Why do they bomb us?

The bombing war in Italy 1940-1945
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FOREWORD

The Gorla Domani Association is very pleased to have partnered with the IBCC Digital Archive at the University of Lincoln and with Associazione Lapsus to support field research work about the Gorla district in Milan. This collaboration has a special focus on the massacre of 184 schoolchildren who died at the local school.

Within the Gorla district stands a unique memorial which remembers the innocent victims of the 20 October 1944 bombing: it is situated on the very spot of the bombed school, now Piazza Piccoli Martiri. This memorial - with the crypt in which the remains of the children were buried – is now becoming a site of remembrance for all civilian casualties in wartime, both nation-wide and globally.

This educational resource based on historical sources is intended for younger generations, and it also supports our history and environment outreach programmes offered to schools in the city of Milan and in its province. It places Second World War facts in a broader context, thus promoting a deeper knowledge and a better understanding of these events. This exercise brings in a wider, authoritative perspective, while at the same time inviting comparisons with contemporary events.

Franco Torti
Gorla Domani Association
Why do they bomb us?
INTRODUCTION

This education resource is the product of a collaboration between two organisations, one in Italy and one in the United Kingdom: Lapsus and the University of Lincoln.

Lapsus is a non-profit organisation based in Milan, whose aims are to research and promote public understanding of contemporary history. Lapsus members are interested in the connection between our commonly held beliefs and historical evidence. We have taken on a number of challenging topics, including Chi è Stato? La strategia della tensione e le stragi impunite - an exhibition on Italian neo-fascist terrorism between 1969 and 1974; 900 Criminale. Mafia, Camorra, ‘Ndrangheta - a multimedia exhibition based on the history of organized crime in Italy); Storia e memoria delle deportazioni nazifasciste - an online course aimed at deconstructing common stereotypes of Italian involvement in political and racial deportation during the Second World War, including interviews with victims.

The University of Lincoln houses a substantial digital archive on the bombing war. The archive is based in the Department of Marketing, Languages and Tourism in the International Business School, where there is a strong interest in researching the visitor economy. Since 2012, the University has been a partner in an ambitious project to open a heritage centre in the city of Lincoln - the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC). The IBCC opened its doors in January 2018 and has since welcomed many thousands of visitors.

The University's role in the partnership has been to collect and share the heritage of RAF Bomber Command in particular and the bombing war in Europe more generally. The primary means to achieve these aims has been the creation of the IBCC Digital Archive, which can be accessed here: https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/. The archive has no paper equivalent of its digital holdings. Archive staff have relied on members of the public with relevant items to loan them for digitisation, or on those with stories to tell to provide oral testimony. Lapsus members have collected a large number of oral testimonies for the Archive, from survivors of the bombing war in Italy. The Archive staff were also responsible for the interpretation and content of the exhibition which is housed in the IBCC.
Lapsus and the IBCC Digital Archive share an ethos of promoting tolerance, inclusivity and understanding. In this joint project on the bombing war, our values are reflected in our desire to present the experiences of ordinary people caught up in the bombing war, in uniform and civilian life, on both sides of the conflict. We want to emphasise people’s common humanity and shared suffering. There is no place for the glorification of war. There is a strong emphasis on promoting understanding.

It is now a long time since the Second World War – in fact, this year of our publication marks the 75th anniversary of the ending of the war in Europe. These days, we often point to wars far outside Europe, in the Middle East, say, or Africa, and note how barbarous they are. When we do this, we forget that the two most barbarous wars in history – the First and Second World Wars - began in Europe and devasted European societies. We hope people will not forget this. Understanding what our forebears went through is an important element of our own personal history. Understanding the pain of war strengthens our determination that it should not happen again.

There were many realities to the war in Italy: political repression, Allied aerial bombardment, troop movements and intense ground battles, a change of regime, German occupation, military internees, the Resistance, a bitterly fought civil war, the Holocaust, shifting borders and mass displacement of civilians. This collection focuses on just one of these: the aerial bombing war carried out by the Allied forces. It was one of the most devastating aspects of the war, because of the number of civilians killed and the damage that was caused to so much of Italy’s heritage and economic infrastructure. Why, you may ask, did the Allies cause so much destruction, especially after the September 1943 armistice?

That is a good question; it has been debated ever since. Although it never had a prominent place in Italy’s official discourse of the war, the bombing war has spawned a considerable output, ranging from personal recollections and scholarly histories to novels, films and plays. However, there are very few instances of a deliberately designed and produced educational resource for those in secondary school; this is the intended audience for this volume.

We hope this work can be widely used, although we are aware that there were marked regional differences in the way people experienced the air war. The bombings meant something different for a factory worker living in Turin in 1940, a Sicilian peasant near the
landing beaches in 1943, or a Treviso shopkeeper in 1944, for example. Our perspective is also influenced by other factors, such as that Bomber Command squadrons based in Great Britain operated only in Northern Italy. Southern regions also suffered heavily from intense and sustained Allied bombings. We therefore invite users to adapt this material creatively, for instance by adding information on a specific area, expanding upon a topic, or exploring related issues. The terms of licence allow you to do so. Most sources are drawn from the IBCC Digital Archive but we have added a few from other archives and websites. While by no means exhaustive, these fascinating accounts reveal the full complexity of the bombing war. We are left wondering whether destructive technology has the capacity to bring about lasting and meaningful political change.

Our collection is published as the coronavirus pandemic sweeps across our countries. Some observers have made a link between the Second World War and the ‘war on the virus’, while others have criticised the choice of framing a public health issue in terms of sacrifice, resilience and collective effort. We are not so sure that coronavirus and war are similar, but we invite you at various points in this collection to make your own judgement.

We welcome your feedback and comments on this collection of material. You can contact us at info@laboratoriolapsus.it or ibccarchive@lincoln.ac.uk

*The editorial team*
HOW TO USE THIS EDUCATION PACK

We have called this collection an ‘education pack’ to indicate that it may be used formally as a teaching resource in a school or college setting or informally for independent learning at home.

The ‘stars’ of the pack are the sources themselves, of which there are 60 in total. They include toys, letters, comics, posters, art, poetry, novels, and oral testimonies. They cover a wide range of experiences of the bombing war in Italy. We have presented Italian sources in English, and English sources in Italian. The fact that this is a digital resource means it is easy to share material that otherwise would be very difficult to access.

The sources are presented in eight themed sections. There is no particular order prescribed for using the sections – you may start anywhere. Each source comes with a brief contextual background to help appreciate its content. Importantly, after every source, you will find a question, or questions, to think about and discuss. We want you to be active in your use of the sources, not passive! Section 9 contains ideas for discussion for each source.

In some sources, you will see three period marks: … This indicates that some material has been omitted because it was not relevant to the present purpose. In most cases, you can listen to the full interview or read the full document by going to the web address provided.

Please note that in most cases, the hyperlink for the original source takes you to the full source (for example an interview, diary or letter) and not just the excerpt presented in this pack. At the end of Section 9, you will find a guide to the wide range of resources related to the bombing war in Italy that are held in the IBCC Digital Archive.
Symbols and notations

The following symbols are used in the text to guide you:

- Original is an audio interview
- Hyperlink to original source
- Question for discussion
- Watch external footage
- Reference to original print source
- Activity to try
Why do they bomb us?

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Note to the English version
Interviews with Italian informants were originally recorded in Italian, transcribed, and then translated into English. Interjections, fillers and other sound utterances are normally omitted; text may have been slightly edited for clarity.

Readers should be advised that in spoken Italian the adjective *inglese* (‘English’) is frequently used as a loose synonym for ‘British’ or ‘English-speaking person’.

Some place names have changed after the war; whenever necessary, the current form is provided.

Other languages
This educational resource is also available in Italian.
See: https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/why-do-they-bomb-us

Thanks
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1. Bombing civilians before the Second World War
A new weapon of war arrived with the twentieth century: the aircraft. The American writer, H.G. Wells, imagined the new aerial warfare in his science fiction novel *The War in the Air* (1907). In his vision, many cities and their inhabitants across the world - New York, San Francisco, London, Paris, Hamburg and Berlin – are all obliterated by invading air forces. Even though this was fantasy, it made many people terrified. A new era in aerial warfare was about to begin.

**The First World War**

The First World War (1914-1918) witnessed the first contests for control of the sky as well as the sea and land. Both sides in the conflict used aircraft in multiple ways: reconnaissance, dropping propaganda leaflets, spectacular battles between fighter planes, tactical bombing, and machine-gunning. They also used giant airships to drop bombs on ports and strategic installations.

There were civilian casualties as a result of bombing, but they were comparatively small in number compared to later wars.
**Source 1: The role of civilians in war**

This pamphlet was published in *Il Messaggero* in 1915. It appealed to citizens of Italy to play their part in the war effort.

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**LONG LIVE ITALY!**

*From now on, every citizen is an integral part of the Nation’s defence.*

We must spontaneously impose on ourselves civil discipline, which ought to be more severe than even the harshest military discipline.

We should absolutely give up the habit to easily criticise. No doubt, no hesitation anymore, especially in difficult times.

Trust the Government, now and ever – such trust must be absolute, strong, steadfast, and cheerful.

Obey without question; accommodate, and even anticipate, the needs and the desires of those who rule the country at such a difficult juncture.

Every personal sacrifice should seem a light burden, even a welcome one.

No complaints, no regrets.

They are pointless and weaken others’ morale.

Every effort should be directed to alleviate the distress of combatants’ families.

We should use all means available and concentrate our efforts to lessen the material and psychological distress of families who have given so much to the Fatherland.

Only in this way frontline men can offer themselves to the Country, with compete trust, and in the fullest of ways.

Families must cut all non-essential expenditures.

The first preoccupation of a nation at war must be reducing domestic spending.

Everything for the combatants, everything for the combatants’ families

**LONG LIVE ITALY!**

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[https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/aerial-warfare-during-world-war-one](https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/aerial-warfare-during-world-war-one)
1. Bombing civilians before the Second World War

Source 2: The mystique of flying

The first fighter aircraft were developed during this war. A mystique emerged about the pilots who flew them. They were treated as celebrities and if they shot down at least five enemy aircraft, could claim to be ‘aces’. Count Francesco Baracca (1888-1918) was an acclaimed Italian pilot credited with many victories.


Look at the side of Baracca’s plane, emblazoned with his black prancing stallion emblem. Which famous Italian luxury sports car manufacturer still uses the same black stallion as its trademark? How did the allure of flying come to be associated with sports cars?
Theorists of air war

As the technology of flight developed from hot air balloons to winged aircraft, military theorists began thinking about its capacity to wage war. Some thought it would be a useful addition to ground forces, such as observation of enemy movement. Others went much further, arguing that airpower could develop into a powerful, independent attacking force.

**Source 3: General Giulio Douhet explains the implications of air power**

General Giulio Douhet (1869-1930) was the first major theorist of air war. His most important work, *Il dominio dell’aria* (1921), was highly influential in Italy, Germany and Britain.

By virtue of this new weapon, the repercussions of war are no longer limited by the farthest artillery range of surface guns, but can be directly felt for hundreds of miles over all the lands and seas of nations at war. No longer can areas exist in which life can be lived in safety and tranquillity, nor can the battlefield any longer be limited to actual combatants. On the contrary, the battlefield will be limited only by the boundaries of the nations at war, and all of their citizens will become combatants, since all of them will be exposed to the aerial offensives of the enemy. There will be no distinction any longer between soldiers and civilians. The defences on land and sea will no longer serve to protect the country behind them; nor can victory on land or sea protect the people from enemy aerial attacks unless that victory ensures the destruction, by actual occupation of the enemy’s territory, of all that gives life to his aerial forces.

**Can you identify why Douhet believed that air war equalled total war?**
1. Bombing civilians before the Second World War

Air power and colonial expansion

Britain and Italy both used bomber aircraft in the 1920s and 1930s to control the populations of their colonies and to make new colonial conquests. Mussolini relied heavily on the Regia Aeronautica [Italian Air Force] in the invasion and conquest of the last independent state in Africa, Ethiopia, in 1936.

Source 4: The Italian invasion of Ethiopia

Watch some original film footage of the invasion here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb30pEOWyrg.

This footage begins with Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie reviewing his troops. After these scenes, can you identify what impact the aerial bombardment is having on the ground?
Air power closer to home

Against the background of the rise of fascism, in the 1930s many European countries strengthened their armed forces and for the first time, this included substantial investment in air power. At the same time, civilian populations grew more anxious about the prospect of aerial bombing. Some historians have called the 1930s the ‘age of anxiety’.

Source 5: An eyewitness account of the bombing of Guernica

The first time a European town was completely destroyed by aerial bombing was during the Spanish Civil War: the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica on 27 April 1937.

BILBAO, APRIL 27

Guernica, the most ancient town of the Basques and the centre of their cultural tradition, was completely destroyed yesterday afternoon by insurgent air raiders. The bombardment of the open town far behind the lines occupied precisely three hours and a quarter, during which a powerful fleet of aeroplanes consisting of three German types, Junkers and Heinkel bombers and Heinkel fighters, did not cease unloading on the town bombs weighing from 1,000 lb. downwards and, it is calculated, more than 3,000 two-pounder aluminium incendiary projectiles. The fighters, meanwhile, plunges low from above the centre of the town to machine-gun those of the civilian population who had taken refuge in the fields.

The whole of Guernica was soon in flames except the historic Casa de Juntas with its rich archives of the Basque race, where the ancient Basque Parliament used to sit. The famous oak of Guernica, the dried old stump of 600 years and the young new shoots of this century, was also untouched.

The Times, 28 April 1937.

This account was written by a journalist called George Steer. What are the clues that tell us he was sympathetic to the Basques who had been bombed?
SOURCE 6: PICASSO PAINTS GUERNICA

Pablo Picasso, who was in exile in Paris, read Steer’s account a few days after it was published. He immediately began work on his famous mural, Guernica, portraying the intense pain and confusion of civilians under the bombs.

Learn more about the production of Guernica here: https://guernica.museoreinasofia.es/en#introduccion.

Why do you think Picasso’s work has become such a powerful anti-war symbol?
2. ALLIED AIRCREW EXPERIENCES OF BOMBING ITALY
The airmen who flew bombing missions over Europe were mostly in their early 20s, the age of university students today. They were all volunteers. Many could not even drive a car, yet they were flying enormous, unwieldy aircraft loaded with thousands of tons of bombs.

The Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force both took part in the bombing of Italy. There were between six and 12 crew on each plane, depending on the make and type. Each crew member had a specific role: pilot, navigator, gunner, bomb aimer, radio operator, flight engineer and so on. Each depended on the others for survival. This often meant that intensely close bonds developed between them.

Many airmen left accounts of their experiences in letters, artwork, diaries and interviews. Some of these traces were produced at the time of the conflict, while others were created long afterwards. It is worth considering whether the ones emanating in the heat of wartime are different from those that came much later.

**During the conflict**

All aircrew were required to register every operation they flew in their personal official logbook. The logbook contained the basic details but almost nothing in the way of personal reactions. You can see an example in source 9. Letters to and from airmen were censored and there were heavy restrictions on what could be photographed. We need to remember these limitations when reading wartime sources.
SOURCE 7: STEPHEN DAWSON’S NOTEBOOK ENTRY FOR AN OPERATION TO MILAN

In addition to his logbook, Stephen Dawson kept an informal notebook. Here is his account of an attack on Milan. Note the date – just a few weeks before the Armistice of 8 September. This bombing was part of an escalation of attacks on Italy’s industrial heartland, calculated to cause surrender to the Allies. He begins by noting the aircraft’s bombload.

