Darmstadt housewife, 36, with two small children says:

. . . The continuous anxiety, loss of sleep, worry about my children, I felt like taking the[ir] life . . . and my own, to put an end to it all . . .²⁰

The other side of the civilian experience is one of long continued threat, frequently repeated disruptions, and sudden fear (Hewitt, 1993). However, in the scale and share of total harm, and as the focus of wartime recollections, the most devastating raids had a significance out of all proportion to their incidence and duration. At a personal level, this is summed up in the remark of a woman from Darmstadt:

. . . in ten minutes during the terror raid I had nothing but rubble . . .²¹

That city had 1,567 air raid alerts. Bombs fell there on 36 separate occasions. But the firestorm, set by an RAF area raid on the night of 11/12 September, 1944, caused over 80 percent of the death and destruction listed in Table 1 (Schmidt 1964). In most other cities the greatest numbers of casualties and greater part of the destruction occurred in just one, or a small number of calamitous attacks (Hewitt, 1993).

Signposts: The Concerns of Civilians

What the testimonies mainly suggest is that, when life across a city was unhinged by bombing, the severest consequences devolved upon the household. They fell most heavily upon the principal able-bodied adult in the home, usually a woman. That not only reflects the absence of men at the fighting fronts or in war work. The demands of everyday life, notably care of children and other dependents, do not stop because of war. They are hardly less urgent when a raid is over or fails to materialize:

. . . This everlasting running to the cellar; pulling the child out of bed – a child doesn't like to have his sleep disturbed, and it isn't good for him. This poor child has known nothing else but war . . . Many times my child would say "Mama, I would like to sleep SO much." [Hamburg housewife (47)]²²

Women, especially in the most severely affected districts and classes of these cities, had become more or less fully bound to domestic duties and neighborhood existence in peacetime (Kirkpatrick, 1937; Oakley,

1974; Pahl, 1984; Mies, 1986). And while "Rosie the Riveter" and her sisters in weapons factories are important to war and women's history (Braybon and Summerfield, 1987; Gluck, 1987) they formed a tiny fraction of women subjected to bombing, and of raid victims. Most women were tied to the duties or banalities of everyday survival. That identifies the real ground zero of the urban raids as the domestic scene and so-called women's work.

Two common, seemingly contradictory themes emerge: a sense of horrendous and unprecedented experience, but focused upon quite ordinary personal, domestic or local matters, – albeit, made extraordinary by what is happening to them.²³ Understandably, the language and concerns are not those in dominant visions of the purposes of air war, and only rarely parallel the "literary" style of remembrance that Paul Fussell finds in male writers recalling a soldier's life under fire (1975). Moreover, this is another example of how ". . . When women speak for themselves, they reveal hidden realities . . . new perspectives emerge that challenge the 'truths' of official accounts and . . . existing theories . . ." (Anderson et al. 1987:104).

Furthermore, they reveal a union or sisterhood in courage and misery, that overrides experience in different cities, countries and sides in the conflict. Even the morale professionals acknowledged that, ". . . The impression one gets is that the German civilian reacts just as any other civilian would under similar circumstances . . ." ²⁴

Thus, from the extreme consequence of nationalism and enmity between nation states, comes support for Kropotkin's critique of nationalistic geography: specifically, his point that it encourages us to ". . . overlook the immense likeness which exists among the labouring classes of all nationalities" (quoted in MacLaughlin, 1986:32).

"Unreal City"²⁵: The Civil Ecology of Violence

The local compass and domestic focus of civilian raid experience, suggest human ecology rather than the geostrategic space of air war. And if ecology emphasizes living space or the sustaining of life, so do the voices from these killing grounds. They speak mainly of survival, of keeping going, in spite of fire and wreckage. Nonetheless, it is an unfamiliar sort of ecology.

Troglodyte Worlds

An underworld existence pervades memories from the worst periods or bombed areas; a world of cellars, bunkers, "the bowels of the earth". From London in the Blitz:

. . . we lived in the shelter best part of the time . . .²⁵

. . . we spent most of our time in the shelters . . . We didn't only sleep in shelter bunks, we read, sewed and knitted, played Lexicon and sang . . .²⁷

From Germany, later in the war:

. . . the cellar became our house . . . [housewife, 34, Darmstadt]

. . . Half the time I spent in the cellar or bunker . . . [mother, 25, Duisburg]

. . . The raid forced us . . . in[to] the caves and we live there most of the time [housewife, Darmstadt].²⁸

The Morale Division referred to “. . . civilian fox-hole existence . . .” imposed by raiding “. . . for periods varying from hours to months. . . .”²⁹ It recalls Siegfried Sasoon's (1972:444) remark: “. . . when all is said and done, the War was mainly a matter of holes and ditches.” A “troglydote existence” which does recall trench warfare in the First World War, came to haunt the lives of civilians in bombed cities (Fussell, 1975).³⁰ The practices of survival were those of underground, hiding and basement living, of diving for cover:

. . . Towards the end my [little] daughter wouldn't even leave the bunker to eat – I had to take her food . . .

