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## **“If We Had Lost The War, We All Would Have Been Prosecuted As War Criminals:” The Bombing Campaign Against Japan in World War Two**

Travis Siegel

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“IF WE HAD LOST THE WAR, WE ALL WOULD HAVE BEEN PROSECUTED AS WAR CRIMINALS:”  
THE BOMBING CAMPAIGN AGAINST JAPAN IN WORLD WAR TWO

by

Travis Siegel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in the History

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Michaela Hoenicke-Moore  
Thesis Mentor

Spring 2021

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the  
History have been completed.

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“If We Had Lost The War, We All Would Have Been Prosecuted As War Criminals:”

The Bombing Campaign Against Japan in World War Two

Honors Thesis In History: 2020

Written By Travis N. Siegel

### Abstract

In the last six months of WWII, the United States conducted a bombing campaign in Japan that would mark the world forever. Though a combination of engineering ingenuity, chemical creations, mass production, and racial profiling, the course of the war in the Pacific was fundamentally changed. Strategic bombing was a relatively new concept which only a handful of crucial figures were investigating into. In the pursuit of creating a fleet which would dominate the skies, it was the American government's intention to brutalize the Japanese until they gave into an unconditional surrender. While the usage of atomic bombs has been widely analyzed and criticized, few have looked into the usage of firebombs which wreaked havoc in Japan. The combination of dehumanization of the Japanese and a full mobilization of industry into achieving their goals, it is without any doubt, there were major ethical implications. In my thesis, it is my hope that through peering into the many factors that went into total destruction, that concepts like right and wrong, good and bad, are merely relative. Through the usage of primary and secondary sources, I sought out the forces which went into why decisions were made. The theory that was used at the time was that through swift actions to create a swift victory, it would ultimately lessen the suffering of violent conflict. Through acute research, this is not the case. It was the mentality that allowed people in culpable positions in the U.S. government that allowed justification for it, but this does not take away the horrendous nature of such actions. The crux of this campaign was on the night March 9, 1945 where the U.S. bombed Tokyo. It is clear that this was not only an effort to cripple the capital of Japan, but to make a statement to the rest of the world not to mess with them. It is my most humble opinion that the research which has been conducted will prove such theories in a manner which is academically respectable.

Key Words: Strategic bombing, firebombing, Curtis LeMay, Military Industry, B-29 bomber, WWII in the Pacific

## Introduction

“For a child who did not know the true meaning of death or fear, March 10 was my first experience of that.”<sup>1</sup> Katusmote Sautome was ten years old when 345 B-29 superbombers mercilessly firebombed the capital of Japan and his family's home. He was awakened in the middle of the night, and with his family gazed upwards to see the bombers sail across the sky. “I could see the crimson flames from the ground reflected in the silvery metal underbellies of the aircraft.”<sup>2</sup> On the night of March 9th, 1945, the US Army Air Corp, under the command of General Curtis LeMay flew 345 bombers on a mission to destroy much of Tokyo, the capital of Imperial Japan. This is what the ten-year old Sautome and his family were watching.

The firebombing of Tokyo, code-named *Operation Meetinghouse* is considered the deadliest air raid in human history. It is estimated that there were 100,000 civilian casualties and over a million people displaced from their homes. Throughout the course of the last six months of the war in the Pacific the United States brought untold misery onto 90 different Japanese cities through means of bombing raids using fire bombs. This was a part of a much larger effort by the United States government to force Japan into an unconditional surrender, by strategically bombing them. In the effort of the government to do so, they developed and manufactured thousands of aircrafts that would be capable of completing such missions, invested resources into developing a bomb that would bring maximum damage to civilians, and effectively burn parts of Japan to the ground. All of this was executed properly by General Curtis E. LeMay, a well-known general who is credited with the successful bombing campaign in the Pacific. He was one