Milan. Aug 12/13 1943

1/4000 lb. 3/500 lb. 4/T.I. Green.
Took off at 21.35 in ‘B’, climbed over base to 5,000 ft and on track to 18,000 ft. Lost height through fighter belt south of Paris and then climbed to 20,000 feet. Saw four machines shot down over France. Not surprising – full moon almost and only 2300 when we crossed the coast so not fully dark. Quiet trip rest of the way, stooged on “George’. Plenty of pin points by moon light. Had seventeen minutes in hand at Lake Bourget so flew round lakes for quarter of an hour before crossing Alps. Whole crew stopped work and admired Mont Blanc and other mountains by moonlight. Quite a lot of snow on higher mountains. Lost height after crossing Alps to 15,000 feet & attacked at this height. Target poorly defended, very few searchlights (one picked us up & promptly went out) and only slight flak. Turin burning on way back. Very quiet on way back, took our time & were last back to base.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/6708. You can read the full notebook here, as well as a transcription.

What seem to be the most memorable aspects of the operation to Stephen Dawson?
SOURCE 8: PETER LAMPREY ON ATTACKING ITALIAN TARGETS

Peter Lamprey was a flight sergeant serving with 101 Squadron. He wrote a large number of letters to his former workmate, William Gunton, before he was killed in an operation over Braunschweig in January 1944. The letters are mostly chatty and humorous in tone, probably continuing the kind of work banter that the two would have exchanged before the war.

This is an extract from one of Lamprey’s letters to Gunton from RAF Ludford Magna, where Lamprey was stationed. Most of those who served there found it remote, uncomfortable and badly equipped: they called it ‘Mudford Magna’. The letter is undated.

For some reason or other they, the big shots, have kept us on the deck for quite a while. They might be giving our jolly old paperhanger [i.e. Adolph Hitler] a chance to pile the bricks up again ready for us to knock down – if he can find them. It was a pity the other boys went and done Rome. I should have enjoyed helping to put a few more ancient buildings in there. These Italian do’s are just what the doctor ordered – especially if you go in fairly late. We spent twelve minutes over Turin watching the place coming up piece by piece, a bit different to Gelsenkirchen that we bombed at 240mph and had three holes knocked in us inside two minutes. I’d rather do two Italian trips at ten hours a piece than one Happy Valley at five. The bloody Hun is too keen and he always seems to be peeved at something. If the silly bleeders only let us alone we could wipe the place out in a week and then all of us could go to bed at night. As it is he stays up – we stay up and if they aren’t careful it will develop into one of these ‘Vishus [vicious] circles’. …

At the present moment I am in the throes of trying to repair my lighter so if you fiddlers receive a little parcel of bits it will be another little job to keep your fingers out.

Remember me to all. The sudden halt is a battle-order for tonight just coming up. All the best.

Pete.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/items/show/6540. You can read the full letter here, as well as a transcription.

Lamprey suggests in this extract that it is preferable to fly operations to Italy than to Germany (‘Happy Valley’ is the Ruhr valley, the German industrial heartland). What are his reasons? How does he view the Germans and Italians?
**SOURCE 9: SUPPORTING THE RESISTANCE**

The Allies supported Resistance movements in occupied Europe by means of airdrops. Normally they took place under cover of darkness, the drop point marked by fires or lights. This page from a logbook records a drop to the Partisans. Details of the cargo are not provided but usually included weapons, ammunition, medical supplies, clothing and food.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/items/show/10243

Use the map for source 9 in Section 9 and try to find Chiapovano (Čepovan), a rural hamlet in western Slovenia. Why do you think the supplies were dropped in such a remote location? Does the name on the map match the record in the logbook?
Source 10: Operation Honours

In European military tradition, ‘honours’ are an official acknowledgement of achievements in specific campaigns or operations, usually in the form of a medal, or flag, or other ceremonial object. Individual aircrew serving in bomber squadrons and units won a high number of personal honours during the war.

This artwork is unusual, as it represents an unofficial form of honours to the crew of one aircraft, for an operation to Turin on 28/29 November 1942. Seven bombs are being released from the Lancaster’s bomb bay, each one inscribed with the name and rank of one of the crew. They will fall into Turin below, some of the buildings and the Po river just visible before the destruction, with a host of searchlights representing the attempts of those on the ground to defend the city from such attacks. The artwork belonged to one of the crew, Stanley Archer; maybe he was the artist?

While the Po river does actually cross Turin, its depiction here is an artistic convention. There is another artwork in the series that shows the bombs hitting their targets, at https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/961.


Why do you think the artist felt the need to capture the attack on Turin in this form? We know of a number of instances of aircrew chalking their names on the bombs that they carried to their targets. Why do you think they did this?
Recollections after the conflict

After demobilisation, most veterans wanted to return as quickly as possible to normal life and to leave the war behind them. When they reached retirement, however, many felt a growing desire to look back and memorialise their war experiences. This activity took many different forms: assembling scrapbooks, writing memoirs, granting interviews and participating in the construction of memorials at former air stations or crash sites.

SOURCE 11: AND THIS IS WHAT I CALL A TERROR RAID

This is an extract from an interview conducted by Annie Moody (AM) with veteran Harry Irons (HI) about a bombing operation to Milan on 24 October 1942. The interview took place in 2015 – nearly 73 years after the events he is recounting.

Harry Irons : Anyway, believe it or not, the target was Milan, and we was gonna bomb it, in daylight, taking it from a very, very low level ‘till we got to the Alps, we couldn’t go low level so we had to wander through the Alps, and there was ninety- two Lancasters, darting and diving through the Alps … and this is what I call a terror raid. We went across Lake Como about hundred feet then, we climbed to three hundred feet, and there was Milan waiting for us. No air raid shelter, no flack, they never expected British bombers to come all the way from England in daylight, never expected …

AM: Were you low enough to actually see people?
HI: It was, we was that low, we dropped down to about a hundred feet, hundred and fifty feet over Milan, we could see everybody in the streets, in the restaurants, we could see ‘em all. And we see ‘em started running about, there was no alarm given, and the city was completely open, and imagine ninety-two Lancs with six one thousand pounders on. We caused absolute havoc there, and a few of the boys I know were machine gunning, which I thought was wrong. Anyway, we climbed up again, came back, slid our way through the Alps …

AM: What did you feel about that then? The fact that you could actually see people?
HI: Oh we could see ‘em yeah, yeah because we –
AM: What did you, did you talk about it afterwards?
HI: No, we never talked about air raids, never mentioned it

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7906

Why do you think Irons identifies this attack as a ‘terror raid’? Think of the conditions he witnessed in Milan at the time, as well as the fact of the interview taking place so long after the event. This scene seems to confirm the arguments of at least one theorist of air war. Have a look at source 3.
SOURCE 12: WE HAD NO MORE BOMBS TO GIVE THEM

This is an account by veteran David Donaldson of an operation to bomb the Fiat works in Turin.

It was one of those clear moon-light nights and the stars seem stand out in the sky. You feel you can put out your hand and grab one. As we flew on toward the Alps we could make out some of the little mountain villages against the background of snow. You could see their lights twinkling in the trees. The aircraft was going wonderfully well and we cleared the highest mountains by 3 or 4000 feet. We could see the ridges and peaks well defined and the moon shining on the snow. Flying over this sort of scenery was something completely new to us and pretty awe-inspiring because the nearest we got to it that was on the Munich raid when we’d seen the Bavarian Alps in the distance. The navigator came up and pointed out Mont Blanc away on our port side, he was able to identify it from its shape because he actually climbed it. He was telling us how he was beaten by the weather when he had got to within 600 feet of the summit. Immediately we got to the other side of the Alps with no snow about it seemed by comparison intensely dark for a bit, it was like coming out from a lightened room into the blackout. Soon after that we started to glide down, losing height very gradually and arrived slightly west of Turin. Other planes were already over the target because you could see their flares and there was a barrage of anti-aircraft fire in the sky. Our target was the Fiat works, and the whole time we were looking for them we were still gliding down to our bombing height. Actually we picked the works up in the light of somebody else’s flare. They were unmistakable. I’d never had such a target before. There seemed to be acres of factory buildings. We almost wept afterwards because we hadn’t got any more bombs to give them. Having located our target, we flew four or five miles away, turned round and made our run up over it. The wireless operator came along and stood beside me to have a look at the bombing, otherwise he wouldn’t have seen anything from his usual position. When he saw the light flak coming up from the works he said ‘Gosh, look at the Roman candles’. We made two attacks. As we came round afterwards to have a look, the fires which we’d started were going strong. There was a big orange-coloured fire burning fiercely inside one block of buildings. Having finished the job, we climbed to get enough height to cross the Alps again. Altogether we were over or round about the town for three quarter of an hour, and, whilst circling to get height we saw somebody hit the Royal Arsenal good and proper.

Why does Donaldson regret they had no more bombs to drop on their target? It is interesting to compare his account of the Alps, recalled 70 years afterwards, with that of Dawson’s (source 7), written just hours afterwards. How similar are they, and why do you think they were so memorable?
Some of those involved in wartime bombing came to regret the destructive role they had played, and this dominated their later lives. Walter Miller is an example.

Walter M. Miller was 20 years old and serving with the US Army Air Forces as the Allies pushed north up the Italian peninsula. He was one of those involved in operations on the 15 February 1944 – the day that the Abbey of Monte Cassino, the oldest in the western world, was destroyed.

When he realised what he had been part of, he was gripped by trauma and guilt. After the war, he converted to Catholicism and turned to writing. His most famous work, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, appeared in 1959; it has never been out of print. It is set in a future time after a nuclear devastation. All knowledge has been destroyed and survivors mostly struggle with radiation damage and do not know how to read or write. An order of monks has dedicated itself to gathering whatever scraps of the old civilisation they can find.

Even though its themes are so dark, it is also full of humour, representing the human capacity for gentleness and compassion. Miller later acknowledged that the ideas in the novel were based on the destruction of Monte Cassino. There are similarities between H G Wells’s and Walter Miller’s work: both point to humanity’s terrifying capacity for self-destruction, as well as a deep nostalgia for things that have been lost forever.

Do you think our experience of the coronavirus pandemic is similar to a ‘before and after’ crisis like Miller’s? In what sense is it (or not) like a war? What might we have lost forever?
3. Dealing with Danger
Whether you were in military uniform or a civilian, old or young, total war meant living with constant danger. People developed many different kinds of coping mechanisms, such as belief in lucky objects and the performance of rituals to protect against harm.

These beliefs may seem irrational to us now, but in wartime they gave people a sense that they could control their fate a little: death tended to be highly arbitrary.

Although bombs mostly fell in urban centres, rural areas also felt threatened. People took refuge in various forms of superstition and religious belief, not only for comfort but also for luck. The wearing of crucifixes and other religious symbols played a similar role to the charms and mascots that aircrew carried.

**Lucky charms**

A complex system of beliefs and rituals emerged in RAF Bomber Command and in bomber groups of the US Army Air Force. Commonly, individual aircrew would carry personal talismans for luck, such as a coin whose date added up to 13 (for example 1921 or 1930), babies’ shoes, a photo of a wife or sweetheart, an item of women’s clothing or a childhood toy. The crew together might also have a mascot that accompanied them on all operations. They knew that the casualty rate was very high; shared beliefs in these objects helped to reduce tension and build a sense of solidarity.

Many aircrew believed that there was one missile (a bullet or a piece of flak, for example) ‘out there’, with ‘their name on it’ and their lucky talismans would help them to avoid it. This is an exact reverse of the names inscribed on bombs in source 10.
Source 14: Lucky cards

This card belonged to Gordon Cruikshank, who served in RAF Bomber Command throughout the war. It belonged to a pack, which was one of his lucky charms. On each of the 52 cards in the pack, he recorded the details of one completed operation.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/17789, where you can see the full pack.

Note the date and the target on this card, as well as the number of Lancaster aircraft. Now return to source 11. Who was in one of the other Lancasters?
This airmen doll belonged to a New Zealand pilot, Jack Hoffeins. He carried it as a good luck charm in all the operations he flew over the Middle East and Italy during the Second World War.

Just months after the end of the war, in September 1945, Hoffeins was flying 16 New Zealand aircrew home in a Dakota aircraft. Radio contact was lost when the Dakota was somewhere over the Pacific Ocean; the aircraft, crew and passengers were never found.

Hoffeins did not have his doll with him on that flight, which explains how it has survived. During the war, aircrew considered it unlucky to return to collect anything once they had left their quarters to attend the briefing before an operation. Maybe Hoffeins still observed that superstition, even though the war was over, which is why he flew without it.

Do you have a treasured possession that brings you luck? Why do you think we still believe in luck?
**3. Dealing with Danger**

**Aircraft as evil spirits**

When facing acute danger, people have often turned to old or alternative belief systems, not only to help them to try to comprehend the threats but to provide comfort (and maybe a strategy for survival).

**Source 16: Wielding a broom and yelling**

In traditional communities, beliefs in magic remained strong. Magic was invoked to banish threats and protect against evil. In this example, the threat is approaching bomber aircraft. Speranza Piras remembers an elderly relative’s reactions.

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I remember aunt Maria, an elderly woman. Poor soul, when the bombers flew over, she stood under a tree wielding a broom and yelling: ‘I cast a spell on you! I cast a spell on you!’ while she was trying to keep away them.
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https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7648

Speranza Piras tells us that Aunt Maria was elderly. Do you think this is an important element explaining her reaction to the aircraft?
**Source 17: Pippo**

Pippo was believed to be an aircraft that flew over northern Italy at night, during the last years of the war. No-one actually saw it but claimed it had a distinctive sound. People also believed that Pippo would aim directly at your house if you left any lights on. It was reputed to drop particularly nasty weapons, because they were disguised as candy and pens. Some were sure it was a British or American plane, others maintained it was a German one. While Allied aircraft actually flew over Italy bombing or strafing, Pippo’s uncanny capability was most likely a figment of the imagination.

Here is the artist Angiolino Filiputti’s impression of Pippo. He portrays it as ghost-like, wreaking havoc nonetheless. Note the artistic licence: bombers were painted dark, whereas white is associated with shadowy things that scare us, like ghosts.

The caption translates as: 23 February 1945, time: 20.30 S GIORGIO DI NOGARO [a town in the Friuli region], MARITTIMA road and some alleys are hit by bombs and small bombs clusters dropped by an English [sic] night bomber known as “PIppo”.

How might one explain the origins of the superstition about Pippo?
**Source 18: A Premonition**

This is the testimony of a survivor of the bombings in Voghera. As a child he developed what he calls premonitions. One premonition possibly saved his and his mother's life.

I've always had these sort of things... Premonitions - I can't really explain how they worked. A sort of presentiment before the event. 'Mom' – I said – 'we must run away right now - they're coming to bomb us'. Mom did not want to go, and she tried in any way to resist. She was cooking, pasta was on the fire. I insisted so many times until she put me in her arms and dashed down the stairs. At that point the muffled sound of incoming airplanes was already perceptible.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/items/show/7929

Is there a link between premonition and superstition?
4. CHILDREN UNDER THE BOMBS
Children’s lives were deeply affected by wartime conditions. Many fathers or older brothers disappeared to fight on faraway fronts, leaving women and children with extra family responsibilities. Communication via post was slow and difficult. Many children were directly displaced by fighting, or temporarily evacuated to a place of safety. This meant severe disruption to their friendships and schooling.