. . . The milk soured in the bunker and my child was often sick . . .

. . . The household suffered terribly for my wife had to spend much time in the cellar.³¹

Congestion and discomfort below ground were perennial themes:

. . . There were nine of us in the . . . Anderson shelter . . . dad and mum and my brother aged 6 and my 5 sisters and me . . . aged 8 . . . it was cold and damp and lit with just candles and torches . . . the corrugated iron used to be dripping . . .” (Quoted in Shaw, 1990:136).

Shelter deaths were second only to those in people's homes. With more women, children and the elderly in shelters, more of them died there.³² In Germany and Japan mass death resulted from asphyxiating

smoke and carbon monoxide seeping into shelters from great fires (USSBS, 1947b and c; SIPRI, 1975). A mother recalls:

. . . There was only a little coughing as people gasped for air. Then I heard no more. I was sitting or lying, – today I can't say which, – among dead people, with my dead children beside me, and I knew nothing about it . . . I was taken from the cellar, alive but with heavy smoke poisoning . . .³³

The horrors of the much-publicized Amiriya Shelter incident in Baghdad have recurred in hundreds of the worst disaster incidents in raids from the First World War onwards. They emerge as an inevitable consequence for some civilians, rather than a chance aberration, when cities are attacked with weapons of mass destruction.

Night and Weariness

Air forces carried out urban campaigns under cover of night, mainly to reduce their own losses. However, nighttime raids imposed distinct and severe problems upon civilians. Darkness, the imposed blackout, and the disruption of the normal rhythms of home and work, especially sleep, added enormously to the strain and risks of accident among civilians. Domestic life was turned on its head, again recalling the stalemated battlefield world of the trenches in World War One (Fussell, 1975:51ff). A majority of all those interviewed by the Morale Division described night raids as the worst,³⁴ with such comments as:

. . . It was dark in the streets . . . Often I fell with my child as I ran to the bunker . . . injured my knee . . . lost clothes on the way . . . [woman, domestic (36), Hamburg]³⁵

. . . night was worse . . . because it was hard to take my old mother into the shelter . . . [woman, nurse (26), Ishaya, Nagasaki]³⁶

Night bombing was much worse. One cannot see where to go. Can't get help so easily. There were more dead. [woman (46), Darmstadt]³⁷

The strain of night attacks was magnified by lost sleep. The commonest answers to the USSBS question: "In what way was your normal life most upset by the raids?" concerned "Rest in the night."³⁸ Likewise in Britain:

. . . It's not the bombs I'm scared of any more, its the weariness . . .³⁹

Harrison (1976:100) called loss of sleep "the key" to survivors' state of mind during the Blitz

With this weary, nightmarish condition, went dramatic changes at the level of the senses. Hearing assumed special importance. In darkness and blackout, sound told of the coming raiders, the nearness of bombs, the plight of loved ones. A boy recalls life in Hannover in 1943, just before his home was burnt down:

. . . I lie in bed. I am afraid. I strain my ears to hear something, but still all is quiet. I hardly dare breathe, as if something horrible is knocking at the door, at the windows. Is it the beating of my heart? . . . Suddenly there seems relief, the sirens howl into the night . . . (Heimatbund Niedersachsen, 1953:185)

Smell and touch assumed special significance. Unpleasant odors filled many ill-lit, crowded and dirty spaces underground. Damp or dust from the rubble spread everywhere. Raids brought smoke in the nose and eyes.

Darkness and weariness, sudden death and ruined neighborhoods, created a pervasive sense of unreality, a nightmare ecology:

. . . At night it is always more uncanny ("unheimlicher") than by day . . . [housewife (45), Wuppertal-Barmen]⁴⁰

People adapted, but few got used to it. As Elizabeth Bowen (1949:3) expressed it, recalling London in 1942, "War had made them idolise day and summer; night and autumn were enemies." The fading importance of vision is uniquely significant. It defines the sensory ecology of this violent experience, as the cityscape itself was destroyed and people fled underground in fear of the open sky. It is the reality behind underground imagery of future calamity, environmental or thermonuclear, in the late twentieth century.

