

The Bombing of Gernika

April 26th, 1937



Adolf Hitler and Francisco Franco

In July 1936 General Franco, with the help of the Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, undermined the Spanish Republic and sparked the beginning of the war. Basque nationalist troops defended both democracy and human rights by meeting the military uprising with force.

The Luftwaffe's "Experiment"

Hermann Wilhelm Goering wanted to test how efficiently he could destroy a city of 10,000 inhabitants. He decided to launch 3 consecutive attacks that would surprise civilians, burn them with heavy incendiary bombs, then machine gun survivors when they thought the attack was over.

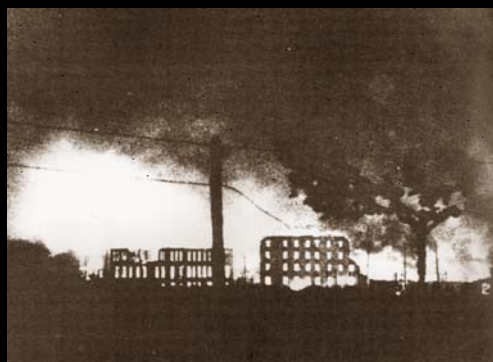


The Market Day Massacre

Goering chose Gernika, a village of 8,000 as the target. It was the traditional Basque capital where deputies from the Republic of Biscay met biennially under the "Holy Tree". The German air force selected April 26, 1936 at 4pm to launch the attack because it was a busy market day.

Countless Victims

The city was completely undefended. No anti-aircraft protected it. The city was 7.5 miles from the front, so the German army witnessed the devastation before the international Red Cross could respond. Gernika was finally defeated two days after the attack. We don't know how many casualties there were, but conservative estimates place them at 800 people.



The Bombing of Gernika's 70th Anniversary

1937 - 2007



Guernica by Pablo Picasso

*Basque Library - Center for Basque Studies
University of Nevada, Reno*

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First Hand from THE TIMES

As George Steer, journalist of The Times, later described,

The Nazi planes came over in waves, blasting the houses from their foundations with heavy bombs, loosing showers of glittering two-pound aluminum incendiary bombs to turn the "Holy City" to a furnace. Skimming the roof tops, fighting planes followed with all machine guns popping, harrying terrified peasants through the fields, sending them sprawling in their own blood. Over 800 men, women and children were killed.

A priest's testimony

The Catholic Canon, Alberto Onaindia, also witnessed the bombing:

I saw the bombing and burning of Guernica, one of the terrible crimes of this age. I walked through streets thick with blood, and saw bodies of the dead, many of them dismembered. There were bodies of old men, women and children.



The "Official Version"

Franco's Spanish government consistently denied any involvement in the bombing. In fact, General Franco accused the Basque nationalists of burning their own city, which remained the official Spanish version of the event until 1975.



Nuremberg Trials

Hermann Goering, interrogated at Nuremberg about the massacre, answered that it was:

A lamentable event. But we could not do otherwise. At that time, such experiments could not be carried out elsewhere.

Nobody was ever sentenced for this crime.

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