

EUROPE

Book documents WWII bombing of Wiesbaden

By DAN STOUTAMIRE
Stars and Stripes

WIESBADEN, Germany—More than 70 years since World War II ended, it's hard to tell that Germany, now home to U.S. Army Europe, was bombed hundreds of times by British and American planes in that conflict.

Wiesbaden resident and historian Thomas Weichel's book, "Wiesbaden im Bombenkrieg" ("The Bombing of Wiesbaden"), documents and explains that bombing campaign.

Released at the beginning of November, it is a reprinting of his 2004 book, with full English translations added in each section. On Dec. 3, Weichel will appear at a book signing at the Wiesbaden Exchange on Hainerberg, where copies of the book will be available.

"During my childhood in Mainz, I can remember seeing the ruins of many bombed-out buildings, so I grew up with this topic," Weichel said in an interview with Stars and Stripes.

At just under 100 pages, the book features dozens of historical photographs that show the aftermath of the bombing campaign.

"Bombenkrieg" also touches on the years preceding the war — the occupation after World War I by the French and British and the later ascendancy of the Nazis.

Adolf Hitler often visited Wiesbaden and sometimes made use of Erbenheim airfield, today part of Clay Kaserne.

The worst night of the bombing campaign, Weichel writes, was Feb. 2, 1945, when nearly 500 British aircraft dropped 1,251 tons of bombs, including several so-called blockbuster bombs, which could destroy entire city blocks.

But the city was lucky — heavy cloud cover meant it was spared the destruction suffered by many German cities in the war.

"(Today) only a few people know that the city of Wiesbaden would have been completely destroyed if the Royal Air Force at-

tack on Feb. 2, 1945, had been successful," Weichel said.

About 20 percent of Wiesbaden's buildings were destroyed, with the most damage focused around the spa district and downtown Kurhaus, he said.

Despite the bombing, much of Wiesbaden remained relatively whole following the war, a situation that led to some lingering rumors that the Allies spared it because the U.S. military planned to install a major



Weichel

base in the city after the war.
"I know one of the rumors that goes around is that we didn't bomb Wiesbaden because we were already planning to build a headquarters here when the war was over, but I have seen no evidence to support anything like that," said USAREUR historian Russell Rodgers. "Basically, Wiesbaden was not at that time a major industrial town, so it didn't receive the same type of [heavy destruction] the Ruhr district received or even a city like Frankfurt or Stuttgart would have received."

Some historians have criticized the relentless American and British strategic bombing campaign against German cities and towns in the final months of the war, saying it served no useful military purpose.

Weichel said he hopes readers will come away with a better understanding of the bombing of civilian targets in Germany during the war.

"I think that the most interesting thing in the book is, perhaps, seeing how the residents of Wiesbaden coped with the bombing threat," he said. "I think that readers will learn about the cruelties of war against a civilian population."

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Courtesy photo from "The Bombing of Wiesbaden"

A Wiesbaden resident picks through the rubble of his residence on Kaiser-Friedrich-Ring following an Allied bombing run on July 28, 1944. Wiesbaden, while not destroyed to the extent of other major German cities, was repeatedly bombed by American and British planes in the final years of the war.