

Ground View of Cologne in Ruins Bares Havoc of Years of Bombing

By GLADWIN HILL By Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

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AMERICANS IN CATHEDRAL CITY OF COLOGNE



Infantrymen and vehicles of the Third Armored Division of the First Army waiting to drive into the heart of the metropolis.

Associated Press Wirephoto (U. S. Signal Corps Radiophoto)

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COLOGNE, March 6—As American troops slashed rapidly through to capture Cologne today, Germany's fourth largest city lay in almost incredible destruction and desolation—a grisly monument to the Allies' air power.

In a tour of several miles through the city this correspondent saw scarcely a single building undamaged, and most of them were not only uninhabitable but evidently long since evacuated. Whole sections were written off in the Germans' defensive campaign against the bombardment. The soldiers fought through miles of streets, deserted except for snipers and intermittent and quickly yielding strong points.

The devastation made London's bomb damage look like a drop in the bucket by comparison.

One of the few structures that seemed to have escaped largely is the cathedral. Although there was sharp street fighting going on around it most of the day, from a distance of a few blocks the spires could be seen apparently intact. The central part of the edifice received at least one bomb—as did St. Paul's in London—but appears to have survived similarly. Some, if not all, of the windows are missing.

Cologne, after only a two-day

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RUINS OF COLOGNE VERIFIED BY ALLIES

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siege, with relatively little shelling, is virtually as much a ruin as Aachen, which was under siege with intensive shelling for more than a month in addition to aerial bombardment.

It pointed grimly to the condition of Berlin and possibly several score more of Germany's largest cities which have been under intensive air attack.

Like Aachen, Cologne will probably be at least ten years in basic reconstruction and eradication of the major scars of the assault.

First to Be Hit by 1,000 Planes

It was the first victim of the Royal Air Force's saturation bombing idea, the target of the first 1,000-bomber blow in May, 1942. It has received, according to the Allied air forces, 30,000 tons of bombs from the RAF and 12,000 from the Eighth Air Force in about twenty-five big attacks. The Eighth has attacked it sixteen times since last March, which made Cologne second only to Berlin in the number of attacks. Cologne's last big attack was carried out by the RAF Friday night, when 750 bombers dropped 3,500 tons of bombs. An RAF spokesman said tonight that 2,000 of Cologne's 3,300 built-up acres had been wiped out.

The damage to factories was so extensive and so many could not be identified in the wreckage that it was impossible today to make any closer assessment than the Allies' earlier announcement that Cologne, as one of Germany's principal centers of war industry, had been severely crippled.

Aerial photographs have probably not established all the damage because more buildings than not are still standing with their walls and often their roofs still up. They might show up as doubtful in pictures, although they are fit only for wrecking crews.

Civilians Hazy on Nightmare

The aerial attacks were so stunning that the scattered civilians in Cologne were as incoherent about them and their effects as a person trying to recall a nightmare. They had to cast about for dates and could not remember how many attacks there had been. As to results, they would simply shrug their shoulders and gesture at the destruction about them.

The date they all remembered, however, was Oct. 30, 1944, when the RAF loosed a forty-minute holocaust on the city, which was preceded by a daylight attack and followed up the next night.

The evidence of this was astonishing. The blow seemed to have wiped clear of human habitation a great area in the western section of the city.

Buildings lay in ruins, debris blocking the main thoroughfares—untouched in the four subsequent months. Trolley cars stood abandoned in the middle of the main street. Fire hose lines lay weathering the gutters where the people apparently had left them and just run away—for good—in panic and despair.

From piecemeal reports, the rate of casualties was not extremely high because of evacuations and air raid shelters. People huddled in these for long periods just as they had done in London during the blitz.

"Yes," one woman said wryly, "it made us think of the leaders' boasts about our bombing of England—and their promises that it would not happen here." Then she shrugged.

That was about all one could get out of them. No conclusions, no ideas about the future. All they knew was that the capture of Cologne meant that it was over at last.

For this reason, the deeper American troops got into the city the friendlier the reception from the scattered civilians, of whose number no reliable estimate is available. Judging from the de-

struction, it will be a small fraction of Cologne's pre-war 780,000.

A typical scene was this: In a neat residential section a few hundred yards behind the advancing tanks and infantrymen, a small group of Americans with small equipment and trucks hustled through the partly wrecked houses, staking out locations for temporary advance unit headquarters. American artillery boomed intermittently from all directions, firing on the few German artillery sites in the heart of the Old City area, a mile away. The area was dotted with the night-marish trees of war—stripped, broken and burned.

Crossing a little street to an open patch, two soldiers with a stretcher improvised from a crate lugged a green-uniformed German who had been found in a front yard. As they set him down and ran through his papers a five-mark note fluttered to the damp ground.

Two girls in attractive play clothes appeared mysteriously from a wrecked house and pleasantly said, "Good morning," to some of the soldiers. They got suspicious verbal and silent acknowledgments. The girls, paying no attention to the body, crossed

the street to a huge underground concrete structure right among the houses. Construction had been interrupted. It was for use as a big air raid shelter or possibly a fort.

It had recently been a Wehrmacht headquarters. Its ten chambers, twenty feet underground, were luxuriously furnished. In them were two big electric refrigerators and a complete kitchen and pantry. The German officers had abandoned it so hurriedly the night before its capture that their dinner leavings—including French wine and Norwegian sardines—were still lying about among scattered clips of Russian rifle bullets dated 1940.

The two girls started down the underground stairway past the American MP, who looked tolerant and explained, "They're just scrounging for bread."

A tiny American cub artillery observation plane buzzed overhead. The girls instinctively ducked, exclaimed "Oh!" and ducked down the stairs.

This description of Cologne's damage should not be construed as a brief in the old controversy about air power versus land pow-

er. In the opinion of this correspondent, who has seen bomb damage in Germany both from bombers and on the ground, it is not even a tacit reflection on the ground forces' role in warfare. Corroborating many of the air forces' statements, it indicates that with massive attacks, involving considerable losses, the enemy's cities can be badly smashed and his industries badly disrupted.

It does not prove that with the air forces on their present scale and with the enemy using such devices as underground shelters and the evacuation of industry, air power can displace land power—as German missiles crashing in ruined Cologne today and the American boys defying them attested.