Often there were food shortages and they felt acute hunger for the first time. They also had to cope with the constant threat of aerial bombardment and were required to learn new air raid drills. Around 60 000 Italians were killed by Allied bombs; children were among the casualties.

The sources in this section reveal how children adapted to wartime conditions and tried hard to maintain a sense of ordinariness in their everyday lives.

**Memories of wartime childhood**

The memories of childhood in wartime presented below were recalled many decades afterwards. They have been filtered through experiences of growing up, possibly marrying and having children, work and retirement. In spite of the ways memories change over time, these testimonies remain important for giving us a sense of what the bombing war was like for children.
SOURCE 19: LEARNING FROM LIFE

Gualtiero Silvio Cosolo, from Monfalcone, talks about his childhood under the bombs. The menace from the sky severely disrupts his schooling. Yet he remembers these years with pride: children were resourceful and carried on learning and playing, despite hardships.

We kids had to run away when the sirens went off, but we had to make up for the hours lost in the morning by attending supplementary classes in the afternoon. When this happened, we had to prepare our lunch with cans of pasta or soup taken from home, and warm them up in the street. We passed the tunnel, went up to the Rocca fort on the hill, and there kindled a fire on some rocks to warm our pots up. We used that time to catch up with the lessons. I don’t want to brag, but kids nowadays always complain, moaning about this and that. Instead, we had to adapt to this kind of thing to survive. Clearly, our education suffered from it but what I learnt at school is nothing compared to what I learnt when left to my own devices. Reading, attending courses, and all that. I needed to make up for what I did not learn in school. They used to take us to Monfalcone in the cattle car with the workers, and then we walked to school. We finished at midday and we had to walk back home from Monfalcone, it took at least two hours. We always played in the streets, no matter how serious the situation was: kids being kids, they always want to crack jokes and play.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/452

Gualtiero Silvio Cosolo is critical of children today, compared to what he experienced in the war. Do you think today’s young people always moan and complain?
Efrem Colombi describes the first Milan bombing he witnessed, on 20 October 1944.

The first proper bombing I saw was that of 1944. I was in via Livraghi playing with my friends. We used to play there every day, in the early morning. At that time I was supposed to go to a different boarding school here in Milan, the Don Guanella one. That morning, around eleven, five to eleven, ten to eleven, I don’t know … 103 planes, you would hear them, wouldn’t you. You hear the wrooom because you hear them from afar. I raised my head and saw the sky darkened by airplanes. It was a sunny day, the sky so clear I could see the Grigna mountain because there were none of the buildings that are there now. There were no high-rise buildings, just the railway tracks. You could see the Monte Rosa on one side and the Grigna on the other. In Milan the sky was always clear, there was no pollution like now, air could circulate … I raised my head and saw all these planes, and while I was looking they dropped the first bombs.

[Interviewer]: Do you know where they fell?

The first fell on via Pelitti, the house remained in ruins until 7-8 years ago, when it was rebuilt. But it’s still there. The attack started there, and I said to my father ‘run away!’.

It was a farmland, with wheat fields. In May, waiting for the girls coming out of church, there were hay bales all around. We used to hide there and scare the girls, pranks, having fun, we were kids, weren’t we? And I remember this scene, like in a slow-motion sequence: there was this beam from a farmhouse, rising up in the sky while burning. It was going up and then all of a sudden suddenly wrooom and it went down.’
Source 21: It looked like fireworks

Anna Maria Baccolini witnessed the bombing of Turin as a young girl. The fires caused by the bombs are a mix of marvel and terror.

On the balcony, with daddy and mum... It was a show, it looked like a firework show, fires everywhere. A whole train buffer, with part of a railway car, was thrown in the courtyard of the Mira Lanza [soap and candle factory in Turin]. That made me realise the danger. Furthermore, the explosions smashed all the sandbags used to protect the basement windows which broke and there was plenty of sand and dust. Dad protected me by hiding me inside his long coat.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/228

Anna’s father tried to hide her inside his coat. What was the purpose of that gesture?
**SOURCE 22: IT WAS DANGEROUS AND COLD, WE WERE HUNGRY, BUT WE KEPT PLAYING**

Paolo Bottani was evacuated to Crema but returned to Milan when the situation in Crema deteriorated.

In Crema there were no shelters like they had in Milan. In Milan almost all the houses had underground shelters in the basement. Not in Crema, no one thought they could bomb there. The populace was less prepared. Thus, people remained in their homes, and there you could feel the blast, I used to hang on to my auntie in a corner of the house, because you could feel the house trembling, ‘Ooooh, it’s falling, it’s falling!’ It was terrible. In Crema I was strafed by a machine gun, I barely survived: the fighters were on their way, and that was a spot where columns of German soldiers used to come on their way between Cremona and Milan.

Once, when we were children, we were playing on the street and a couple of fighters arrived, suddenly, without the sirens signalling the attack, otherwise we would not have been still there. These fighters arrived ‘Aaaah! Pa-pa-pa-papam!’, they started shooting, we did not know where to go, they were shooting at the sides of the road and I threw myself into a house doorway. The planes went away, luckily without hitting anyone. And after a shooting, we kids used to pick up the cartridges for selling, because they were made of brass, and we could make a little money to buy sweets when they were available.

My parents, seeing that Crema was being bombed just like Milan, decided it was better to bring me back to Milan. They brought me back at the end of the 4th school year and enrolled me in the Precotto school. Ironically, there were no more places there, so I was supposed to go Gorla school, where there was that massacre that killed 200 people.

Life in Precotto during the war was horrible, people were really scared, and as I said in Milan sirens went off often, but we children got used to that kind of life. We kept playing, nonetheless. It was dangerous and cold, we were hungry, but we kept playing.

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**Why is play such an important part of childhood? How might it help children in situations of hardship, fear and danger?**

[https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/273](https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/273)
**Children’s contributions to the war effort**

All across Europe, children and young people contributed in many important ways to the war effort: keeping a lookout for enemy aircraft, helping in family businesses, harvesting crops, working in factories, helping those who were injured, foraging for food and salvaging goods to sell.

**SOURCE 23: WE SAW A BIG FLAME AND THAT WAS IT**

Gilberto Martina spent his childhood in the Carnia region. After each bombing, he and other children used to look for things to salvage among the debris. This was driven partly by curiosity, partly by the opportunity to gather scrap metal for sale.

One day, going through the debris looking for stuff to salvage, a child who was two years younger than me died. There was a bomb, a kind of onion bomb, and it exploded in his hands. That is the only tragic memory of my childhood, seeing that child dying while we were there, three or four of us - we saw a big flame and that was it.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7761

**Look again at source 22, together with the one above. List all the dangers mentioned that children faced in wartime.**
Children under the bombs

A few months after he came home my father went by train to the Po valley rice fields south of Milan to see if he could buy rice. He returned empty handed, and it was the first and last time I saw my father burst into tears. A few weeks after this, desperate for food, he went to the Po valley again. This time he took me with him. We tramped from farm to farm - long, hot, seemingly endless dusty roads. We had many refusals, some polite, some not, some offered to sell us any amount we wanted but at exorbitant prices. Finally we found a farm where we bought rice and maize at a high but reasonable price. The rice was for eating but my father wanted the maize for seed.

The return journey by train was, no doubt, a nightmare for my father but very exciting and enjoyable for me. We finally got on an already crowded train with many people clinging to the sides. We managed to stand on the buffers between two carriages with our suitcases full of rice and maize, I well remember my father clutching me tightly. We stopped at one point and a long train passed by slowly heading south, it appeared to be an entire German division, flat car after flat car loaded with tanks, and on every flat car German steel-helmeted soldiers at the front and back with rifles. This was the first time I saw German soldiers, I was to see many more ...

The rice didn’t last long, but my father felled all the mulberry trees on a plot of family land and dug the entire field by hand. He made me dig too but my contribution was very small. The mulberry trees were grown for feeding silkworms, which the women of the area specialised in rearing before the war. (I saw the last season of rearing silkworms in 1940). Every square foot was planted with grano turco (maize) and after that we subsisted mainly on ‘polenta’ until 1945. We were always hungry, but my father made sure we didn’t starve. He knew every mushroom and wild plant that you could eat. We caught and ate every kind of animal, every sort of bird. We caught and ate frogs, snails, freshwater shrimp, hedgehogs, and on one occasion, a squirrel. From mid-1943 we also kept guinea pigs, which were another useful supply of protein.

This is the testimony of Peter Ghirighelli, who was born in Leeds in the north of England. His whole family were deported to Italy in 1940 when he was ten years old. His father was conscripted and fought in Yugoslavia before being discharged. Here, Peter describes their efforts to find food.

Source 24: Helping to Feed the Family

Which of the sources of food that Peter found are still acceptable to eat today?
Protecting children

Children represented hope for the future and the prospect of reconstruction and peace. Authorities in every war-torn country made various plans to protect them: to provide them with food, clothing and shelter and to teach them how to avoid the bombs. All too often, such measures were not enough.

Source 25: Layette ration card

There was a rationing system in place for all scarce goods, including food and clothing. This unused ration card, from the city of Trieste, is for an allocation of yarns and textiles to make a layette.

Putting together a layette is a time-honoured tradition in many cultures: women would hand-sew or knit items of clothing for the baby during their pregnancy, in anticipation and readiness for the birth. In wartime, this tradition became part of a broader campaign to encourage families to be self-reliant: to make their own clothes and grow their own food. Making clothing was almost exclusively a woman’s task. Children often helped to grow food, as we have seen in source 24.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/3532

In what ways are we urged to be self-reliant today? How have women’s and children’s domestic roles changed since the Second World War?
SOURCE 26: LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Here is a board game that was devised in the late 1930s specifically to teach children how to protect themselves in a bombing attack. Note that it includes instructions in the event of the use of poison gas – this was a particularly strong fear through the 1930s.

See if you can play the game! You can download a printable version at the link above. The instructions at the bottom of the board read:

Number of players is unlimited. Two dice are required. Order of players to be drawn before start, after paying a fixed fee to the bank. Each player’s piece is moved according to throws of two dice and must follow the instructions by going forward or backward. Upon arriving at a square, one must follow the instruction given and then wait for their turn (e.g. the player who reaches square 20 is entitled to go to square 35 and wait there for their turn). After square 76 only one dice must be used. The player who first arrives at square 78 wins. Translations of each square are in the suggestions in Section 9.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/270
5. LIBERATORS OR TORMENTORS?
Italy was the only country that entered the Second World War on one side of the conflict and ended it on the other. Before the Armistice of 8 September 1943, the Allies bombed Italian cities and strategic installations as enemy forces (have a look again at sources 7, 10 and 11, for example). After the Armistice, they carried on relentlessly promising that this would result in liberation from the occupying German forces and the end of the Italian Social Republic puppet state. Operating behind German lines, the Resistance supported the Allies’ efforts. Fighting ended only in May 1945, at the same time the war came to an end all over Europe.

But how could those on the ground, witnessing close up the death and destruction that the bombs caused, treat those in the aircraft above as ‘liberators’? How could you thank those who caused so much damage? These questions were asked at the time and have been asked ever since. Bombing has left a divided legacy in Italy, one that, even after so long, remains unresolved. For some, there was always a sense of helplessness in this situation. For others, the bitterness felt at the time has eased into acceptance, while for yet others, the bitterness remains strong.

The testimonies in this section were collected recently among elderly survivors of those times. They display a range of emotions that are clearly still deeply felt.

**Tormentors?**

These testimonies reflect the belief that the Allies were causing deliberate harm, or that their actions were making matters worse rather than being conducive to ending the war. Some also allocate disproportionate blame between the British and Americans.
When we were kids the country was occupied by German troops. It was the Allies who were bombing us, the Americans, the Anglo-Americans. Allies were loathed because they were causing more damage than the German troops stationed in town. Later, when the Allied troops marched in as liberators (they were mainly British) many people climbed onto the tanks to insult them and spit in their faces. No one reacted. People were furious. The Americans, the Anglo-Americans, were to blame because they caused all the damage. They were constantly bombing the railway – they wanted to destroy it and weren’t able to hit it. They dropped around 100 bombs on a bridge, which is now called Ponte per aria [bridge in the air] but they never hit it. Those were not today’s intelligent bombs, they were stupid bombs. Many exploded, but most remained embedded in the river … After so many years, there is not so much wrath left. Being enraged against a person… They must obey orders, it’s not that they could decide on their whim. At that time if was fine because you had to put together a meal - you came back home and all the windows had been shattered, everything was in shambles, and then you blamed them, you cursed them, you insulted them and prayed. ‘Why are they doing this? We are allies. How do you call them Liberators? Liberators of what?’ They destroy more than they help. That’s the truth. Now I don’t feel any guilt, regret or rage, for the German or Allied troops. They have done more harm than good, at least in our area. I don’t know about other places.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7761

Why has Gilberto Martina decided that there is no point to his rage? (Consider also his testimony in source 23.)
After they got rid of Mussolini, Badoglio stepped in and they made the compromise. We were told that: ‘Now the Americans and the British will come, the war is going to be over soon, it will be fine.’ Instead that was the beginning of a massacre the other way around, because we were bombed by the Americans and the British. Obviously, there was the German anti-aircraft artillery, but the bombs were… How can I explain it? It was like seeing silver birds, one next to the other. They were American or British. And they were bombing us, they almost destroyed Bologna - they did it. And we were there, we could not understand it clearly. We were not asking too many questions. But they were supposed to save us, and they were killing us, how was that possible? We couldn’t understand the reasons, who decided that, who was issuing the orders to do such things. This is why it was all upside down, because it was the Americans and the British [who did that]. We did not gain much from them, can you see that? …. Bologna, which had since been a kind of safe haven, was completely destroyed. That was the actual ending of the war. Later they arrived marching and we welcomed them warmly, sure, all the honours, but that time was not one of the best. I don’t know who decided it, because I don’t know about these things, but… Why?

Lucia Muratori lived in Bologna during the war. She describes the false promise of an early end to war very vividly. Despite the terrible destruction, she remembers the citizens of Bologna welcoming the Allies, unlike the local people in Gilberto Martina’s story.

SOURCE 28: THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

Lucia Muratori’s sense of confusion, even so many decades after the events she describes, is very strong. Can you think of reasons for why ordinary people were so confused?
Ah! Sons of a bitch … when they arrived after the liberation, they did not send in the British as the first troops to enter the city, they sent the Americans. This was because people did not hate them as much as people hated the British. I can assure you that for a certain period of time we did not get along much with the United Kingdom. This [interview] is for a British project, and I’m sorry to say this, but they have to know that they were not loved by the Italians at that time. Not at all.

What do you think may have been the reasons for Tito Samoré feeling positive about Americans and negative about the British?

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/show/428
5. Liberators or tormentors?

**Source 30: Spiritual destruction**

Annamaria De Manzano Vici, of Trieste, describes a different kind of torment in her testimony. It is not so much related to the physical destruction; it is more about the destruction of inner, spiritual peace.