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<sup>1</sup>Motoko Rich. “The Man Who Won’t Let The World Forget The Firebombing of Tokyo.” Beyond The World War II We Know. *New York Times*. March 9, 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/magazine/the-man-who-wont-let-the-world-forget-the-firebombing-of-tokyo.html?searchResultPosition=1>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Sautome remembers looking up and seeing the flames on the ground reflect off of the aircraft as a way of describing just how low flying they were - later on it is discussed why the aircrafts had to fly so low

of the strongest proponents of strategic bombing against many adversaries, but his success proved him right as far as effectiveness and efficiency were concerned. It was his philosophy that “the most moral way to win a war, is through evisceration of your enemy as quickly as possible to reduce suffering.”<sup>3</sup> Robert McNamara, a future secretary of defense, who during World War II was just a bombing analyst under LeMay, reflected on this philosophy in the 2003 documentary, *The Fog Of War*, quite differently.<sup>4</sup> In the interview for the documentary McNamara argued that the action the U.S. government took in the pursuit of victory were inhumane, and if the U.S. had lost the war, they would have been tried as a war criminals.

#### Chronology of U.S. Entering The war

The chronology of World War II is important in understanding the U.S. position when assessing the actions that were taken in Japan primarily during the end of the war in 1945. After WWI ended, public sentiment was against going to war in foreign conflicts. People were worried that the arms industry had undermined American neutrality in World War I. As a result, Congress established the Nye Committee.<sup>5</sup> During this time, book titles like *Merchants of Death* were very popular.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the United States entering the war two years later, the rise of fascism in Europe and especially the Third Reich had been a major concern for US policy makers. The Roosevelt government needed to convince the American public that going to war was the only

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Searle, “It Made A Lot Of Sense To Kill Skilled Workers.” *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 66 (January 2002) 12 <https://www.jstor.org/journal/jmilitaryhistory>

<sup>4</sup> A documentary released in 2003, directed by Errol Morris, it received the best documentary film of the year.

<sup>5</sup> The Nye Committee was established April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1934 and it was chaired by U.S. Senator Gerald Nye. It was known as a special committee on investigating the munitions industry. The committee investigated the dealings between the industry and bankers with their reported profits from promoting foreign wars. Their goal was to nationalize the munitions industry to make sure oversight was placed. There were 93 hearings conducted in which 200 plus witnesses testified. The Nye Committee ultimately failed in their goal to nationalize the arms industry, however it inspired three congressional neutrality acts which signaled profound American opposition to overseas involvement.

<sup>6</sup> An epithet used in the U.S. during the 1930’s to attack and criticize the industries and banks that supplied and funded WWI. H.C. Englebrecht and F.C. Hanighen wrote a book in 1934 called *Merchants of Death* which expounded on the “evils” of the armament industry.

option to defend the American way of life. But it was not until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941 that the U.S. was able to fully mobilize. While it was the Japanese who attacked the U.S. and brought them into the war, the U.S. stuck to its “Germany First” policy. The United States' efforts were focused on defeating the Nazis from 1941-1945, in a joint coalition with the other Allied powers. It is a common misconception that the U.S. was militarily superior to other countries at this time, and actually the better half of the war in the Pacific was spent in U.S. retreat. One of the most notable American retreats was the withdrawal from the Philippines. The Japanese launched a campaign in 1941 and 1942 where they attempted to conquer the Philippines from the Americans. While the Americans outnumbered the Japanese, it was a decisive defeat and is considered one of the greatest military failures in American military history.<sup>7</sup>

The campaign in Europe was vastly different than the campaign in the Pacific. The Japanese planes and naval presence were superior in every fashion in the earlier years of the war. They had more aircraft carriers, more troops occupying islands in the Pacific, and the Japanese Zero was considered superior until the development of the p-51 mustang which equaled the zeros capabilities.<sup>8</sup> To best understand how the United States got to the point of firebombing Tokyo, along with ninety other Japanese cities, it is critical to know about Curtis LeMay and how he became the man he was, the factors that went into creating the B-29 super bomber, the development of the firebomb, and strategic bombing. Only then can we understand that warfare in World War II truly was determined by technological ingenuity and industrial production. The

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Sherry. *The Rise of American Airpower: The Creation of Armageddon*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) 103

<sup>8</sup> The Japanese Zero was the name of the primary airplane used in combat. The reason for the nickname “zero” was because the Japanese imperial symbol was on the side of all airplanes, a red circle, thus leading American troops to dub it as a zero.