Worlds Turned Upside Down

The raids and upheavals in everyday life brought a widespread sense of disorientation, a feeling of "going crazy:"

. . . When one sits in the cellar and it rocks and quakes, you can lose your senses . . . [woman (53), Ulm]⁴¹

And afterwards:

. . . Those who went through bombing like this had no more normal life. It was like a lunatic asylum here . . . [housewife (42), Darmstadt]⁴²

Caring for home and family became a struggle with chaos in everyday life:

. . . I was always accustomed to run my household by the clock. The attacks turned everything upside down. The meals were irregular. I didn't get around to the darning and mending, etc. The household ran to disorder . . . [woman (45), Wuppertal-Barmen]⁴³

Some, usually those in full-time employment, from the professions or better-off neighborhoods, reflected upon the loss of order in the public as well as domestic spheres. Dr. Jacob Schütz, chaplain of St. Ludwig's church in Darmstadt recalled how:

. . . life becomes so chaotic . . . all rules seem to be dissolved . . . you drive along one-way streets the wrong way, drive over the flower beds in the park . . . No doctors, no schools . . . No mail, no telephone . . . letters from neighbouring towns take several weeks to arrive . . . children and elderly people are searching for pieces of wooden window frames to start a cooking fire . . . (Schmidt 1964:25)

In the more usual language of geography this is the experience of spatial disorganization; realized in dismembered communities and a brutal ecology. It was not however indiscriminate in its severity for different parts of cities and urban society.

The Social Space of Harm

The urban attacks were often called "slum raids" and seen as directed at working class districts. That applied in Britain, from London's East End to Merseyside, Clydebank and Belfast (Hewitt, 1990). After the "1,000-raid" on Köln, which pioneered R.A.F. use of massive forces against a single city, a woman there observed:

. . . it was mostly directed towards the centre and the Altstadt
 . . . Unfortunately, the poorer class of people and children
 had to suffer most . . .⁴⁴

A Japanese journalist drew a similar picture in Tokyo:

. . . One night, one of the first raids, 100,000 people were
 killed when they hit a slum area . . . If the raid had come in
 a "better" section of town, the victims would have been able
 to spread more concern . . .⁴⁵

Like many others, he felt that to target such districts caused the greatest distress for people least able to influence the war or home governments. And as we have seen, not only by class but by age and gender, the majority of victims tended to be the least influential persons in the nation at war, as well as being largely preoccupied with family and domestic survival. Moreover, these recollections extend William Bunge's observation about a congested central core as "The City of Death" (1975). Wartime conditions also meant that relatively and sometimes numerically more of those commonly associated with social and economic disadvantages were in the more vulnerable districts (cf. Brown, 1983; Wekerle, 1985). The people interviewed by the USSBS reflect the great numbers of women alone, including *de facto* single parent and woman-headed households. There were relatively more elderly persons, children, disabled and others left in the care of these "non-essential" residents – if not abandoned under pressures of war (Titmuss, 1950). In the inner city were more with lower education, unskilled and without wage earnings; more scavenging, black-marketeering, prostitution, theft and drug abuse. There were reduced services and support for such persons, even without raid damages and where these had been grossly inadequate before the war.⁴⁶

In smaller cities and the worst raids, there could be a terrible leveling, socially as well as physically. A middle class woman after the Darmstadt firestorm:

. . . this night we have all become beggars and homeless . . .⁴⁷

Deprivation, as always, was relative. If they felt it or complained about it more, the better-off and better educated generally had more success in finding assistance. As the war continued or the raiding got worse, however, civilians of all classes suffered more but had less and less influence.

Place Annihilation

Sooner or later, in the worst-affected areas, the shelterers emerged to find home, neighborhood, perhaps their city gone:

. . . when I returned my house was burned down. I had the house key in my hand, but there was no door there . . . [housewife (30) with two children, Hamburg]⁴⁸

After the most severe raids they could not recognize the place:

. . . she could have cried when she saw all the shops down and everything. She didn't know where she was . . . (quoted in Harrison, 1976:175).

A woman of Darmstadt recalls:

. . . It was the saddest [telegram] I ever sent . . . Darmstadt is no more, in the fullest sense of the words 'no more' . . . everything destroyed, even in deep cellars . . .⁴⁹

A sense of calamitous loss could inspire what Wolfenstein (1957) called "End-of-the-world feelings":

. . . in this raid we lost everything we had saved in the previous raid . . . It seemed as if the whole world had come to an end [housewife (52), Hamburg].⁵⁰

In later recollections, a more dreamlike or nightmare feeling is conveyed, often using "literary" language in an effort to recapture that:

. . . Father and mother and all of us went searching until late at night in those dreadful streets. The fires were burning. There was a strange smell all over. Blue-green balls of fire were drifting around. I had a terrible lonely feeling that everybody else in the world was dead and only we were still alive. Ever since that time I haven't liked to go outside . . . (Osada, 1959:140)

Elsewhere, I suggest that the essential geographical consequence of the raids was place annihilation (Hewitt, 1983). But the testimonies show it is a mistake to see that as merely physical, or as applying to the city as a named, administrative or productive unit. Such aspects often survived or were soon restored to form the basis of an even larger

center today (Konvitz, 1990; Ashworth, 1991:144). Place annihilation emerges in the experience and remembrance of the personal or inter-personal city, usually for particular neighborhoods, classes or communities. Even so, most often the old residential areas and highly valued downtown sites were destroyed; their buildings, landmarks and places of congregation. Such are the lost or "dead" cities referred to; the once living worlds of old settlement and civility added to personal or local annihilation.