Sadly, there’s no difference between those who flew aircraft which [helped] win the war, those who were shot down, or those who have only wreaked wanton destruction. I don’t think that, after having done this, they managed to persuade themselves that it was done in the interest of their own country. I can’t think that. I see these men like robots, themselves being controlled by other people, other forces, in order to do things that only brought about desperation, pain and painful memories. I think many of these pilots can cast themselves as heroes but the only thing that bombing achieves is more than material destruction, a spiritual destruction.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7767

Annamaria De Manzano Vici sees no distinction between air crew who survived the war and who were killed on operations. Why do you think she felt this way?
Liberators?

In a sense, all those who offer a view that the Allies were liberators experienced similar circumstances under the bombs as those in sources 28 to 30. Yet as these testimonies below reveal, opinions remain sharply divided.

**Source 31: They destroyed our house, but they freed us. Hurray for the Allies!**

Tullio Magnani, from Pavia, blames the Fascists for the war and therefore is able to treat the Americans as liberators, even though his family suffered extensively.

Even the Fascists called them liberators, ironically, between quotation marks, but for us they were that, despite all the tragedy [of war]. The Fascist regime wanted the war, not the Americans, therefore … My family, as for many other families, were living in such bad conditions that we were waiting for the Americans to arrive. They destroyed our house, but they freed us. Hurray for the Allies!

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/718

Tullio Magnani makes a connection between destruction and freedom. How might we explain this connection?
5. Liberators or tormentors?

**Source 32: I never felt that the pilots were enemies**

Alberto Dini from Trieste provides his opinion of the aircrew.

[The Allies] chose the most efficient way to inflict as much damage as possible on the occupier. I never felt that the pilot was an enemy of my homeland, an enemy of Italy. Those who came to drop bombs, were coming to bomb the Germans who were occupying Italy. I never felt that the pilots were enemies.

Interestingly, Alberto Dini’s sense that this was ‘nothing personal’ was far more common among combatants than among civilians. Can you think of reasons for this?

**Source 33: Americans came here and helped us**

Giuseppe Pirovano, from Milan, talks about his commitment to keep the memory of the bombings alive. He sees this as a moral obligation, as the Allies sacrificed themselves for the liberation of the country. The pain suffered was the price to pay for freedom.

I’ll tell you what: I’ve been asked many times to go to the shelters and talk about the bombings and the war. The youngsters, let’s say from 14 to 18 years old, don’t talk, don’t ask questions and flounder [when they speak]. It’s very tiring. Sometimes, clever questions come out. One asked me: ‘What do you think about the Americans? They killed your father’. And I replied: ‘Listen, the war was finished, we were free, I felt that at last we are free from the Fascist yoke. That sacrifice was unavoidable, I think. What should I do? All things considered, can I hate the Americans since many of them died to come and save us? American soldiers were doing fine in the US, but they came here and helped us to become free. Sure, they caused damage, but what can we say?’

How important do you think it is to be able to draw on the memories of those who lived through the war? How highly do people value these remaining living links to the war?
Resignation

These testimonies reveal insights beyond the ‘either/or’ divide of the previous examples. Here there is a sense that ‘history must take its course’ – certain actions lead, inevitably, to certain conclusions.

**SOURCE 34: THEY DID NOT CARE ABOUT CIVILIANS**

Efrem Colombi, from Milan, accepts that brutality in warfare is inevitable. There is some wartime myth in his account (about the V2 attacks on London) but behind the myth is a deeper truth: in a total war, civilians are at the mercy of military forces.

I saw all the aerial photos taken by the RAF. All annotated: this is the Breda factory, this is the Pirelli factory. Then, that was one of the many reprisal bombings ordered by Churchill. Churchill wanted to force the population to react against the Germans. The Italian army was ignored, and Churchill used the same tactic he used in his own country, in England: in order to avoid the Royal Palace being hit, he placed the outskirts of London within the targets of V2s [German missiles]. They have admitted to that, haven’t they? He did not care at all about civilians. Anyway, I think they were British, I read that none of them ever said he regretted it, because it was an act of war and they had to carry it out.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/398

There is a strong sense of fatality in Efrem Colombi’s account, that civilians are powerless in the face of war. How strong do you think a similar sense of powerlessness is today, in the face of the coronavirus pandemic? How have ordinary people reacted to the spread of the pandemic?
The bombing of civilians changed the sentiment among the populace. People were in an inner turmoil. After that you could hear ‘But they are bombing us’. There was anger, it was natural, they were bombing us. We are those to blame. Blame for what? Our fault was to have started the war. And even we kids knew that we could not win the war, and it was a tragedy. First of all, we did not have the fighting capacity of the Germans. Not at all. Then, having seen the reports by the veterans from the Greece campaign… disasters, unbelievable, things done without organisation. Then we started to say that we Italians had been wrong in starting this war, and accepted the war that way. The punishment, maybe was too harsh: being bombed and dying, but it’s the war. We said: ‘That’s it. We haven’t got any choice. We had to suffer, and we suffered.’

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7769

**The sense of tragedy is important in this account. Investigate the meaning of tragedy and apply it to the bombing war in Italy.**
6. THE GORLA MASSACRE
The districts of Gorla and Precotto in Milan were home to numerous industries and workshops devoted to the war effort. On 20 October 1944, the Allies’ targets were various works, among them Alfa Romeo, Breda and Isotta Fraschini. This was part of a wider plan to hamper the German war effort by disrupting vital supplies.

The attack occurred in daylight and in favourable weather conditions. Yet one of the bomber groups missed their target and instead released their bombload over densely populated housing areas.

At the Francesco Crispi elementary school in the Gorla district, many children, teachers and caretakers were in the school stairwell, hurrying to the underground shelter as the warning siren sounded. A bomb exploded directly on that part of the building, killing 184 children. In surrounding streets, some 450 civilians were also killed, including 19 nuns.

Milan experienced many months of bombing but what happened on the 20 October 1944 became one of the most dramatic episodes of the bombing war in Italy.

**Eyewitnesses to the Gorla bombing**

The testimonies below were provided by survivors of the Gorla bombing. Some still believe that attacking civilians was deliberate policy, while others focus more on the ‘miracle’ of their own survival.
6. The Gorla Massacre

I endured all the Milan bombings, from 1940 to 1945, and the terrible ones in 1943 as well. Luckily my house was never hit, and I managed to survive. But I saw terrible things with my own eyes. I am a first-hand witness of the Gorla school bombing. It is an historical event and, I think, it is mentioned in some school textbooks too. I am a witness of that massacre. The bombing was a typical example of the reprisals of the Allied Forces on the Germans and the Fascists here in Milan. They deliberately destroyed a school, where more than 300 people were killed, children, teachers, all people who were there.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/411

Antonio Bozzetti was in his early 20s when this massacre took place. How might his adult life after this event have shaped his memories?

Source 37: An unbelievable thing

In this detailed testimony, Marco Pederielli tells how he escaped death thanks to a series of chance events that saved his life. The shock of the event has left a mark on him, conditioning his judgement and emotional responses: life becomes a miracle in its own right and small setbacks are unimportant.
I was a small boy, I did not know my classmates because I had not attended the previous year. That day I went to school, a few hundred yards from the home we were renting. Around 11 the early warning went off and all the children were about to be brought down to the shelter. We were in the second year, and, together with those of the first year, we went down first. The older children went down after us, and maybe some of them survived. At the school gate, I remembered that my mum, on a beautiful day, had given me a little coat. Then I left my classmates, went back up the stairs … took the coat and ran down again. It was 11.15, the alarm went off, and everybody had gone into the shelter. The caretaker, who had been standing at the gate so as not to let anyone out of school, was already in the shelter with all the children. I saw the open gate and I ran outside, onto the street. I started to run towards home, because I knew where it was, more or less. I clearly saw the planes and heard such scary noises, they started to drop the bombs, I actually saw the bombs falling down, and the noises have remained in my head ever since. An unbelievable thing.

It is not true that the bombs were falling down from 2,000 metres, they were very low. Luckily, in front of the church there was a grocery store, and the owner knew me. He grabbed me and said: ‘Where are you going? Come, come, I’ll bring you to the shelter’. While he was talking me there, a bomb exploded in the churchyard, but I was already in the building and ended up in the basement, where a small shelter had been built. Those who remained in the streets died, crushed… And I survived.

Around 11.45 it was all over, dust had covered everything in the neighbourhood. I went out and started to run towards home and I finally saw my mum, who was crossing a field to come towards me. I hugged her and we went to the shelter we had in our house.

There we started to feel that something horrible could have happened, people were asking: ‘Where are the others?’ ‘No, I left before them, on my own.’ ‘What, how? My daughter, my son, where are they?’ ‘Eh, they are probably still at school, they went down to the shelter.’ But no one knew anything. Then my father went to the square and it was all silent. He was jumping from one pile of rubble to the next, without realising… Such a silence. On his bike he arrived at the shelter: ‘Checco, where is Marco?’ ‘Ah! Here he is!’ ‘But the others?’, ‘I don’t know, they will probably still be…’, ‘I don’t think they are there, maybe they left earlier…’ There was such a shocking silence. After a while people started to realise that the children were trapped under the school. So, he dressed up and went to help trying to pull those kids out, but they realised that they were pretty much all dead. Because one or two bombs fell exactly through the school stairwell …

Later I always felt that surviving had been a miracle, and it conditioned all my life: when I lose something, I don’t care at all, I don’t give importance to that. I say to myself ‘If I’ve lost it, it was better losing it than having it, then’.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7941

Extract from this testimony all the chance events that led Marco Pederielli to believe that his survival had been a miracle.
The moment the siren went off, we children were rounded up and our teachers hastily shepherded us down into the shelter. We were in high spirits, none of us realised that we were about to be bombed. We cheered because our class had been disrupted. Yeah, that’s true happiness! In the shelter we had a good time: horseplay, you know, what children do. After a while, point blank, the lights went out. Gosh! What’s going on? Then a terrible rumble came, the building shook and trembled, and rubble fell on me. Smell of dust and sulphur. Some children crying, others moaning, one was covered in blood. At that point we realised how serious the situation was. I retained my composure nonetheless. I’m sincere in saying that: I was fairly calm. Oh, yes, afraid but calm. After about ten minutes Father Carlo Porro assembled a rescue party of three or four volunteers, realised that we were trapped below and opened a small passage through which we were rescued. I was the penultimate to leave. The teachers remained calm and collected and managed to keep us under control. They formed a queue, pushed us up through a slope of rubble, so we reached the ceiling and someone from outside pulled us up, as if we were salamis. The familiar urban landscape had changed beyond recognition. … No living souls around, only deserted streets covered with rubble. I was walking alone covered in dust when I saw a derailed tram out of the tracks, and a bleeding horse without a hoof, moaning pitifully. But there were no people at all. When they extracted me from the shelter, I felt really lonely, that struck me. Only then I found the man that then took me home.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/249

Compare sources 37 and 38: what are Paolo Bottani’s and Marco Pederielli’s most vivid memories of the aftermath of the bombing?
Efrem Colombi witnessed the destruction at both the Antonio Rosmini and the Francesco Crispi primary schools. It may be that he did not attend school that day, or perhaps was due to attend the afternoon session.

His excitement at running to see what had happened is abruptly terminated by the cries of the mothers at the sight of the first bodies extracted from the rubble.

What a bright idea! We children, three and four crazy children like me, started running towards the bombing. And then I saw the whole scene. I saw the bombed kindergarten in Precotto. Already three or four workers were there, my uncle Cesare was among them. The mothers, the grandmothers stopped us saying: ‘Where are you going? Aaaah!’. Someone said that the Gorla school my school had been hit, then I went there, and I saw that only the south-eastern part of the building was still standing. The bomb hit the stairwell destroying the whole of the south-western part. Up there was my classroom, the one I used to be in, you can see it in the photos, can’t you? There was the fire brigade, and the UNPA [Civil Defence organisation, militarised during the war], the soldiers that were not really soldiers. They were all digging and then the mothers started to cry because the first corpses were extracted. … I was there digging, my uncle sent me away when the dead children started to be extracted. I saw one or two of them, no more.

Efrem remembers that the mothers’ crying began at the point when the children’s bodies were dug out of the rubble. How could we explain the timing of their anguish?
Remembering the Gorla bombing

Five months after the infamous bombing, Allied troops entered Milan, ending the war. They were giving away coveted goods and promising to help rebuild Italy. Seemingly the only way to cope with the anger, resentment and grief was to suppress such feelings. However, the massacre was never forgotten.

SOURCE 40: THE MOTHERS OF THE VICTIMS CHEERED AMERICAN TROOPS

Paolo Bottani (see also source 38) describes here the changing ways in which the Gorla massacre has been remembered.

It is important to state that these commemorations were very limited for the first twenty years [after the war]. They built a beautiful memorial. The most important families – they knew each other, they were from Gorla – pushed for the memorial, to bring all the children into that ossuary ... with their names on it, and with their teachers. There was no talk about it, for a long time, because... There was some talk about it in Milan, but not much, only among those who had relatives, children ... When the Americans arrived on Viale Monza, the following year on the 25th of April, a few months after that massacre, the mothers of those children were there, taking chocolate and cigarettes and clapping the American troops. It struck me, they had lost their children, lost everything... And then, the Americans were clever, they were helping the country with the Marshall Plan, you could not say it was their fault. It was easier to blame it on the British, because they were more unpleasant, they seemed more unpleasant ...

One thing that needs to be stressed is that the families who suffered the worst losses formed an association, which in the years after the war gathered the funds to buy the marble and hire a prominent sculptor. This had been a very important act in a time where talking about that massacre was not very politically correct.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/249

Why do you think Paolo Bottani says that ‘talking about that massacre was not very politically correct’?
The memorial marking the place where the school once stood is remarkable in terms of its scale, artistic quality and enduring community support. Its size is imposing. The hooded figure holding the body of a child seems mysterious: who is it meant to be? The wording on the arch behind the figure reads:

**THIS IS WAR**

**20 – X – 1944**

**THE PEOPLE**

**CRY FOR 200 CHILDREN**

**KILLED BY THE WAR**

**HERE IN THEIR SCHOOL**

**WITH THEIR TEACHERS**

Carved reliefs show an aircraft arriving over intact houses on one column and an aircraft departing over ruined houses on the other. Underneath the memorial is an ossuary and small museum. As Paolo Bottani pointed out (source 40) the memorial was erected in 1952 by a local organisation. It was called The Little Martyrs of Gorla. The term ‘martyrs’ has implicit religious connotations; it is rarely used for other casualties of the bombing war.

The memorial was originally intended to commemorate the children. Since then, it has acquired a broader significance as a peace symbol and recognition of the civilian casualties of all wars. It is now a major example of how painful memories can be mobilised for public good: ceremonies, memorial services and vigils are regularly held.

Look carefully at the wording on the Memorial. Can you work out who was responsible for the bombing? How would you explain the phrase ‘killed by the war’?
**SOURCE 42: THE MEMORIAL IN POPULAR CULTURE**

The Gorla massacre has also been absorbed into popular culture. Here are two frames from a comic book series.

Elsa, the woman in the framed photograph, lost her daughter in the bombing. The tragedy - we are told elsewhere - has haunted her for the rest of her life. Her niece retells the story of the bombing to her own children, who listen in disbelief. Dialogue translates as follows:

Aunt Elsa’s daughter was among those children.
- My god! That was dreadful…
- Yes. That was a war crime. But people have not been talking much about it since the Allies, the ‘good’ guys, were behind it.

Source: ‘Caravan’, 8 (Jan 2010), Sergio Bonelli Editore, p. 38. Michele Medda (story), Maurizio Gradin and Werner Maresta (drawings).