fate of the world hung in the balance. What were the motivations and justifications offered by the United States government and the entire American war machine to use the strategies and tactics they did in Japan? How did ordinary Americans react to the news of bombing civilians? *These questions go back to the heart of LeMay's philosophy: is bombing really the best and most moral way to win a war?*

### The Factor of Race In Wartime

Following the defeat of the Germans in Europe in the spring of 1945, the United States turned their full efforts onto defeating the Japanese. To the Americans, fighting the Germans who were white, Christian, and promoted anti-Semitism, had not been as popular in the U.S. as fighting the Japanese. Thus creating war propaganda against the Japanese was much easier. In 1945, a film directed by Frank Capra called *Know Your Enemy: Japan [there was another one called, Know Your Enemy: Germany]* was released. This film depicts Japanese history from the late 14th century onward. The U.S. Department of War commissioned the film, and it depicts Japanese society and history as militaristic and totalitarian. “*Know Your Enemy* was a potpourri of most of the English speaking world's dominant clichés about the Japanese enemy, including the crudest, most vulgar, and most blatantly racist approach.”<sup>9</sup> The purpose of this film was to educate American soldiers on Japanese history as a means to dehumanize the enemy, to make them not only an enemy in regards to political reasons, but to portray Japanese as savages. This film was released three years after the wildly controversial start of Japanese-American internment camps in the United States which began on February 19th, 1942. These internment camps were built to relocate and incarcerate all Japanese Americans to monitor their loyalty and to re-educate them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John Dower. *War Without Mercy: Race And Power In The Pacific War* . (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) 20

<sup>10</sup> Decreed by President Roosevelt in executive order 9066

During the war, there were no internment camps for German Americans, or Italian Americans, which leads to the conclusion that the creation of these camps were solely racially motivated. However, precedent had been set to legalize the actions of the U.S. government to do something like this. In World War One there were a string of Supreme Court cases that led to defending the government's rights to more extreme measures to be taken during great national security crises.

By the time World War II had rolled around, the U.S government's attitude had stayed the same. Even though there had been an intense backlash against 1917 and US involvement in war and the hysteria and curtailment of democratic rights it had brought about, the country saw a replay of it in World War II. Since internment camps were created in the name of national security, it was considered that anyone who opposed them had ulterior motives to support the Japanese empire. One of the most prominent supreme court cases to take place was *Korematsu v United States* (323 U.S.214, 1944) which upheld the exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast Military Area during World War II.<sup>11</sup>

These camps led to an increase in racial incidents towards not only Japanese Americans, but all Asian Americans during the war. There are many counts of Chinese-Americans, Korean-Americans, Vietnamese-Americans etc. who dealt with racial backlash from propaganda against the Japanese. All across the country signs would go up on restaurants saying “no Japs allowed”.

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<sup>11</sup> "Korematsu v. United States." Oyez. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/323us214>. A Japanese-American man living in San Leandro, Fred Korematsu, chose to stay at his residence rather than obey the order to relocate. Korematsu was arrested and convicted of violating the order. He responded by arguing that Executive Order 9066 violated the Fifth Amendment. The Ninth Circuit affirmed Korematsu's conviction.



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At the same time though, the Japanese government also invested heavily in anti-American propaganda. “In the late 1930’s the Spiritual Culture Institute was created by the ministry of education explicitly to perfect and unify the entire nation with one conviction.”<sup>13</sup> The Japanese government took pride in being different than westerners, and while Americans focused on individualism, the Japanese were seen as a unified people. “During the years of the war, the Japanese government's propaganda, for internal and external consumption, harped incessantly on 100 million hearts beating as one, the 100 million people as one bullet, 100 million as innumerable monolithic entities.”<sup>14</sup> It was propaganda like this from the Japanese that threatened and terrified many Americans to the point where Japanese Americans were considered working with the enemy, and that they were a part of this unified entity set out to dominate the world and destroy America. Ironically, it was also the point of the Japanese government to inspire fear into their citizens that the Americans were set out to conquer the world and destroy Japan.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A photograph taken at a cafe that had put up a sign that no Japs will be served at their establishment. Taken in 1942

<sup>13</sup> Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 31

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* 30

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* 34

The stark contrasts in lifestyles and culture led to a brutal racial campaign by both sides as a means to mobilize against one another. This was much more pertinent between the Americans and Japanese than any other conflicting countries throughout the entire war. As a result of this relentless racial campaign, it led to bombing fanatics to mercilessly destroy over 90 Japanese cities.