Even a professional like the architect Rudolf Hillebrecht, engaged in assessing reconstruction needs in dozens of bombed cities, recalled:

. . . When I passed through [Hannover] . . . in the early morning, the city was burning. I have seen many cities in a hail of bombs, but as I drove through my hometown, I lost my nerves and simply sobbed when I saw this . . . (Durth and Gutschow, 1988:717)

Another resident, returning after the great attacks said:

. . . I have the feeling that I am a stranger in my hometown . . .⁵¹

Here is loss of place in the most elementary sense: our internal map no longer fits the space to which it applies.

Concluding Remarks: People's War and Oral Geographies

The words quoted articulate the immediate experience and concerns of civilians under fire. They show lives shifted by bombing into a grey zone that was neither peace nor war: worlds of a desperate, burnt-out domesticity; a starved or broken-backed civility. One hopes that, to listen to their words will begin to restore something of the victims' humanity. Amid all that terror and banality, they felt and responded with a remarkable endurance and sense of purpose; were not merely passive and pathetic. But they were confronted by unprecedented violence, unarmed and unable to influence the war, if not innocent of its causes and conduct. The courage and often severe losses of the airmen sent against them are also not in doubt. But it goes against the dominant perspectives even more, to see them as victims of this development. However, the experiences on the ground, indeed, the carefully obfuscated purposes of morale bombing, are a far cry from battle as normally understood. The notion of military honor is soiled, the arguments about military necessity in states with civil government and civilized standards

of conduct are undermined. That may explain why few students of air power or war history have wanted to confront the civilian experience and urban consequences.

The attack on civilian morale was defended in terms of total war, but the words of its victims show they were part of war in much less than total ways. Their lives were fully exposed to the risks of military policy and subordinated to the demands of military action. But the measures taken to protect them, and compass of responses permitted them, were a far cry from the romantic vision of people's war, let alone the nation in arms. Rather, as one Ulm housewife expressed it, they were ". . . suppressed; bound hand and foot," by their plight and security measures at home, no less than the bombing.⁵² They "served" mainly through the privations absorbed in their personal lives and home areas, without troubling the authorities.

I have dwelt upon the personal, everyday aspects of civilian bombing experience not only because of their neglect in air war histories, but also because they address the more common ingredients of urban social geography and hazards research. Moreover, they seem the appropriate place to initiate an "oral geography" of these events, giving those who speak ". . . the right to begin where [they] are . . ." (Dorothy Smith, quoted in Anderson et al., 1987). However, it would diminish and misrepresent these civilians to suggest they were only prisoners of the banalities of survival. They were also concerned about, even obsessed by the war. Elsewhere, I hope to show that, when less severely harmed or suppressed, bombed civilians emerge as perceptive judges of what the bombing did and did not do, and its relation to "the fight." However, the typical answer from the worst hit areas was of the form:

. . . I didn't think much about it. Between the household and the kids and just keeping going, taking whatever comes, there was not time for it . . . [housewife (54), Bottrop]⁵³

Most people interviewed said they expected raids on industrial cities, but the commonest reaction to bombings that occurred was:

. . . It didn't make any sense to destroy our cities like this and kill so many innocent people . . . [housewife (36), mother of two, Darmstadt]⁵⁴

Or, as a male aircraft factory worker in Nagoya put it:

. . . I thought the objective of aerial bombardment was to destroy the enemy's war plants and shipping, and not hospitals and homes of the people . . .⁵⁵

And, more angrily, from a housewife, 61, in Wellingsbüttel, Hamburg:

. . . Why did they bomb us, – women, children, residential sections!!! Our men were gone. They were on the Front . . . Actually it was senseless . . . Why . . . bomb Hamm? . . . There were no industries there . . .⁵⁶

Similar sentiments were widespread over the senseless pattern of German bombing in Britain (Harrison 1976:205). People found the attack on themselves and their morale insane, because they felt as powerless to influence their own government as to deflect the bombers above. Rather, the bombing tended to depoliticize the war for them, turning them inwards, forcing them to escape into, as well as struggle with, domestic and neighborhood survival. They did take it. They carried on, but increasingly for immediate, personal reasons:

No, I wasn't going to give up because of my husband and children, but from the beginning I wished that the war would end the next day . . . [woman, Darmstadt]⁵⁷

Civilians appear to have faced a hopeless dichotomy. The worse the raiding intended to affect the war through them, the less they were able to do anything about it – much like the "Catch-22" which, according to Joseph Heller, aircrews sent to bomb them faced!