Nowadays, young people are routinely exposed to a great deal of violence, frequently in rather graphic form, in news media, gaming and movies, and do not seem too perturbed by it. Why do you think the boy reacts so sharply to this story?
In more recent years, Italians have become interested in marking sites associated with the Second World War; this is a phenomenon across Europe. The memorial marker in the image below is an example. It commemorates the other school that was bombed on the 20 October 1944.

SOURCE 43: THE ANTONIO ROSMINI MEMORIAL

The sign translates as follows:

On 20 October 1944 an aerial bombing hit this building, which at that time housed the Antonio Rosmini primary school in Precotto. All children trapped inside the underground shelter were rescued just before the collapse by vicar Claudio Porro, recipient of the golden civic merit medal awarded by the Milan City Council. The citizens of Precotto.

Why do you think it took much longer to mark this event than the Gorla massacre? What information is emphasised and what omitted?
7. THE AFTERMATH OF THE BOMBING
Bombed-out cities, cold, hunger: this is what most Europeans experienced in the immediate aftermath of the war. In Italy, the American-led ‘economic miracle’ enabled people to move on and not to dwell too much on how the war should be remembered.

However, the war left physical and psychological scars. For many children, growing up meant coming to terms with disturbing memories and there was little support for those who had been traumatised. Not all who found themselves under the bombs developed trauma. Some recalled it as a time of excitement and freedom, while others claimed that the conflict had either left no traces or had prepared them better for life.

After the war, the physical danger was not yet over. There were unexploded bombs everywhere; they are still discovered today.

**The lingering pain of war**

Psychological trauma takes many forms, as the testimonies below reveal. Some manifest themselves in physical conditions.
**Source 44: I’m still terrorised at night**

Ada Dellaferrera, from the Po valley, was 11 years old when she set out on an errand for her mother. At the train station she was caught in an aircraft strafing attack. She narrowly escaped by hiding behind a wall. She reflects on the consequences.

One evening, around 9pm, mum asked me: ‘Can you go to the square to run an errand?’ It was the first evening they turned the lights off in the street, it was dark. ‘Yes, yes, I’ll go’. I went from home to the station walking past the walls, because I could not see where I was going. [With emphasis] I’m still terrorised now by the night, I don’t go anywhere in the dark.

I went to run this errand and came back. Mum asked me: ‘Why are you crying?’ ‘Mum, I’m crying because I’m scared of the dark’. I’ve always been scared of the dark ever since then: even today I don’t go anywhere at night if there’s not enough light. That night, as a child, on my own, left such a mark.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/257

Many young children have a fear of the dark but outgrow it as they develop. Ongoing fear of the dark is called nyctophobia. Ada Dellaferrera’s fear was not just about ordinary darkness; she was out of doors in the blackout. Why was the blackout important and how was it achieved?
7. The Aftermath of the Bombing

**Source 45: Bombs only bring ruin**

Annamaria De Manzano Vici life’s in Trieste was marked by constant rushes to the shelters. The bombing of 10 June 1944 left a permanent mark, when she discovered that her house had been hit.

One day, coming back from one of those rushes to the shelter, I found a sobering surprise. That moment we kids – including myself – realised that I could have been there if we had not run to the shelter. Had I stayed in that room, where we were just a few hours before, I could have been hit by debris dying in a terrible way like a pierced Saint Sebastian. Maybe this is why when I see a painting of Saint Sebastian I feel a peculiar shiver …

We kids saw all that, and we are still carrying the pain inside. The destruction of my home and the death of my grandmother spelt an end to my childhood, I haven’t been able to recover from the trauma I suffered as a young girl. When I think of my life, all the joys and the nice things haven’t been enough to offset my bleak and pessimistic view of world affairs, my vision of the world. This has brought recurring bouts of depression from which it is hard to get out …

I went as far as to reject war, aggression war, retaliation war, any form of war, not even a war of defence – I cannot contemplate it, I don’t understand it. … [The bombings] are the root of so much destruction and suffering: not only material ruins, but also permanent scars. Such wounds are so difficult to heal and become, for some people, the justification for waging war again as to restore justice. But war doesn’t bring justice, and bombs only bring ruin.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/257
SOURCE 46: I NEVER FLEW, NOT EVEN NOW

Celestino Chiesa from Pavia is still haunted by his wartime fears; he has been unable to fly.

They were bombing all the bridges and the main roads. Each time they saw something moving, they came down, strafing. I was targeted by one of those machine-guns. We were going to see a football match, Pavia vs. Novara. Piola played in the Novara team, the great Piola, and we were very happy to go. When we arrived near the stadium, we saw two planes, coming from the north, from Milan. We thought: ‘If they are going to bomb, they’ll bomb the marshalling yards, where the German trains are’. This is what happened, they dropped two bombs on the marshalling yards. We saw the planes and we fled in all directions, around 100 children. I was so scared by the planes, I ran towards the canal, but the planes got there first and fired at me. They missed me by just one metre, I was terrorised. Life went on but the terror of planes is still with me. I never flew, not even now.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7901

Today’s passenger planes are completely different from the attacking aircraft that Celestino Chiesa experienced as a child. Yet he is unable to contemplate flying in one. How do you think he makes an association between the menace of a strafing attack in childhood and jet travel today?
Moving on

For some, the war is either a distant memory or they have come to terms with trauma by becoming strongly opposed to the very notion of war.

**Source 47: I haven’t been traumatised by those things**

Guido Toccacieli from Milan remembers hunger but is sure he has not suffered any long term effects.

No, I’ve never felt fear. I looked at the other people being scared, I thought they were too scared. I never felt neither fear, nor hate. They were bombing us, granted, but that’s war. Thinking like that means being fatalistic. I haven’t been traumatised. I remember being hungry, sure, but it was not caused by that.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7769

**Source 48: I am a radical pacifist**

Paolo Bottani from Milan reacted to the pain of loss (as expressed in his accounts in sources 38 and 40) by completely rejecting war as a solution to international disputes.

What is left is that I hate war, any form of war. I cannot understand the need to go to war, at all. As a child I understood that the war was useless! So many of my friends died while they were still kids, so many dads died on the front line, so many mums left suffering and hungry. What did it leave us with, then? What? This is the question I ask myself. As an adult, the question remains. Is war worth it? We differentiate wars, according to the reasons behind them, but the aim is always the same, pointless. War creates only death and destruction, it does not create anything. These ideas grew on me, and now I am a radical pacifist.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/249

In peacetime, pacifists like Paolo Bottani educate people about peace and campaign against military expenditure. But how do they react if they find themselves living in a country at war?
Post-war physical danger

War leaves much military debris behind, including unexploded devices like bombs and mines. Many people were killed or maimed as a result of handling these. Some were men attached to bomb disposal units, while others were ordinary citizens, including many children.

Source 49: Don’t touch it!

This poster from the post-war period urges children to stay away from anything that may explode, and to report every suspicious find to the Carabinieri. On the reverse, different kinds of explosive devices are shown. The contrast between the normality of the green toy truck and the tragedy of the boy’s bandaged stumps is especially disturbing: trouble-free childhood is over for him, a sense reinforced by his desperate tears.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/items/show/21569

Why do you think it was especially important to tell children not to touch suspicious items?
This poster focuses on the moment an imprudent boy gets too close to an unexploded bomb.

The caption translates as: ‘Don’t – This is death. Never touch these and other similar devices.’

Whoever saw the poster could easily imagine the dire consequences of such a foolish act.

SOURCE 50: THIS IS DEATH

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/items/show/21645

Why do you think a young woman in anguish is so prominently featured behind the boy? Note her body language - outstretched arm and open palm – and facial expression, especially her wide-open month. Have you seen something similar before?
Not all bombs dropped by aircraft exploded on impact. Some buried themselves deep in the ground and are still routinely discovered during engineering projects.


Authorities urged citizens living nearby to leave windows open to minimise the risk of glass panes shattering in the event of an explosion. Someone commented: ‘Oh, yes. Leaving the windows open in winter, for an undetermined number of hours... They are crazy, indeed.’ Do you agree?
8. LITERARY EXPRESSIONS OF THEBombing WAR
Unsurprisingly, the bombing war has featured in many genres of popular culture - novels, poetry, movies, songs and art. A few examples survive from the war years (see source 39, for example) but most are creations of the long post-war decades, when authors, painters and poets could look back and try to make sense of it all.

The UK and USA emerged unequivocally victorious from the war. They had led the global struggle against Nazism and Fascism and had not themselves been invaded (unlike Russia, which also emerged victorious but with a terrible death toll). In these countries, a strong victor narrative quickly established itself, which deeply shaped the way in which the war was remembered in fiction, art and other creative forms. By contrast, in Italy, as we have seen (especially in section 4), how to represent what Italians had been through was far more difficult.

In all these countries, it has probably become easier with the passage of time to articulate stories that refuse to conform to myths, and instead present more nuanced, complex appreciations of the devastation of individual lives as well as homes and historic cities.

**The poetry of Bomber Command**

For bomber aircrew, the most characteristic literary expression has been the memoir or autobiography. Most of these have been written and published since the 1990s, when veterans had more time in their retirement to reflect on their past experiences. These memoirs typically focus heavily on the war years, paying scant attention to their authors’ early lives or subsequent experiences.

In contrast to these later published works is the outpouring of poetry that bomber aircrew composed at the time of the war. It is not altogether clear why poetry was the preferred medium. Perhaps, as a very concentrated form of expression, it best articulated intense emotions. There are very many examples, few of which were ever published. Most have been kept safe in private collections of family memorabilia. Their most striking characteristic is an attempt to come to terms with grief, loss and trauma.
SOURCE 52: Kaleidoscope

Anthony Bartlett, the author of this poem, also wrote an account of one operation, which he called ‘An anxious moment’. You can read it here https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/889 It might help to explain the sentiments in the poem.

Kaleidoscope – the morning after – 1943
(Anthony Bartlett)

Next morning
earth still revolving
lights before the eyes;

Fires burning in the mind,
still fully clothed
on the bed sprawled.

How did we return?
Am I still alive?
Was it Hades I watched?
Can’t sleep...

Breakfast in the Mess
no-one speaks
no-one smiles;

Eight hours to forget
another nightmare
another night!
Dear God - is this real?

Why do you think Bartlett calls this poem Kaleidoscope?

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/890
‘Tail end Charlie’ was Royal Air Force slang for a rear gunner on a heavy bomber, such as a Halifax or Lancaster. The rear gunner (a type of air gunner, or A.G.) was seated at the very tail end of the aircraft, separate from the rest of the crew who were in or nearby the cockpit. It was known to be the most dangerous crew position. The rear gunner’s task was to watch for enemy fighters and to shoot them down.

**Source 53: You’ll Get Your Reward**

‘Tail end Charlie’ was Royal Air Force slang for a rear gunner on a heavy bomber, such as a Halifax or Lancaster. The rear gunner (a type of air gunner, or A.G.) was seated at the very tail end of the aircraft, separate from the rest of the crew who were in or nearby the cockpit. It was known to be the most dangerous crew position. The rear gunner’s task was to watch for enemy fighters and to shoot them down.

An A.G. [air gunner] stood at thee Pearly Gates,  
His face was worn and old,  
He meekly asked thee Man of Fate  
‘May I come into thee Fold?’

‘What have you done?’ St. Peter asked  
‘To gain admission here’.  
‘I was a Tailend Charlie on a Halifax, Sir  
For the best part of a year.’

Thee Pearly Gates swung open wide  
As St. Peter rang the bell.  
‘Come in,’ he said ‘and welcome lad,  
You’ve served your time in Hell.’

**You’ll Get Your Reward (Charly Darby)**

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/1560

What is the ‘reward’ that the A.G. receives at the end of the poem?
The poet, Betty Turner, served in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). Women were not permitted to join the Royal Air Force until well after the war. Large numbers of WAAFs, as they were called, served with Bomber Command.

**Source 54: This is why I joined the RAF**

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**This is why I joined the RAF (Betty Turner)**

He was twenty-two I was seventeen  
I thought he was lovely &  
he seemed very keen

But he was a bomber pilot  
didn’t stand a chance  
when singled out by fighters  
shot down over France

That evening, as usual, I waited  
His friend came instead  
I sobbed as he told me  
my lovely friend was dead

Since then I’ve loved a dozen times  
But first love’s so sincere,  
Remember him? Of course I do,  
Especially this time of year.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/1273

What was the poet’s response to losing her ‘first love’?
SOURCE 55: LINCOLNSHIRE BOMBER STATION

Lincolnshire, on the east coast of England, was the centre of bombing operations during the Second World War. Its terrain is generally very flat; the clay-like soil turns to thick mud in wet weather. Its county capital, Lincoln, originated as a Roman fort in about AD60. It grew into a large and important colonia, or settlement. The Romans constructed a number of strategic roadways across this part of their conquered territory, some of which are important routes to this day.

Lincolnshire Bomber Station (Henry Treece)

Across the road the homesick Romans made
The ground-mist thickens to a milky shroud;
Through flat, damp fields call sheep, mourning their dead
In cracked and timeless voices, unutterably sad,
Suffering for all the world, in Lincolnshire.

And I wonder how the Romans liked it here;
Flat fields, no sun, the muddy misty dawn,
And always, above all, the mad rain dripping down,
Rusting sword and helmet, wetting the feet
And soaking to the bone, down to the very heart.

There is no mention of the war, or even a bomber station, in the poem; if the title were missing, we would probably not suspect it was related to the bombing war. How does the poet create an atmosphere of gloom and foreboding?
Civilian perspectives

The creative achievements of those writing outside the confines of military service and over a far longer time period are, predictably, more varied. In addition to those works engaging with inner turmoil or stress, some invite us to reflect on or challenge the legacy of the bombing war, while others serve to insert their authors’ presence in profoundly important historical events: ‘I was there’. Most creative works on the bombing war are aimed at adults. A small minority have been written for children.

SOURCE 56: THE PERIODIC TABLE

Primo Levi was born in Turin in 1919. It was not easy growing up Jewish in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s, with the rise of fascism. He trained as a chemist, which was one of his lifelong passions, alongside writing. The Periodic Table recounts his life with chemistry. Levi was a survivor of the Holocaust; he died in 1987.

In 1942, Levi moved to Milan with a group of friends. This is his account of living with bombing and other hardships.

We bore with spiteful gaiety the rationing and the freezing cold in houses without coal, and we accepted with irresponsibility the nightly bombings by the English; they were not for us, they were a brutal sign of force on the part of our very distant allies, they didn’t bother us. We thought what all humiliated Italians were then thinking: that the Germans and Japanese were invincible, but the Americans were too, and that the war would plod on like this for another twenty or thirty years, a bloody and interminable but remote stalemate, known only through doctored war bulletins, and sometimes, in certain of my contemporaries’ families, through funereal, bureaucratic letters which spoke such words as ‘heroically, in the fulfilment of his duty.’ …

We went to the theatre and concerts, which sometimes were interrupted halfway through because the air-raid siren would start shrieking: and this seemed to us a ridiculous and gratifying incident; the Allies were masters of the sky, perhaps in the end they would win and Fascism would end – but it was their business, they were rich and powerful, they had the airplane carriers and the Liberators.


