

the bodies were being packed shoulder to shoulder in the mass graves. With the arrival of the police authorities from Berlin the orders were amended again so that the corpses were now buried three layers deep. The Heidefriedhof, several square miles in area, would have offered ample space for a proper burial of all the victims; but the warmer weather was approaching and a smell of decay settled across the city that warned the officials that it was time to think of the safety of the living.



The army erected barricades around the centre of the old city, the area thus cordoned off being a square bounded by streets about three blocks to either side of the Altmarkt. At first nobody even guessed what the restricted zone was for. Then the body recovery squads received a change of orders: the bodies were no longer to be taken to the burial sites outside the city, but sent to a central collecting area in the Altmarkt. Burial in the Heidefriedhof entailed long columns of corpse-laden wagons trekking through the still heavily populated areas of Dresden Neustadt which had received hardly a single bomb during the raids. The authorities did not wish the population here to have to witness this demoralising spectacle.

Nothing was yet said about how else the tens of thousands of corpses being recovered from the ruins each week could be disposed of. Identification of the victims was becoming chaotic. Mounds of unidentified corpses were accumulating at the some of the cemeteries. At some cemeteries officials were able to achieve near-miracles – at the Johannis cemetery in Dresden Tolkewitz for example the police unit leader was able to complete identification procedures with nearly all the victims. But at other sites the rapid accumulation of unidentified corpses gave rise to worrisome complications. S.S. officials who returned to the Heidefriedhof and saw a mound of three thousand unburied victims ordered their summary burial without further attempts at identification. The bodies were merely bulldozed into the prepared grave. The early March weeks were chilly, but in the middle of the month the weather changed and an inordinately warm spring sun beat down on the dead inner city. The ruined buildings dried out, but hundreds of the crushed and blocked basements had still not been opened even weeks later. Unusually large rats were seen scurrying about amongst the ruins, their coats streaked with the white lime that had been spread inside the wrecked buildings. Soldiers working late at night in the cordoned off Dead Zone reported seeing rhesus