My purpose has been to recover a picture of civil life under fire from the words of survivors. Finally, however, it must be asked how far these particular testimonies can be taken as reliable guides, and how far oral testimony in general is relevant to recovering geographical knowledge.

Can we trust what civilian women of the recently defeated country said to representatives of their erstwhile enemy, all men and soldiers or civilians with temporary military rank? It must have had elements of a scene from Kafka for the interviewees! Can we trust those men to ask the questions and set down the answers in a reliable fashion? The Morale Division interviews had their own hidden agenda, and took place amid post-war chaos and the rubble of the bombing (Stern, 1947).

I suspect such problems were fatal impediments to the goals of the Survey: its concern with deriving supposedly objective and statistically valid measures of morale as a function of the weight and styles of bombing. Conversely, the witness to personal experience and civilian concerns in the open-ended or straightforward questions cited, seems robust. Civilians appear less compromised by wartime controls, or the intimidating circumstances of the interviews, when speaking of personal and local matters. They were more likely to fall silent, profess

ignorance, or change the subject, when asked about the political, moral and war-fighting implications of the raids and wartime raid measures: that is, about the preoccupations of air war or mass emergency research.

As a source of popular remembrance and witness to extreme experience, the original transcripts of the Morale Division contain uniquely valuable materials. In them, one finds the giant apparatus of the Survey; the limitations of its methods; the prejudices and ambitions of the interviewers, suddenly suspended as everything hinged on what some young mother or elderly pensioner would or would not say. Then, persons never before asked about "their war," rarely daring to speak of it outside their own families, were allowed to be, in the classic phrase of oral history, experts on their own experience. If the whole project was not to fail, there had to be thousands of these moments. They are tiny moments. They are often flawed by a refusal or inability to remember, the obvious impatience or bad translations of some interviewers. Again and again, the survivors break down, sobbing, the memories and losses too much to bear. A few are angry, some uncooperative. Yet, amazingly, there is little of the rhetoric or self-conscious literary qualities, the devious phrases and propaganda, familiar in the media, official reports and the memoirs of famous personalities.

The present sketch and its limited selections hardly do justice to what is available. The approach used is but one of the possibilities with this material and of an oral geography, generally, to judge from the more developed field of oral history. Pure oral histories range from uninterrupted transcripts of one person's words, essentially oral autobiography, to exhaustive projects of all or as many individuals as possible from a given group, place or event. Conversely, oral testimony may be used, as here, to reconstruct experience or develop a perspective or concept of people's condition. The least intrusive and methodologically most radical approaches are where the scholar selects, edits and compiles passages intended to speak for themselves. At the other extreme are highly structured surveys and analyses that border on sociometric and reductionist treatment of verbal responses.

The jury is still out on the arguments about whether one of those approaches is more promising than another. However, if personal testimony has a meaningful place in our work, it hinges upon two inescapable premises, one instrumental and the other concerned with the social construction of knowledge. At the very least, personal testimony can provide information, perspectives, and arguments absent or less satisfactory in other sources. That has been shown to be the case here, and not only in matters of interest to geographers, but through intrinsically geographical notions in the words recorded.

The intellectual and scholarly significance however, lies in the irreducibility of those words. If, as mainstream social science has treated

it, a spoken source only yields "data," to be recast and validated by other forms of enquiry, then it can provide, at best, indicators, but loses intrinsic worth. That was the position of the Morale Division professionals. The sort of approach I have used is what they called an "impressionistic survey," not scientifically acceptable. Psychologists and specialists in public opinion surveys designed the interviews. For them, the main purpose was to derive impersonal scaled and coded indices of civilian responses, to test theories about the impact of morale bombing. Preliminary reports requested from field staff, were expected to be only "impressionistic," not scientifically valid (Huey, 1947; MacIsaac, 1976).⁵⁸ It is useful to contrast that with what two oral historians studying working women call an "authoritative summary" (Olson and Shopes, 1991). It is essentially what the Morale Division meant by an "impressionistic survey" and more or less what I have written here. But for them, the idea of "authoritative" identifies the limitations of such work as being dramatically opposite to the USSBS view. They would see it as a concession to the demands of "the academic market place." A truly radical oral history, they suggest, strives instead to minimize the intrusion of scholarly preoccupations or privileged agendas. Since all technique implies a politico-social and moral position, that reflects a commitment to open and just reflection of peoples' lives. But, as Olson and Shopes (1991:199) point out, ". . . Given the competitiveness of the academic enterprise, professional credibility often necessitates that we abandon social commitments and frame our work in theoretically complex arguments that invite collegial appreciation." Hence, rather than giving a voice to the voiceless, letting their words speak for themselves, we craft a conventional looking scholarly narrative or argument: the "authoritative summary."