It has been said of Levi that his writing is inseparable from his morality. Can you identify his morality in this extract?
As noted in earlier sources, August 1943 saw an intensification of bombing attacks on Milan and other Italian cities. Harry Irons (source 11) provides an aircrew view and so does Gordon Cruikshank (source 14), who needed his lucky cards to get through it but noted a success when he returned to base. This is an important difference in perspective between aircrew and those caught under the bombs: when the aircrew returned to their bases, that was the end of the operation. But not for those on the ground. This is a response, in the aftermath of the bombings.

**SOURCE 57: MILAN, AUGUST 1943**

As noted in earlier sources, August 1943 saw an intensification of bombing attacks on Milan and other Italian cities. Harry Irons (source 11) provides an aircrew view and so does Gordon Cruikshank (source 14), who needed his lucky cards to get through it but noted a success when he returned to base. This is an important difference in perspective between aircrew and those caught under the bombs: when the aircrew returned to their bases, that was the end of the operation. But not for those on the ground. This is a response, in the aftermath of the bombings.

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**Milan, August 1943 (Salvatore Quasimodo)**

In vain you rummage among the dust,  
poor hand, the city is dead.  
It is dead: the last rumble was heard  
over the heart of the Naviglio. And the nightingale  
fell from the pole, high above the convent,  
where it used to sing before dusk.  
Do not sink wells in the yards:  
the living are not thirsty anymore.  
Do not touch the dead, so red, so swollen  
Leave them entombed in their homes:  
the city is dead, is dead.

---

**Salvatore Quasimodo,**  
*Tutte le poesie.* Milano,  
Mondadori, 1969, p. 238.  
Trans. A. Pesaro

This poem is symbolically addressed to survivors. How does the poet convey the utter sense of helplessness that he feels after the attack?
SOURCE 58: L’ULTIMO TEMO IN CLASSE

L’ultimo tema in classe (The Last Class Assignment) is a rare example of children’s literature exploring the morality of the bombing war. It deals, moreover, with the Gorla massacre (section 5, above). Authored by Mario Emari, it presents two perspectives: one an American bombing commander and the other a Gorla family, whose daughter is killed. The foreword is by Marco Pederielli (source 37). The story begins and ends with a poem by Catarina Rovatti.

Airborne (Caterina Rovatti)

[the aircraft] traces white ribbons in the sky as visible as spontaneous woman’s caresses outside but nobody knows all the silent darkness in a steely heart ...

There is a strong contrast in these lines between softness and light on one hand and steeliness and darkness on the other: what do each represent?
After the war, some British comic books were re-issued for foreign markets. This issue of *Storie eroiche* (*Heroic Tales*) was published in 1963 in Italy. The cover depicts aircrew and bomber aircraft behind them, in a way that strongly resembles film posters.

*Source 59: Heroic Tales*

How was it possible to publish this comic book in Italy, a country that suffered heavily during the bombing war? The figure on the left looks similar to an Italian movie star of the past: can you work out who?
The award of the 2016 Nobel Prize for literature to Bob Dylan reminds us that some of the best poetry is in the form of song lyrics. Lucio Dalla, who was born during the war and died in 2012, released a song called 1983, which deals with the bombing war.

A central segment of the lyrics reads:

Mom starts talking from a photo
She says: ‘Do you remember the quick-thinking dad had?’
Those were wartime years, everyone sitting on the ground
We ate among dogs; do you remember the joy when the Americans arrived in Bologna?
Eh! In 1943 people departed, departed and died without knowing why
But after two years all people, Fascists included, were waiting for the Americans
In the same way they wait now for tourists at Riccione
And you, indeed you, looked like a king that night at the square, on dad’s shoulders
When the bombings ended, and people were congratulating each other
Only dead people were unhappy, biting their fingers
Because no one would wake up tomorrow
Do you remember that brunette, how sad she was,
Because she knew she would never have seen the rockets on the Moon?

You can listen to it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPuSM_CpGyM

These lines are full of mockery. But who is being mocked?
9. Suggestions for discussion, further resources and activities

Suggestions for discussion

The questions accompanying each source are intended to stimulate ideas and thoughts. It is important to note that there are no ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ responses. Below are some explanatory points to aid discussion.
1 Bombing Civilians before the Second World War

**Source 1: The Role of Civilians in War**

Italy was highly militarised in 1915, and the authorities could use that reality to call on citizens to behave like soldiers: disciplined, obeying without question, and so on. In a time of peace that is not possible. However, there may be some overlaps in the appeal to moral responsibility then and now.

**Source 2: The Mystique of Flying**

This is of course the emblem of Ferrari; as the website makes clear, there was a deliberate connection between the glamour of flight and that of a luxury sports car brand – connected also by the new concept of speed. There were also plays on the idea of exclusivity, daring and possibly even danger. On the relation between Baracca and Ferrari, see [https://magazine.ferrari.com/en/events/2018/06/18/news/francesco_baracca_100_years_on-42674/](https://magazine.ferrari.com/en/events/2018/06/18/news/francesco_baracca_100_years_on-42674/)

**Source 3: General Giulio Douhet Explains the Implications of Air Power**

Douhet makes clear that with air war, there is no longer the possibility of making a distinction between fighting forces and civilians. That is how the term ‘home front’ came into being: in a bombing war, everywhere is a war zone. Aircraft can penetrate hundreds of miles behind enemy lines to take the war to the cities, factories, ports and military installations far from the scenes of ground and sea engagements. It follows that governments are relatively powerless to protect civilians in times of war, one of the historic duties of the state.
**Source 4: Air Power and Colonial Expansion**

This early example of footage of bombing reveals that a limited number of bomber aircraft can cause substantial confusion on the ground. Bombs visibly cause injuries and start fires. But the main impact seems to be to cause chaos.

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**Source 5: An Eyewitness Account of the Bombing of Guernica**

George Steer had, interestingly, recently covered the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and was an admirer of Haile Selassie. His next assignment was to cover the Spanish Civil War for *The Times* newspaper in London. He based himself in the north, in Basque territory. The phrase ‘insurgent air raiders’ suggests an illegal, unprovoked attack. The extent of the bombing suggests a form of savagery, as does the way in which fighter aircraft attack fleeing, unarmed civilians. There is a note of defiance in the statement that the two most important symbols of Basque identity have not been destroyed. The detail of the type of aircraft, the bombloads, and the duration give his account an air of authority.

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**Source 6: Picasso Paints Guernica**

Picasso wanted his huge mural to make a strong political statement. It was also an act of defiance, as Franco and his nationalist allies continued to deny that the bombing had occurred. The intentions of the artist, as well as the conditions at the time, therefore provided all those around the world who supported the republican and Basque causes with a powerful symbol which they used to great effect.
The bombings of August 1943 had multiple dimensions, including the deliberate use of overwhelming power and spectacular displays of force in the pursuit of political goals. The success of the action demonstrated how the regime was incapable to defend its own citizens - note the explicit references to weak and ineffective reaction. This and other displays of powerlessness convinced Italian leaders that further resistance was futile.

The prominence of the memory of Mont Blanc in the moonlight stands out. The tone of the military details seems to us now to be oddly detached: his witnessing of four aircraft shot down, being caught in a searchlight over Milan and feeling it was ‘quiet’ on the return journey, not to mention the matter-of-fact mention of dropping bombs. But perhaps at the time, this sense of detachment was necessary to survival. Nowadays, emergency responders are trained to remain detached in order to control an otherwise overwhelming emotional reaction.
SOURCE 8: PETER LAMPREY ON ATTACKING ITALIAN TARGETS

Lamprey suggests that Italian cities are weakly defended and that Germans are more determined to defend their theirs. He seems to be making value judgements about ‘national character’ – a form of stereotyping that was very common, even normalised, during wartime.

On one level, the letter contains mundane facts, petty annoyances, and casual pleasantries; on another, it is filled with contempt and an open sense of self-righteousness. Lamprey is really worried because his lighter doesn’t work but the destruction of Turin is told with satisfaction. Allied aircrew believed they were doing the right thing to stamp out the threats of totalitarian regimes, especially when their own countries were in danger. It is a view still endorsed by some who argue that Bomber Command and the US Army Air Force did what was necessary to help win the war.

There is another aspect to the tone and contents of this letter. Aircrew knew that what they were doing was dangerous, and they suspected that casualties were very high. Ground and air defences destroyed many aircraft and the heavy bombers often crashed on return from operations because they were lost or had run out of fuel. Possibly Lamprey was trying to deal with stress by adopting this light-hearted style: in trying to reassure a work colleague that all was well, he was trying to reassure himself.
Source 9: Supporting the Resistance

Resistance movements operated in all sorts of environments, including urban areas, but often had bases in remote, difficult terrain. Borders shifted after the war and place names were changed to reflect that. The village was part of Italy when the conflict broke out, hence the logbook record ‘North East Italy’.

Here is an image of present-day north east Italy and western Slovenia.

As you can see, the drop area around Čepovan is rugged, sparsely populated and densely forested, which all provided cover and protection. Furthermore, supplies could be hidden straight away, without attracting attention.

Have a look at the photo at https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/17415 and see if you can find the parachute over the river (use the description to help you). This photo was taken much further away, near Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the Čepovan drop probably looked very similar.
**Source 10: Operation Honours**

The artist heightens the tension and danger of the scene by the dark pall of smoke, dust and clouds. The only suggestion of human presence is the names written on the bombs – weapons of destruction that will obliterate those names, as well as much else, when the bombs explode.

Air force personnel often scribbled names and other messages on bombs as a way of indicating their personal investment in the desire for victory, to inflict as much damage on the enemy as possible. There may also have been an element of superstition: loss rates among aircrew were very high and maybe this was a way of hoping that their operation would meet with success and they would survive. Interestingly, inscribing projectiles is a tradition as old as civilisation: see for example [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1851-0507-11](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1851-0507-11).

**Source 11: And This Is What I Call a Terror Raid**

Irons labels this a terror raid because of the enormous forces pitched against a defenceless target – 92 heavy bombers each carrying the equivalent of 6000 lbs of bombs – 552 000 lbs in total, or 250383 kg. He notes it was daylight; people were going about their normal business and there was no warning of an attack. He also notes that some gunners were shooting at people from the air because they were so low: the guns on board the heavy bombers were designed to fend off enemy aircraft, not target civilians.

This event seems an almost literal fulfilment of General Giulio Douhet’s prediction in source 3: warfare is no longer limited to the battlefields and civilians are at mercy of the enemy’s ability to project airpower over considerable distances. The Alps, traditionally considered Italy’s natural frontier, are no barrier to these airborne invasions. It is of interest that Irons recalls this operation in almost cinematic detail: the outward journey as well as the attack itself.

He also notes something that seems to have been standard at the time: crews did not discuss their completed operations and even after the war, veterans tended not to discuss their war experiences with their families. Often this was because they had been traumatised. Maybe after 70 years of reflection, Irons’s feelings about the attack had changed – or maybe he felt it was a form of terror at the time. We simply do not know. This unresolved ambiguity makes this passage compelling.
**Source 12: We Had No More Bombs to Give Them**

While American forces carried out their operations in daylight, RAF Bomber Command flew mostly at night, as a means of protecting aircraft under cover of darkness. However, night flying had its own dangers. Navigational and communication aids were not well developed. It was harder to calculate position without sight of landmarks below, harder to see attacking fighters and harder to find the target. Therefore an operation like this, where the target was very clearly visible, was a rare experience. Hence the regret that Donaldson expressed. Once again, we see in this account a very detached view of the likely impact of the bombs on the target.

Donaldson’s recollection of the moonlit Alpine scenery is even more detailed than Dawson’s, but that may be because Dawson was making only a very brief entry in his notebook. Both clearly were impressed. Apart from the wonder of the spectacle itself, holding on to a memory of something that seemed so serene and magisterial may have been a way to cope with the sordidness of destruction and death. Finally, it was a very rare experience to witness this sight: virtually the only people who did were those in military aircraft, as this was before the time of civilian air travel and international holidays.

**Source 13: A Canticle for Leibowitz**

This question links past catastrophes to the most significant one we are facing now. Since the outbreak of the virus began in China in December 2019, governments’ attempts to bring it under control have frequently been likened to fighting a war against an invisible enemy – one, moreover, whose characteristics we do not yet fully understand. Terms like ‘combatting the virus’ and other battle terms have been used to mobilise resources and to gain public support. Similarly, those who are ill are described as ‘fighting for their lives’ or ‘battling the illness’. But is warlike terminology appropriate? For a discussion, see [https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/war-metaphor-coronavirus/609049/](https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/war-metaphor-coronavirus/609049/)

We will probably only know in many years’ time what we have lost, and how our way of life has changed, as a result of this pandemic. But even now, we can reflect on our own capacity for self-destruction, on the inequalities which have become so apparent and which cause terrible hardship for many families under lockdown, and on the sense of humanity which has been so evident in supporting communities to survive.
Dealing with Danger

Source 14: Lucky Cards
Cruikshank and his crew participated in the attack on Milan on 24 October 1942 – the same in which Harry Irons flew.

Source 15: The Fate of a Lucky Charm
Most of us possess something lucky, that we remember when we feel we need luck to achieve a desired outcome – whether in an exam, a competition or a game. We probably know deep down that the charm will not affect the outcome – but then again, if we are lucky, the charm is validated!

Source 16: Wielding a Broom and Yelling
Speranza Piras seems to feel sympathy for her Aunt as someone who was possibly a bit confused and ignorant and possessing hopeless beliefs in magic. We should take care, however, not to stereotype elderly people or women: irrational beliefs are distributed quite widely in most societies.

Source 17: Pippo
The Pippo myth very probably emerged from people's intense fears of aerial bombing. Whatever side you were on, you were vulnerable to attack from the sky. Rumour thrives in an atmosphere of fear; together, fear and rumour gave rise to a rich folklore, including the story of Pippo.

Source 18: A Premonition
Premonition is known by many names: precognition, second sight, presentiment. Some believe this is merely a form of coincidence; others that it is a genuine psychic condition. In any event, it is considered a personal phenomenon. By contrast, superstition is only meaningful if a whole group understands it: it is therefore a social phenomenon.
**Source 19: Learning from Life**

Undoubtedly, those who experienced the war in Italy as children faced many hardships. However, it is probably wise to add two qualifications to Gualtiero Silvio Cosolo’s remarks: first, not all children today are comfortable and well-off (which is the implication of his accusation). Second, perhaps it is a widespread tendency for elders to accuse the young of ‘having it easy’ – no matter which period in history!

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**Source 20: I Raised My Head and Saw the Sky Darkened by Airplanes**

In this memory, everyday life is enlivened by vivid description of playing in the fields among the hay bales, the sunny day, views of the mountains, first encounters with girls: in short, an idyllic scene. And then the shock of the attack, heralded by the ominous roar of the aircraft, followed by bombs dropping and setting alight to a building. He expresses this memory by appealing to the sense of sight as well as sound. It is unlikely that Efrem Colombi really counted the number of aircraft involved in that attack: perhaps he mentions 103 as a validation for the accuracy of the rest of his memory?

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**Source 21: It Looked Like Fireworks**

Anna Maria Baccolini’s father’s body language is profoundly human: hiding his daughter under his coat defines a protected space, while at the same time not allowing her to see what is happening around them. However, he is clearly watching the falling bombs himself, and hardly succeeds in shielding his daughter from these views! It is also worth noting that many children found a grim fascination in the ‘show’ of bombers and bomb damage. As a young boy, Nino Tenco Montini was eager to leave an air raid shelter ‘to go out, to see the flares, the airplanes flying low. To see these gigantic four-engine bombers: that was a show for a boy, amazing indeed’.