### Background of Bombing

Through a full mobilization effort to racialize the conflict between the Japanese and the American Government set out for the best ways to defeat them as quickly as possible. Due to the fact that the Japanese fought fiercely and defended their home with their lives, the Americans were constantly looking for ways to mitigate American casualties. Kamikaze missions and concepts like “for every one Japanese soldier who dies, he must bring ten Americans with him” radicalized the Japanese war effort and in doing so scared Americans.<sup>16</sup> By the time the Americans had conquered most of the Mariana, it was critical to subdue them at the source, Japan. President Truman knew that a land invasion of Japan would lead to the deaths of tens of millions of Americans which would have been devastating on the home front, potentially costing the war.<sup>17</sup> It was because of this fact, that the U.S had set out to accomplish a means to defeat the Japanese without a land invasion. The solution was bombing. This ideology is what drove LeMay into becoming a bombing fanatic.<sup>18</sup>

Bombing was a relatively new concept. It was first theorized by an Italian general named Giulio Douhet. He thought of the possibility of air machines becoming the new center of

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<sup>16</sup> Kamikaze missions were missions where Japanese pilots would have funerals pre mission, and they would only fuel their plane up with enough fuel to reach their target, and once they arrived, would intentionally crash their plane into the target as a means of inflicting as much damage as possible.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Government, “*U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey In The Pacific*” (Secretary of War Department, 1944) 7

<sup>18</sup> Sherry, *The Rise of American Airpower*, 69

warfare. He authored a book called *The Command of The Air*, 1921. At this time the airplane had only been used in the World War I as a means of reconnaissance or in dogfights which were primarily used as propaganda. This is not what Douhet and other air fanatics had in mind when envisioning air power at its full force. There is no way for the civilian population to protect itself from the rain of bombs that comes without warning, just pure acceptance that one's life is now out of one's own hands. But at the start of World War II it was understood by both Allied and Axis strategists, industrialists, and leaders alike that it would be bombing that decided the war.

The war in Europe had already gone on for almost two years before the Americans officially entered. The Axis powers and Allied powers alike were trying to bomb one another into oblivion. This began with the Luftwaffe raids in Poland in 1939, France in 1940, the U.K. through 1941. In fact in 1937, before the war broke out, the Germans bombed Guernica during the Spanish civil war on April 26th, 1937. This was one of the first instances of bombing raids. This established precedence for the U.S. Government to justify the mass production in manufacturing bombers. It was never about dogfighters and World War One aces, but about the ability to amass a fleet of capable machines to carry out raids that would spare millions of men on a battlefield.<sup>19</sup>

### Who Was Curtis LeMay?

Curtis LeMay was born on November 15th, 1906 in Columbus Ohio. His father was a handyman and his mother worked around the house. There is a famous story that LeMay would tell people about how when he was only five years old, he looked up in the sky for the first time

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. Government, "*U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey In The Pacific*" 3

and saw an airplane. As a little boy, he was fascinated by the flying machine, and he chased after it not understanding that he could never keep up with it due to the plane being miles high in the sky. He wanted to catch it but never came close, and eventually it disappeared into the horizon.<sup>20</sup> His father could never hold a job for more than a few months at a time, so income was fairly limited in the LeMay household. They were constantly moving around the country so that his father could find work, but nothing ever really stuck. By the time he enrolled into high school, the family had moved back to Columbus. After high school he attended college at Ohio State University where he graduated with a degree in civil engineering. In his last couple years of college, he joined up with the newly created Air Corp department in the United Armed Forces. At this time, the Air Corp was a part of the Army, there was no separate Air Force branch.<sup>21</sup> In October of 1929 he received the commission of second lieutenant in Air Corps reserves. In 1930, he received a regular commission from the U.S. Army Air Corp and was stationed in Hawaii as a pursuit pilot.<sup>22</sup>