However, it seems to me that this sort of survey or summary is also appropriate given the state, or rather the absence, of such material from modern geography. Looking across the entire spectrum of scholarly journals and texts of geography, those which use personal testimony can be counted with the fingers of one hand. That suggests a deep-seated ideological as well as a technical bias against oral testimony, especially from ordinary or "lay" persons. That, in turn, serves to reinforce other biases that exclude or demean such persons as we have heard above. They allow us to echo what the literate assume about the illiterate; adults about children's "chatter;" how the fashionable and career-oriented refer to "out-of-date ramblings" of the elderly; patriarchal views of women's "gossip," "old wives tales;" "professionals" on "amateurs," the "developed" on the "underdeveloped." More specifically we risk confirming what elites assume and strategic bombing theory has said, about the working class, peasants or the masses.

Like any other, oral sources have their problems and limitations. Oral

historians have already devoted a large literature to that (Thompson, 1978; Vansina, 1985; Anderson et al., 1987). In its present state, or conspicuous absence from our work, the most serious issues seem to be our willingness to listen, and to persons not normally heard, in places not readily accessible to us, and to radically reexamine our attitudes to "talk," people's geography, and popular discourse.

Appendix. The Interviews of the USSBS Morale Division.

The Survey interviewed 3,711 civilians in 34 German towns and almost as many in Japan. The purpose was to determine whether and how far bombing had affected the morale of civilians, specifically willingness to continue with and support the war. Towns were selected in terms of weight of bombing; the civilians, as far as possible, were a random sample of those exposed. I have looked only at the most heavily bombed cities, the types of civilian noted early in the paper, and those subject to the more severe impacts.

The interview procedure was one developed in public opinion research in North America and clinical psychology. It is described as the "indirect method" in which, ". . . The interviewer sits down with the respondent and encourages a free narrative story within a framework of the prescribed questions" (USSBS 1947a:109). This was intended to put the respondent at ease to hide the true purpose of the interviews, by making out it was to assess and improve conditions under the Allied Occupation. Whereas the German questionnaire first asked about bombing in Q. 6 of the "Main Schedule," it was not overtly raised in the Japanese interviews until Q. 26. However, this, and the "free narrative" – where the Interviewer had the sensitivity and patience to allow it – mean the transcripts contain one of the most remarkable records of personal experience in war. Certain questions were better at drawing out the concerns of civilians. The earlier German surveys tend to be more open, and capture more of the flavor of the person's language.

Extended selections from a Main or "Schedule A" interview are quoted here, to give a fuller sense of the questions asked and content of the responses as personal testimony. The latter was translated directly into English at the time. The interview, of a 30 year old seamstress, took place in Karlsruhe, 20th July, 1945 (#51193).

Q. 1. How are you managing under the [Allied] Occupation:

Up to now quite well. Nothing has been plundered from me by the French, except a few little things taken by the Moroccans on the first day of the Occupation. Then every radio in our village was taken. But everything I had evacuated out of town has been taken, but I don't know by whom. And I don't know where my husband is. Apart from that I am satisfied. Up to now I haven't been badly off.

Q 2. Is it better or worse than you expected?

Better so far, in a way. If we'd only got a little more food!! But I suppose that'll settle itself soon too. . . .

Q 6. *When was your city bombed for the very first time?*

Summer 1942.

Q 7. *Were you surprised by the first bombing raid, or prepared for it?*

I was very surprised. I did not expect air raids on Karlsruhe so fast. There was always much talk about Karlsruhe being spared.

Q 8. *Did you then think that more raids would follow the first, or that your city would be left in peace?*

We expected more and more and bigger raids.

Q 9. *What did you think then that the future raids would be like?*

Worse than the first one. But I never expected such a raid on the suburb of Hagsfeld as came last year. In the centre of town – yes, but not on a small farming community like ours.

Q 10. *When did you first experience a big raid?*

April 1944. That was the raid when Karlsruhe itself was not hit but both Rintheim and Hagsfeld were completely destroyed.

Q 11. *How did you fare at the time? What were your experiences?*

I always went to the house next door in which some relatives of mine were living. Their house was bigger than ours, and had a better cellar. All I could take with me was my baby. My sister, who happened to be visiting, carried my handbag – and that's all I saved. I lost everything else, everything I had owned. The raid took about half an hour. All that remained of the two houses was the cellar we were in.