(source: [https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7646](https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/7646)).
**Source 22: It was dangerous and cold, we were hungry, but we kept playing**

Even in wartime, throughout history, children have shown a strong determination to play. Wherever they have been able to come together, in small groups or large, they have found imaginative ways to play. Play is a chance to escape into fantasy, to forget daily worries and to laugh. Toys were mostly home-made because of shortages and often had a military theme (as in the image), and so too did games. In virtually all parts of Europe, bomb sites became intriguing play areas.

**Source 23: We saw a big flame and that was it**

The dangers referred to in sources 22 and 23 are all directly related to weaponry: bombs falling, being fired at, touching unexploded bombs. These are the things that stand out most for those recalling the events of long ago. There may have been other dangers but these seem the most vivid.

**Source 24: Helping to feed the family**

The foods that Peter Ghirighelli helped to grow or hunt in order to feed his family were rice, maize (for polenta), frogs, snails, freshwater shrimp, hedgehogs, guinea pigs and one squirrel. Some of these, like polenta, are still a staple food today. We shudder at others (like hedgehogs). However, when people are hungry, they are not so fussy about cultural norms.

**Source 25: Layette ration card**

We are probably less self-reliant today than people were during the war. We depend more heavily on supermarkets for food and shops for everything from clothes to toys. Most of us make very little for ourselves, unless it is to satisfy a hobby, like knitting or gardening.

Many women now have paid employment outside the home yet continue to be primarily responsible for housework. This is one of the reasons for the declining birth rate in Italy (and in many other countries too). Children probably spend more time at school now than in the 1940s, and generally have fewer domestic responsibilities today.
**SOURCE 26: LEARNING THROUGH PLAY**

Here are translations for the heading, the borders, and each square in the board game:

**[Heading]**
UNPA National union for anti-aircraft readiness
Institution with charitable status
Royal decree August 30th 1934 – The twelfth year [after the march on Rome]

**[Board]**
War breaks out
1. Mobilisation.
2. Air raid on a large industrial and urban centre.
4. Aircraft dropping poison gas over a large city.
5. Enemy aircraft hit by anti-aircraft fire.
6. Observing aircraft manoeuvres is careless behaviour. Miss two turns.
7. If you observe fire precautions your home will be protected from incendiaries.
8. Gas mask.
9. Reconnaissance aircraft defending [sic] the city.
10. Preparation rule. Citizens without a gas mask can use a handkerchief. The player who observes this rule moves on to square 33.
11. Aircraft in flight.
12. Park vehicles at the roadside during the alarm.
13. Fighter aircraft ready to scramble.
14. Aircraft flying over the countryside in formation.
15. Gas mask.
17. Lights foolishly left on will help the enemy. Go back to number 1.
18. Preparation rule. Switch off any lights. Move on to number 35.
20. Preparation rule. Switch off stoves and fireplaces. Move on to number 35.
22. Aircraft coned by searchlights.
23. Preparation rule. Turn off gas and water supply. Move on to square 43.
24. This is the way the city would look to the enemy if everyone follows instructions.
25. Forming a knot of people in the street is foolish behaviour. Pay a double penalty and go back to square one.
27. Preparation rule. Lie down and cover your face when it is impossible to reach the air Raid shelter.
28. Aircraft spreads poison gas over the city.
30. Preparation rule. Manage to get gas masks. Move on to number 62.
31. Aircraft in flight.
32. Proportion between a high capacity bomb and a person.
33. Preparation rule. Keep calm: get to the nearest anti-aircraft shelter. Move on to number 49.
34. Dogfight.
35. Gas mask.
36. Industrial centre.
37. This person misunderstands the preparation rules. The player is eliminated from the game.
38. Dogfight.
41. Fighter aircraft in flight.
42. City under complete blackout.
43. Gas mask.
44. Preparation rule. Have an electric torch ready.
45. Dogfight near an airfield.
46. Hangar.
47. Anti-aircraft guns.
48. Bomb explodes.
49. Gas mask.
50. Industrial centre hit by bombing.
51. Preparation rule. Stockpile staple food. Move on to number 55.
52. Reconnaissance aircraft in flight.
53. Keep calm. This is the most important thing to remember – everyone pays a fee to the player.
54. Preparation rule. Stay away from wetland.
55. Gas mask.
56. Aircraft in flight.
57. A victim of her own imprudence. Go back to number 15.
58. An aircraft in flight.
59. Industrial complex being hit by bombs and poisonous gas.
60. Enemy aircraft is shot down.
61. Preparation rule. Walk against the wind. Move on to number 67.
62. Gas mask.
63. Airman preparing for flight.
64. Panic-stricken citizens. Go back to number 8. Play again only if set free by another player.
65. Bomb explodes.
66. Airman bailing out.
67. Preparation rule. The anti-aircraft shelter.
68. Coastal Anti-aircraft guns.
69. Reconnaissance flight.
70. Paramilitary Red Cross personnel carrying a wounded person.
71. Preparation rule. Seek refuge in the basement. Move on to number 73.
72. These citizens are discussing an air raid. Go back to number 35.
73. Bombing rural housing is not worth the effort for the enemy.
74. Preparation rule. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Move on to number 77.
75. Crashed aircraft by a country road.
76. In general, caves provide good protection as anti-aircraft shelters.
77. Preparation rule. Help the disabled get into the air-raid shelter.
78. End of the game.

[Bottom left]
All Roberts’ products are Italian and manufactured in the company’s chemical and pharmaceutical plant in Firenze.

[Bottom middle]
From the pharmacy ‘H. Roberts & Co’ - with compliments.
(Est. in Italy, 1843)

[Bottom right]
The air raid preparation game
Number of players is unlimited. Two dice are required. Order of players to be drawn before start, after paying a fixed fee to the bank. Each player’s piece is moved according to throws of two dice and must follow the instructions by going forward or backward. Upon arriving at a square, one must follow the instruction given and then wait for his turn (e.g. the player who reaches square 20 is entitled to go to square 35 and wait there for his turn). After square 76 only one dice must be used. The player who first arrives at square 78 wins.
Why do they bomb us?

Liberators or tormentors?

Source 27: They caused more harm than the Nazis

It is interesting that Gilberto Martina decides his rage is misplaced because the airmen doing all the bombing were part of a military force subject to a higher authority and were just obeying orders. It was not their decision to drop the bombs. In other words, they had no say in the matter – and were therefore, possibly, just as lacking in agency as the people under the bombs. He also had an especially traumatic experience, witnessing the death of a child (source 23) and this could well have affected his memories.

While we understand Gilberto’s distinction between ‘stupid’ bombs and ‘intelligent’ bombs, we need to exercise caution. During the Second World War, area bombing was employed in part because the navigational and bomb aiming technology was inadequate for pinpoint accuracy. But those were not the only reasons; there were also strategic considerations – civilians were also assisting the war effort, and aerial attack could weaken ‘enemy morale’. Today the technology is far more sophisticated. Yet civilians are still killed in large numbers – for example in the conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. The point is that in air war, civilians and combatants alike are targets. This takes us back once again to Gen Douhet’s predictions (source 3).

Source 28: The world upside down

There is a saying that truth is the first casualty of war. Accurate information about the situation in Bologna and everywhere else was difficult (if not impossible) to find. Propaganda – the use of unfounded claims to advance one cause and discredit another – was used by both sides. Ordinary citizens experienced great difficulty and confusion trying to understand events as a result.
**Source 29: People hated the British**

It is a common theme in wartime memories that Americans were more welcome than the British. In this case, it is quite possible that Tito Samoré had particularly unpleasant experiences of British forces. It is also possible – we cannot know for sure – that his memories are also shaped by the fact that American soldiers had more resources to share (their rations of sweets, chocolate and cigarettes were more generous than the British); there were stronger bonds between Italy and America because of emigration; and America financed the post-war Italian economic miracle. Britain – a recurring target of fascist propaganda - had been bombing Italy since the start of the war. Furthermore, the United States did not enter the conflict until 1942.

**Source 30: Spiritual destruction**

For Annamaria De Manzano Vici, all aircrew, whether they survived or not, were carrying out the orders of others, and all contributed to the destruction of inner spirituality. Even though they were treated as heroes in their own countries, they destroyed so much more than the physical landscape in Italy. The inner torment may outlast the physical torment of war.

**Source 31: They destroyed our house, but they freed us. Hurray for the Allies!**

There is a strong sense in this brief testimony that ending the war was preferable to any consideration of who won and who lost. Tullio Magnani attributes the blame for starting the war to the Fascists, therefore the other side was the one that should end it, irrespective of how much destruction was caused in the process.

**Source 32: I never felt that the pilots were enemies**

There are numerous testimonies in the IBCC Digital Archive that suggest that those doing the fighting had a very strong sense that they were under orders, doing a job for their country and did not think of the war in personal terms at all. This was a war about ideology, not about personal vendetta. Because all military personnel understood this dynamic, those who had been on opposing sides could come together to talk about it afterwards, bearing no grudges. It was much harder for civilians, however. They did not share a fighting ethos with aircrew. Their experiences had a far more random quality about them and it was far more difficult to exercise a detached view, as Alberto Dini is able to do here.
**SOURCE 33: AMERICANS CAME HERE AND HELPED US**

Eyewitnesses to the conflict are fewer and fewer in number because of advancing age; the remaining ones are more at risk than at any time before, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Survivors are mostly of a great age. Their testimony has been vital in maintaining a strong link to the Second World War and what it meant in Europe and the world generally. Their words carry great significance. Yet this living link will disappear in the next few years. Will that change our view of the war? Will we respect or reject their memories? These are important questions for current and future generations; there are no definitive answers.

**SOURCE 34: THEY DID NOT CARE ABOUT CIVILIANS**

Civilians generally feel helpless in a war situation because they are not armed; they are not organised into any sort of force; and they are deprived of information. Consequently they often feel as if they at the mercy of opposing forces.

The coronavirus pandemic is not a war: governments have tried to provide a lot of information and to ensure that key workers and the most vulnerable are offered strong protection. They have tried hard to communicate with the public. Yet, just like in a war, there is so much we do not know, and about which we feel anxious: how many waves will there be? Will the weather help to reduce risks? To what extent can our government really offer protection? More often than not the answers to such questions are entirely unclear.

**SOURCE 35: EVEN WE KIDS KNEW THAT WE COULD NOT WIN THE WAR**

Tragedy is a dramatic form. The plot usually involves someone very promising and highly respected, with a bright future and much potential power, brought down by their own flaws of character. We do not reject this individual; on the contrary, we feel sadness and pity. Maybe this sense of tragedy goes some way to addressing the divided legacy of war memories alluded to in the introduction to this section.
The Gorla Massacre

Source 36: They ‘deliberately’ destroyed a school

This must have been a fearful and traumatising event for the witnesses. It was only with the passage of time, however, that this became a ‘historic’ event, represented in textbooks and so on. It is likely that Antonio Bozzetti’s memories have been shaped by these later developments and possibly also contemporary debates in Italy about the suffering of Italians during the war. Adult memories are rarely if ever ‘pure’ and unchanged from childhood or early adulthood.

Source 37: An incredible thing

Marco Pederielli returned to class to collect his coat; on the way back to the shelter, he noticed the gate was not guarded; he saw a chance to run home (perhaps because he did not know the other children); on the way, a shopkeeper pulled him inside his premises and led him to safety in a shelter.

Source 38: We cheered because our class had been disrupted

Both accounts 37 and 38 contain multisensory references: The eerie silence; the smell of dust and sulphur; the scenes of devastation and suffering; the feeling of comfort of being led home. The atmosphere of confusion is very strong in Pederiell’s account; by contrast, calm and control seem to characterise Bottani’s.
**Source 39: The Mothers Started to Cry When the First Corpses Were Extracted**

Other eyewitnesses (for example source 37) suggest that there was considerable chaos in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. It is highly likely that, until there was actual evidence to the contrary, families hoped the children had survived. It may seem counterintuitive, but not all people caught inside a bombed building died on the spot – records show that some survived, a fraction even unscathed. Mothers especially would have had strongly protective instincts towards those caught in the rubble. Hoping against all hope that a loved one may still be alive is a recurring theme of wartime experiences.

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**Source 40: The Mothers of the Victims Cheered American Troops**

There are two senses in which it was ‘not politically correct’ to remember the massacre publicly. The first is that it was perpetrated by the same forces which now promised to rebuild Italy – neither they nor the recipients of economic development considered it diplomatic to remind of this massacre.

The second was that almost immediately after the bombing, as one eyewitness recalled, Fascist propaganda posters began appearing. These portrayed images of death and proclaimed that the attack was evidence of the Allies’ brutality (the ‘tormentors’ of the previous section).

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**Source 41: The Gorla Memorial**

The hooded figure holding the body was inspired by a real event. When a child was extracted from the rubble, it was found that he stayed warm after death. His mother carried him to a local shop, hoping to resuscitate him – onlookers showed compassion for her agony and did not stop her. Note how the hood hides the face: this transforms the statue into a universal symbol of suffering.

The wording on the Memorial does not give any sense of who carried out the attack (we now know that it was the USAAF 451st Bomb Group). Bombs simply ‘fell’; it was ‘the war’ that killed the children. This kind of omission is a recurring feature of memorials. On the 75th anniversary of the bombing in 2019, the mayor of Milan asked the USA to apologise - the consul replied offering condolences but no formal apology. Tellingly, she stressed the need of maintaining the good relationship between the two countries.
SOURCE 42: THE MEMORIAL IN POPULAR CULTURE

We can imagine two possible explanations. A person cannot hold contradictory beliefs: the notion of Allies as liberators, saviours, and candy-givers is obviously incompatible with the idea of murderers of young innocents. Hence his astonishment.

We tend to care about relatives, dear ones, friends, or people we know well, but are less concerned about the misery of individuals we don’t have a bond of affection with, even when their tragedy is crushing. So far, the boy knew the war only indirectly, as history – listening her mother’s account brings the tragedy into his own present.

SOURCE 43: THE ANTONIO ROSMINI MEMORIAL

The sign is part of a later wave of memorialisation probably because in this case, there were no casualties; everyone survived, and it would therefore have been inappropriate to take the focus away from the Gorla memorial in earlier times.

The wording recalls the tragic event but carefully omits who dropped the bombs, the United States Army Air Force (see sources 40 and 41 on this too). Blaming a country which became Italy’s closest ally and a powerful force in its recovery was problematic. On the other hand, Claudio Porro’s deed is a reassuring example of altruistic behaviour under difficult circumstances - unproblematic and worthy of praise.
7  THE AFTERMATH OF THE BOMBING WAR

SOURCE 44: I’M STILL TERRORISED AT NIGHT

The blackout was experienced all over Europe. It was a measure designed to minimise the attack of aerial bombing at night – the idea was that the landscape below would appear an inky black mass, and aircrew would not be able to see settlements to help them navigate. However, they often used rail tracks and rivers instead, which reflected light. Furthermore, many factories were unable to ‘black’ themselves out.

Blackouts were strictly enforced. Streetlights were switched off (as in Ada Dellafererra’s account); motor vehicles had to have hoods fitted over their headlights and people were required to cover their windows and doors tightly, so that no light could escape.

The blackout was highly unpopular and was dangerous, too. For example, there were many more road accidents and pedestrian deaths.

