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Protesters in Dresden Block Neo-Nazi March on Anniversary of Deadly Allied Firebombing

By ROBERT MACKEY



Thousands of anti-fascist protesters blocked a neo-Nazi march in Dresden, Germany, on Wednesday night, on the 68th anniversary of the British and American air campaign that killed an estimated 25,000 people in 37 hours of bombing.

In recent years, the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle reports, anti-fascist activists “have outnumbered neo-Nazis who previously had used Dresden’s bombing anniversary to stage large ‘funeral’ marches to recall the demise of Hitler’s Third Reich.” On Wednesday, about 800 neo-Nazis were prevented from marching by thousands of police officers and counter-demonstrators, as more than 10,000 anti-fascist protesters formed a human chain in the city.

As the British historian Frederick Taylor has explained, the Allies dropped “more than 4,500 tons of high explosive and incendiary bombs” on Dresden on Feb. 13, 1945, as part of an effort to crush German resistance and morale through the “indiscriminate ‘area bombing’ by night of all German cities with populations exceeding 100,000.”

In an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel in 2009, Mr. Taylor said:

The neo-Nazis use the anniversary in two ways. First, as a straight propaganda bludgeon against the victors of World War II, an example of the Allies’ allegedly criminal conduct of the war against Germany. Second, more subtly, as a tool to relativize Adolf Hitler’s Holocaust. They refer to a “bomb holocaust” of the Allies against the civilian inhabitants of German cities, wildly inflating the figures involved

and, of course, underplaying the number of Jews, Sinti, Roma, homosexuals and political prisoners, and other millions of victims of the real Holocaust. It is this two-fold advantage of the Dresden anniversary protests that is especially attractive to the neo-Nazis and their associates. Plus, many otherwise respectable people in Dresden and elsewhere, many of whom grew up with the post-war myths, continue to believe in the inflated casualty figures and in the criminality of the Allied bombing campaign.

As Anthony Grayling, an English moral philosopher noted in his book “Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the World War II Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan,” just five weeks after the destruction of Dresden, the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, expressed reservations in a letter to the British Air Marshal Charles Portal, chief of the air staff. “It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing German cities for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed,” Churchill wrote. “Otherwise, we shall come into control of an utterly ruined land. The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing.”

Earlier this week, the BBC broadcast a rare postwar interview with the man who ran the British area-bombing campaign, Air Marshal Arthur Harris, discovered recently in the archives of the Royal Air Force. Speaking in 1977, the man nicknamed Bomber Harris insisted that he had simply carried out orders. “The directive when I took over was that I wasn’t to specifically aim at anything unless ordered to do so, except to blast the German cities as a whole,” he said.

After the broadcast, a copy of the BBC report on the interview was uploaded to a YouTube channel devoted to British far-right groups by an anonymous blogger who referred to the attack on the German city as “the Dresden Holocaust.”