Q 12. *What did you do then?*

We lived on the other side of the railway, and very often we couldn't hear the siren when a train passed. But that evening we heard it, and immediately went to the cellar. And then things began to pop. Bomb after bomb fell; first the high explosives and then the incendiaries; wave after wave of planes; and we could hear – and feel – one "Luftmine" hit in the village. It was horrible. I was so scared. Our house burnt down completely. Only one remained standing in the neighbourhood. When the raid was over, the men left the shelter and did their best to put out the fire, and about an hour later I came out of the cellar, and the houses had burnt down completely. Our house was level, just a mass of smoking, smouldering ruins. The odd thing is tho', the baby didn't wake up once; it slept all through the night and didn't cry once.

Q 13. *What were your feelings then, and how did you react to it?*

I mustn't think back of [*sic*] that night. What I had to go through, esp.' the baby!! I kept asking myself "How long will this misery last?" During an attack like that the only thing on everybody's mind is self-preservation. Save your life. Your belongings don't matter. Everyone thought first of

himself. There was no order, no unity, in our village. Otherwise much could have been saved. In the morning the fire police were still standing at the edge of our village and hadn't even begun to do anything. I left for the Black Forest the next day. I had had more than enough of everything. I was all through. My parents-in-law were all bombed out. So were my five brothers and sisters. We had no place at all to stay at.

Q 14. *How many big raids did you experience?*

Five.

Q 15. *In total how many raids have you experienced?*

About nine or ten.

Q 16. *Were you more and more afraid as the raids continued, or did you get used to them?*

I got more and more scared, because things got worse with every raid and the raids kept getting bigger.

Q 17. *Did these repeated raids have any other effect on your state of mind?*

Certainly. When the raids kept getting worse, we saw that things were drawing to a close. It couldn't go on that way much longer. We kept asking ourselves "How can this go on?" The damage can never be restored.

Q 18. *Which of the following bombs did you find most terrible: Incendiaries, explosives, phosphorus, air mines?*

Sprengbomben – explosives. Out in the village, with the small cellars, every bomb has a bad effect, unlike the city with its big cellars.

Q 19. *Which were more terrible, day or night raids?*

Night raids. I only went through night raids in our village. During the day there were only occasional bombs dropped.

[A series of questions on attitudes to the Allies and the bombing war generally, is omitted here.]

Q 25. *In what way was your normal life most upset by the air raids?*

The fact that I lost everything I owned. I had to stay with strangers for four months. Here I was completely helpless with a baby, and nothing left of what belonged to either of us. . . . [Repetition of previous remarks]

Q 26. *How were your family relationships affected by the raids?*

Not at all . . . My husband has been in the army all along. I have been living with my parents whenever I returned to Karlsruhe since the raid. My baby has always stayed with me.

Q 27. *Was your work affected in any way by air raids?*

. . . I lost my sewing machine in the raid and couldn't get a replacement for it. I got the ration card but there just weren't any sewing machines available. Of course, there were other reasons for cutting down the amount of sewing I did. There was more work on the land, in the fields, and I had also just given birth to the baby, which meant a lot of extra work. And then I evacuated to an aunt who was sick and spent some time looking after her. Everything was lacking for my work anyway – scissors, cloth, thread, needles etc. – so I didn't try to work very hard any more.

[Qs 28–34 concerned employment]

Q 35. *In your opinion how good were the Air Raid Precautions here?*

There was no protection to speak of. . . .

[Several other questions in this vein follow, then the interview turns to wider issues about the war that are outside the scope of this essay. There were 45 questions in all.]

The Survey Reports give a few quotations from the verbal material and one sample interview, but are mainly based on subsequent coding of the answers. They used Hollerith Cards for a computerized analysis, apparently the first in a large-scale social survey. Afterwards, the thousands of personal testimonies, surely the most extensive and immediate record of wartime experience among ordinary civilians, were classified and remained inaccessible to scholars for almost 40 years. This work is about the recovery of lost experience in that sense too.

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Notes

Abbreviations

USSBS: United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Record Group 242, Modern Military Archives, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

USSBS(E): European War Survey. Unless otherwise stated, from Section 1, European Documents, 64b f1. etc. Interviews are classified by city and number ("#"), with the number stamped on the transcript; they were carried out between May and July 1945. "Q" refers to the question in the interview schedule to which this answer was given.

USSBS(P): Pacific War Survey. Unless otherwise stated, from Section 2. Japanese Documents, 14e 1, etc. Interviews classified by city and number as with USSBS(E), conducted September through November, 1945.

PRO AIR: Public Record Office, Kew, London; Air Historical holdings.

NOTE: The interviews were conducted within a few weeks, sometimes just days, after the bombing had ceased, but most individuals were recalling several years of raids and, often, their most extreme experience in a calamitous raid months or years earlier.