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LeMay was one of the first men in this time to receive specialized training regarding

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<sup>20</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *The Bomber Mafia*, Pushkin Industries (Podcast), July 9, 2020  
<http://revisionisthistory.com/episodes/45-the-bomber-mafia>

<sup>21</sup> Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 8

<sup>22</sup> A term used to describe a fighter pilot

<sup>23</sup> A photograph of Curtis LeMay

aerial navigation. In 1937 LeMay showed that his training had paid off during a combat training mission run by the U.S. Navy. The objective behind this mission was that LeMay and a couple other pilots while flying a Boeing B-17 flying fortress (predecessor of the B-29 super fortress) were to locate a ship and bomb it. It took LeMay a whole lot of convincing the joint chiefs that this training exercise was worthwhile. There had been a lot of push back from military leaders and politicians early on before the start of World War II who were stuck in the ways of traditional warfare which was exclusive to land and sea combat.<sup>24</sup> Investing money into bombers seemed like a waste of resources and time. LeMay and other bombing fanatics were determined to convince them otherwise, and to do so he would prove that bombers could in fact be accurate when all odds were against them. On a cloudy misty day off the coast of California in August 1937, LeMay under the command of Major General Caleb V. Haynes helped hunt down from the sky the USS Utah and nail the target with water bombs.<sup>25</sup> This success was in spite of the fact that the Navy had given incorrect coordinates to Haynes and his crew, but with the style and knowledge LeMay provided to his crew, they made the necessary adjustments and executed with precision. It is said that some sailors actually got injured that day from the bomb, and when LeMay was asked about it, he said “my job was to find and bomb the USS Utah, and so I did.”<sup>26</sup>

LeMay was the type of man who no one wanted to mess around with. He never gave grandiose battle speeches, he was not kind or sympathetic with his words. Curtis E. LeMay was the man the U.S. Government called when they needed a problem solved. Without pride or prejudice he solved problems. He did not take failure as an answer and through whatever means

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<sup>24</sup> RJ Overy. *The Air War 1939-1945* (New York: Stein And Day Publishing Co. 1980) 5

<sup>25</sup> Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 61

<sup>26</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, “The Bomber Mafia.” Pushkin Industries (Podcast), <http://revisionisthistory.com/episodes/45-the-bomber-mafia>

necessary would establish a solution for a problem, no matter how he got there. His type was old school, the toughest man on the block, and by the time he was in command of his own unit, his men were well aware of it.<sup>27</sup>

LeMay best proved this during his service in Germany in 1943. He was in command of a fleet of B-24 bombers who were responsible for various raids. During this time, the Air Force was reporting that planes had a 40% return rate from missions. This fact scared many men and actually resulted in a significant drop in pilots engaging in their missions for fear that they would not return. When LeMay became aware of this fact, he gathered all of his men and told them that any man who did not do his job, would return to a firing squad for treason. LeMay is famously known for saying “I would never ask my men to do something that I was not prepared to do myself.”<sup>28</sup> From that point on, LeMay flew in the lead bomber for 22 missions. This led to a 100% engagement rate and significantly lessened the casualties. To the men who served under LeMay, he was unwavering.

### Building The B-29

LeMay and his bombing tactics were in desperate need of a bomber capable of performing at the level necessary to produce the results LeMay wanted to see. It is critical to understand how the B-29 bomber was developed to give context to one of the most important creations during the war. In 1940, one year before the United States would enter the war, President Roosevelt knew it was critical to begin preparations for the inevitability that they would enter. Germany’s success in conquering European countries so quickly prompted