SOURCE 45: BOMBS ONLY BRING RUIN

Annamaria De Manzano Vici may find special meaning in the image for these reasons: both have been injured (in his case by arrows, in hers by the loss of a grandmother and her home); both reject violence; both display fortitude in the face of adversity. Having a powerful role model is a common coping mechanism.

You can see here a propaganda leaflet produced after the 6 June 1944 bombing of Trieste, the same event that traumatised Annamaria: (https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/document/267).

It also explores the relationship between religion and wartime violence, but from another angle and reaching opposite conclusions. The term ‘mutilata’ normally refers only to people; destruction of a sacred place is likened to violence to the body.
**SOURCE 46: I NEVER FLEW, NOT EVEN NOW**

Fear of flying is called aerophobia. It may be that there is no direct link at all in Celestino’s mind between attacking aircraft of the war and passenger jets now. Panic attacks and post traumatic stress are also very common causes of aerophobia.

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**SOURCE 47: Ihaven’t been traumatised by those things**

Fatalistic means a feeling that what will happen will happen, ‘que sera sera’. There is little we can do about it. We can obey government restrictions on our movement and association with others; we may as a result not become infected but then again, we may.

Most people in reality are probably reacting to the current circumstances in mixed ways: some days suffering a lot, other days feeling compliant, yet other days wanting to resist authority. It is probably only with a great deal of hindsight that we can adopt an attitude of fatalism to something so life-changing as war or pandemic. Moreover, if we have lost close relatives, or have become ill ourselves, or suffered acutely in some other way as a result of the lockdown, fatalism is very likely not the feeling we will have in years to come.

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**SOURCE 48: I AM A RADICAL PACIFIST**

Those holding pacifist beliefs have often been severely persecuted in times of war, partly as a deterrent to others who may want to resist fighting. Some pacifists have chosen to act in non-combatant roles, such as medical aides, while others have gone to gaol for their beliefs.

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**SOURCE 49: DON’T TOUCH IT!**

Youngsters were especially at risk of serious injury, partly because of inquisitiveness and a spirit of adventure, partly because many resorted to salvaging metal to eke out a meagre living. Bomb sites were also favourite playgrounds.
**Source 50: This is death**

This poster, while depicting a boy in the foreground, obviously plays on mothers’ fear and anxiety, hoping they will instruct their offspring to act sensibly. Using strong negative feelings to reinforce a message is a common way to persuade people to act in a specific way.

A widespread variant of the ‘Do not enter’ sign features a human figure in a very similar pose. Both use universally recognisable body language as symbol of danger.

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**Source 51: A recent evacuation**

The advice to leave windows open was sensible. People tend to underestimate the consequences of threats they are unfamiliar with. Nowadays, our perception of danger is distorted and it is difficult to imagine how dangerous civilian life was in wartime.

See more on this story at [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-50622518](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-50622518)
LITERARY EXPRESSIONS OF THE BOMBING WAR

SOURCE 52: KALEIDOSCOPE

A kaleidoscope can cause a sense of dizziness when a viewer rotates it; even the slightest movement sets in motion the tiny coloured objects inside, resulting in an ever-changing view. It is a powerful symbol suggesting a flurry of rapidly changing mental images and emotions and a sense of having lost one’s bearings.

Here is one interpretation of the poem. Back in his quartiers, the poet is haunted by the previous night’s operation. He is in his bunk, probably alone and he is sprawled out – suggesting having flopped down without undressing, probably due to exhaustion. ‘Earth still revolving’ suggests that for others, life is proceeding routinely, whereas for him, the ordeal of a bombing mission induces a sense of unreality and absurdity.

‘Fires’ can be understood in two ways: the effect of incendiary (flammable) devices, and corrosive thoughts. Fires are reputed to burn in hell, Hades, which is also the space of the condemned dead. The repeated questions suggest despair. The ‘no-one’ of the fourth verse, used twice, suggests alone-ness: aircrew have similar experiences yet nobody wants to reveal their feelings in case they are considered weak or cowardly. Shared experience is utterly incommunicable.

The poem ends with the tormented thought that this ordeal will continue, with no end in sight.
SOURCE 53: YOU’LL GET YOUR REWARD

The poem equates life as a Tailend Charlie with Hell – although clearly this particular Tailend Charlie survived the war, as his face is ‘worn and ‘old’. At the gates of heaven, St. Peter understands the ‘hell’ that the A.G. suffered during the war and immediately welcomes him in. This poem is unusual in using religion as a rhetorical device: that life is hell, and heaven is the reward for enduring it.

SOURCE 54: THIS IS WHY I JOINED THE RAF

The title of the poem suggests that she joined up in response to her first love being killed in action. Even though it was written a long time after (‘Since then I’ve loved a dozen times’), Turner’s feelings of grief and loss are still strong.

Waiting in vain for someone who will never come back is a universal symbol of mourning, which also deeply resonates with the experiences of countless women in wartime. ‘Over France’ is so indeterminate as to become a metaphor of absence: there is no coffin to mourn over, no corpse to be interred,

Turner joined up in an effort to make sense of the situation and to be symbolically closer to her love, rather than as an act of revenge. As she explained in a note accompanying this poem: ‘After this happened within days I joined the RAF and after training at Compton Bassett, became a wireless operator. Very boring listening in to signals [and] writing down pages of groups of letters. Found out many years later, some of which we wrote down went to Bletchley Park to help break the German secret code.’
**Source 55: Lincolnshire Bomber Station**

The perpetually soaking rain, low cloud and muddy fields create a doom-laden atmosphere, reinforced by the symbolism of death: the mist is like a shroud and the sheep seem to be lamenting, because they are reared only to be slaughtered. Treece imagines that the Roman soldiers of long ago, whose equipment, bodies and souls were all rotting in the foul weather, were as miserable here as he was feeling. But there is no consolation in common misfortune. Gloom, misery and unhappiness are universal. All these elements hint at the high attrition rate of aircrew on bombing missions, and the likelihood of violent death.

**Source 56: The Periodic Table**

Levi’s humanism – tolerance, celebration of human life, generosity of spirit, absence of bitterness or vengeance – is conveyed by his humorous, somewhat detached style. Bombing was a nuisance: entertainment was disrupted with no serious consequences. He did not seem to consider it life-threatening. (But then we need to remember that a far worse fate awaited him later in the war, so perhaps he was looking back on this period of early adulthood with the benefit of hindsight).

The expression ‘spiteful gaiety’ seems a complete contradiction: confident youths mocking their own and their county’s situation, which did not seem entirely appropriate in those desperate times. He is also detached because of his Jewishness: war is hastily dismissed as ‘their business’, and the official telegrams reporting servicemen killed in action do not concern them because Jews were not allowed to enlist.

Importantly, Levi suggests a sense of stalemate in the war, exactly the situation that strategic bombing was supposed to prevent. He hoped that the Allies would eventually win, but this would require a long, painful war of attrition. The use of the term Liberator (properly a Consolidated B-24 aircraft) is interesting: in modern Italian, this has become a generic synonym for all heavy bombers.
**Source 57: Milan, August 1943**

Somebody’s hand rummaging in the debris represents the futility of searching: it is not said to whom it belongs, making it a universal icon of humanity and shared suffering. Milan is described as a living creature that is no more; ‘dead’ is repeated twice for emphasis.

The bombing is only suggested by the fading rumbling sound of bombers heard in the Navigli area, then a working-class district considered the very heart of the city. The mechanical noise of aircraft is contrasted with the melodious song of a nightingale, a metaphor of nature’s innocence and purity. The fallen pole represents the irreversibility of death.

Water mains are severed but there is no point for survivors to dig wells: every attempt to restore the water supply is pointless, because people are not thirsty anymore. Their soul is crushed, to the point of not feeling the most basic sensations.

Signs of violent death are also evident: corpses are red and swollen but they need not be removed as the whole city is now a cemetery. ‘Dead’ is again repeated, to suggest the funereal tolling of a bell.

**Source 58: L’ultimo tema in classe**

There is a powerful contrast between bright natural light, enhanced by ribbon-like contrails, and the dark interior of the aircraft. ‘A steely heart’ evokes the absurdity of evil, namely an impersonal force controlled by people who seem to be behaving as no more than pieces of machinery.

The ‘silent darkness’ is symbolic rather than literal. Silence implies no-one is talking, hence no communication is taking place, while darkness suggests the inability to see: not seeing other humans as humans utterly denies any form of relationship.

For more on this source, see [https://ibccdigitalarchive.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/2018/03/03/ultimo-tema-in-classe/](https://ibccdigitalarchive.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/2018/03/03/ultimo-tema-in-classe/)
**Source 59: Heroic Tales**

In the early 1960s, the first generations born after the war (the so-called ‘baby boomers’) were in their teens, and many had been beneficiaries of the economic recovery plan. They probably therefore had some extra money to spend on goods like comics. ‘American’ had also by this time acquired very positive connotations that seemed to cancel out the memories of the Allies’ bombing attacks.

The cover illustrator gave the man on the left the features of Marcello Mastroianni, a famous Italian actor and widely recognised sex symbol. Look at [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000052/](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000052/) and try to find the snapshot that the cover is based on. See also source 2 for another example of how the mystique of flying has been associated with manhood and daring.

For more on this source, see [https://ibcdigitalarchive.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/2017/10/31/82/](https://ibcdigitalarchive.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/2017/10/31/82/)

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**Source 60: Lucio Dalla’s 1983**

In this part of 1983, Dalla recalls the war in a surreal, dreamlike way. Joy and despair, life and death, hardships and happiness, all are interwoven: a family photo comes to life; bombing victims behave as if they are still alive.

Dalla’s mockery is about the consequences of the bombing war: it not only caused death and destruction, but also made political persuasion and national allegiance almost meaningless. People were so exhausted by years of wartime hardship that they eagerly awaited the end of the hostilities, regardless of which side would emerge victorious. So the Fascists and those in Riccione – a popular coastal resort on the Adriatic coast – are not so different: both wait for delivery, either from the Allies or from tourists. We have seen this pattern elsewhere (for example, source 31).
Further resources

The sources presented in this volume are a very small sample of what is available in the IBCC Digital Archive on the bombing war in Italy. The Archive can be explored by using a suite of search tools:
https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/discover-the-archive

Alternatively, the collections listed below highlight items that may be of special interest for users interested in the history of Italy during the second World War. Some may also include items about related topics – for instance the Resistance - or other theatres, such as the whole Mediterranean, North Africa or the Balkans.

Angiolino Filupotti
A promising painter from childhood, Alfonsino ‘Angiolino’ Filiputti (1924-1999) depicted some of the most dramatic and controversial aspects of the Second World War as seen from the perspective of San Giorgio di Nogaro, a small town in the Friuli region of Italy. He explored a broad range of subjects, including the sinking of the SS Conte Rosso by HMS Upholder (P37), the Laconia incident (a series of events surrounding the loss of the eponymous British troopship) and well-known Bomber Command operations such as the bombing of Dresden and the attacks of the Möhne, Eder and Sorpe dams led by Victoria Cross recipient Guy Gibson. Other works focus on Nazi brutalities, the Resistance, as well as civilian life in wartime Europe: bomb disposal units and British evaders being helped by civilians.
https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/show/27
Gordon Lett

Gordon Lett escaped from a prisoner of war camp in Italy, took to the mountains and established contacts with Resistance forces active in the Apennines between Liguria and Toscana. Lett founded and led the Battaglione Internazionale, a multinational unit that successfully engaged Black Brigades and German units, later supplemented by Special Operations Executive personnel. Documents consist of military assessments, notes on air drops, a ciphers book, a draft of a radio message sent via clandestine radio operators, and a request for tactical bombing. The collection also contains notes on an aircraft crash, the military funeral and the subsequent burial of the aircrew. A specific subset includes correspondence, plans and reports about the construction of an improvised landing strip for Allied aircraft operating behind enemy lines.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/show/999

Digitised and published under licence of the Istituto spezzino per la Storia della Resistenza e dell’Età Contemporanea

Allied Screening Commission in Pistoia (‘fondo Risaliti’)

The commission was tasked to track down Italian civilians who helped escapers and evaders. Documents contain personal information of the helper(s), the names of the Allied servicemen accompanied in some case by their service numbers, the nature of the support provided (food, shelter, clothing, medical attention, etc.) and the relevant timespan. Some personnel actively joined local Resistance units as combatants. The collection also includes five air raid alarms logs covering the whole timespan of the war.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/show/1233

Digitised and published under licence of The Istituto Storico della Resistenza e dell’età contemporanea in provincia di Pistoia
Maurizio Radacich

This collection consists of propaganda, civil defence material, documents and correspondence related to the bombing war in the Italian theatre. It contains some items which can help shed light on the private lives of people who were at the receiving end of the bombing war: a love letter abruptly stopped by a bombing, blank ration cards, a board game, toys, and propaganda flyers.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/show/38

Gordon Cruickshank

Gordon Cruickshank flew with Bomber Command for the duration of the conflict. The collection consists of memoirs, logbooks, playing cards annotated with his operations, official documents, lucky mascots, memorabilia, crew procedures, as well as photographs of aircraft, targets and people. Many contain detailed information and first-hand accounts of the bombings on Turin, Milan and Genova.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/show/759

Jim Auton

Jim Auton was stationed at Foggia in Italy. He describes the tough conditions there, as well as the operations in which he participated, such as targeting an oil refinery in Fiume, now Rijeka in Croatia and Ploiesti in Romania. He took part in mining operations in the Danube as well as secret operations to drop supplies in Warsaw to support the uprising.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/show/19

Operation Dodge

In 1945, heavy bombers participating in Operation Dodge repatriated Eighth Army personnel from Italy. Items include logbooks, interviews, memoirs, and photos taken at various airfields in Southern Italy.

https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/items/browse?tags=Operation+Dodge+%281945%29
Ted Neale
Ted Neale was stationed in North Africa, the Middle East and Italy. The collection contains propaganda leaflets dropped by the Allies, as well as a photograph album, navigation logs, and target photographs. Documents contain first hand recollections of his service life in Italy including being sheltered by local people and returning to his unit with three Austrian teenage deserters; or being driven to Rome by Jesse Owens, the Olympic athlete. 
https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/show/1246

Charles and Margaret Ward
Charles and Margaret Ward née Pratt served in the Special Operation Executive in North Africa, Italy and Greece. The collection contains a diary, British Army paperwork, and photographs taken in Italy. 
https://ibccdigitalarchive.lincoln.ac.uk/omeka/collections/show/188

Personal stories
The archive has preserved hundreds of stories of civilians who were at the receiving end of the bombing war, some recorded by Archive volunteers, others published under licence. On the whole, they offer insights into the daily lives of ordinary people in wartime. While the air war has a place of prominence, they also provide accounts of related experiences: Fascist and German brutality, round-ups, evacuation, forced labour, rationing, strafing, antisemitism, the Holocaust, the Resistance, Italian military internees, Allied occupation, and difficult post-war recovery.
Illustration acknowledgments

P. 1, British Aircraft of the First World War. Source: https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205314278.

P. 2, German Schutte-Lanz Airship SL2 bombing Warsaw, Poland, in 1914. Artwork by Hans Rudolf Schulze. Hans Rudolf Schulze / Public domain.


P. 25, Children of an eastern suburb of London, who have been made homeless by the random bombs of the Nazi night raiders, waiting outside the wreckage of what was their home September 1940. Source: https://catalog.archives.gov/id/541920.


Why do they bomb us?