1. USSBS(E) Elderly "housewife," Hamburg. #61997. Q. 9.
2. The urban targeting methodology is rarely described, even in air force histories, but the USSBS archive and the PRO AIR holdings contain detailed information about it.
3. #61986, Q. 33. Note that in asking these questions, interviewers encouraged open-ended answers. But respondents often became confused, crying over their recollections, often fell silent, or kept changing the topic. This, and constraints of space, explain the ". . ." editing.
4. Cf. PRO AIR 20/3717 "Notes on bombing and its effect on morale," etc.; 20/4069 Meeting of 2nd June 1941 ". . . to discuss bombing policy," p. 2. "Directive of 14th February, 1942; Minute to Mr. Churchill," 30/03/1942; AIR 14/838 "10,000 Plan."
5. Cf. Zuckerman (1978); USSBS(P) 193a 104, Bronowski letter 26/05/45 and paper "Area Attack Against Japan" (25/05/45).
6. USSBS(E) 64b b2 Report of Progress - the Morale Division.
7. USSBS(E) 64b 15f #61922, Q. 33.
8. #695, Q. 3.
9. Kuroda Interview #2.
10. #30018, Q. 27.
11. #51521, Q. 11 (at Detmold). Also quoted Rept. #16b, p. 113.
12. Mass Observation, Tom Harrisson Archive, University of Sussex.
13. #30013, Q. 7.
14. #63431, Q. 37.
15. #50186.
16. Kuroda Interview #1, Qs. 3 and 18.
17. #50745, Qs. 7ff.
18. #695, Q. 35.
19. #30016, Q. 18.
20. "Pretest" Loeb #2, Q. 18. "Pretest" refers to preliminary interviews carried out at Darmstadt to test questionnaires, etc. At this stage, transcript numbers were identified with interviewer's name.
21. Pretest Q. 19.
22. #61993, Qs. 24 and 36.
23. This mixture of "banality" and horror is found in that extraordinary novel of Hiroshima, Masuji Ibuse's *Black Rain* (1969).
24. USSBS(E) 64b j1 "Impressionistic Report on [captured German] mail," 17/2/45, p. 8.

25. "Unreal city," T. S. Eliot's phrase in "The Wasteland."
26. Hostettler, 1990. Mrs. Brewster, East London, born 1921, interviewed 1980.
27. Imperial War Museum, London, 8/1/81, Miss C. E. Clark (Lewisham) "When Hitler's Blitz in London Began, 1940" p. 5.
28. Pretest Kruglah, #4, Q. 29; #1521, Q. 25; #30206, Q. 17.
29. USSBS(E) Report #64b, p. 9.
30. Already occurring in the 1914-18 war at places like Dover, or the cave life of people from Chongqing bombed early in the Sino-Japanese War.
31. USSBS(E) Summaries of answers, Schedule A., Q. 25.
32. Imperial War Museum, London, 8/1/81, Miss C. E. Clark (Lewisham) "When Hitler's Blitz" p. 6; Cf. J. D. Bernal's "disaster incidents" inventory, Public Records Office, Home Office, 192/7.
33. Quoted in Schmidt, 1964:86-87.
34. USSBS (1947a), Report #64b, vol. I, p. 28.
35. #50633, Q. 19.
36. #1887, Q. 37.
37. Pretest, Cantor #1, Q. 21.
38. USSBS(E) Summaries of answers to Q. 25.
39. Woman "civil servant," quoted in Harrison, 1976:102.
40. #50208, Q. 9.
41. #50745, Q. 14.
42. Pretest, Schwarz #5.
43. #50208, Qs. 25-26.
44. USSBS(E) 64b f2 Summaries of responses to Q. 11.
45. USSBS(P) 2nd Doc (1)-(11) Interrogation #419, p. 4.
46. Later in the war, with full employment, the home services run essentially by the Labour members of the wartime government, and much reduced bombing, a majority of working class Britons did become materially better off than at any time for many generations. But inner city and woman-headed households continued to suffer most, and again disproportionately in London in the V-bombings (Titmuss, 1950).
47. Quoted in Schmidt, 1964:86-87.
48. #61959, Q. 33.
49. Woman's letter of 14/09/44, quoted in Schmidt, 1964:105.
50. #61975, Q. 33.
51. Quoted in Irving, 1989:176.
52. #50745, Q. 5.
53. #62372, Q. 21.
54. Pretest, Loeb #2, Q. 29.
55. USSBS(P).
56. #61997, Q. 37.
57. Pretest, Spiegel #3, Sc. "B," Q. 20.
58. USSBS(E) 64b q1 for the (Orwellian!) correspondence by Gordon Allport and others, mainly from the editorial board of Public Opinion Quarterly, on the assumptions and design of a survey of enemy morale.

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