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

Roosevelt to call for a joint congressional meeting on May 16th, 1940. This meeting was to discuss the production capacity of at least 50,000 planes a year, a standing force of naval and military aircraft of the same size, and renewed congressional commitment to the sale of aircraft to Britain and France.<sup>29</sup> This dramatic turn in policy enabled the American war machine. The reaction of the policy was “calculated to shock the American public into rethinking fundamental assumptions about national security.”<sup>30</sup> The American public had initially imagined, like in World War One, that the U.S. would stay neutral from what was perceived to be European affairs. Roosevelt's address to Congress was designed to incite fear in the American public. They were forced to come to the realization that the only reason mobilization of this magnitude was necessary if they believed an attack was imminent. Charles Lindbergh also played a more direct and sinister role in the lead up to Pearl Harbor. As part of the America First Committee, and having visited Nazi Germany repeatedly, indeed having a family there, he warned the U.S. stood no chance against Nazi Luftwaffe. While this took place almost a decade earlier, war breaking out worried many Americans that the Nazis would be just as capable to send a fleet of their own bombers and attack the home front. This was utilized as propaganda by the U.S. government as a tool of fear towards the public. “They took the blitz of London and offered this as a reality to New York or D.C.”<sup>31</sup>

The war in which so many fought, was ultimately decided by manufacturing and ingenuity, who could build the most bombers? It was a simple equation for industrialists, a mathematical problem. The most important independent variable was time. By the end of the war, it was determined that Germany and Japan had not produced enough planes at the rate in

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<sup>29</sup> Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 91

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* 91

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid* 95

which would have lead them to succeed.<sup>32</sup> When we compare the figures between the Allied power production of bombers versus the Axis we can see the vast differences.

	Allied Total Production of Bombers Per Year	Axis Total Production of Bombers Per Year
1939	24,178	14,562
1940	39,518	16,815
1941	64,706	19,264
1942	101,519	26,670
1943	151,673	43,100
1944	167,654	67,987
1945	84,806	18,606

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As can be seen by these figures the allied powers (USSR, USA, Britain) were out producing the Axis (Germany, Japan, Italy) the entire time, but in the 40's it really wasn't even close. This is vastly attributed to the U.S. which were accounting for the majority of production for the allies. The United States accounted for just about 50% of the total number of planes produced during the war. They built 304,090 planes out of the total 608,895.<sup>34</sup> There are many things that factored into this, but the most important takeaway is that U.S. manufacturing blew away all competition. The mobilization effort by the U.S. was like nothing the world had ever seen before. All the while this created hundreds of thousands of jobs in the United States which stimulated the economy. Roosevelt's decree for 50,000 planes a year catapulted this country into the war machine that would terrify Japan in a few years to come.

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<sup>32</sup> RJ Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945*, 151

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid* 152

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* 150



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Although the United States dominated in production numbers, that was only the first part of winning. The next step was a much more complex problem to solve. It wasn't just about making the most, but making the best. It was actually Charles Lindbergh who convinced General Henry Arnold that the U.S. needed to produce a brand new super plane to counter the Nazi production. The pursuit to the B-29 was a long and arduous process. Initially the contract was placed at a competitive price for production companies all over the country. Big manufacturers like Lockheed Martin and Douglas Co. were in the race for the contract, but they eventually gave up after some difficulties. In December 1939, the Air Corps issued a formal specification for a so-called "super bomber", that could deliver 20,000 lbs. (9,100 kg) of bombs to a target 2,667 mi (4,292 km) away and at a speed of 400 mph (640 km/h).<sup>35</sup> The task was awarded to the Boeing manufacturing company. It was their job to build the greatest plane the world had ever seen.

In January of 1925, Lloyd Stearmen, Walter Beech, and Clyde Cessena established the

<sup>35</sup> A photograph of a manufacturing plant in Wichita Kansas building the B-29 circa 1942

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Government, "*U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey In The Pacific*" 7

Travel Air Manufacturing Company in Wichita Kansas.<sup>37</sup> This plant opened with intentions to build planes for all purposes. Lloyd Stearmen actually left this company to establish his own, Stearmen Aircraft Corporation. This was acquired by a holding company for Boeing in 1929. In 1938 it acquired its first major military contract, and later that year Stearmen had become an official division of the Boeing company. In 1941 it officially became known as The Wichita Division of The Boeing Airplane Company. Boeing's new "Plant II" was in partial operation by June of 1942. Building a new plant was a formidable task, but staffing it with sufficient numbers of trained workers was equally difficult. People were recruited from all over Kansas and neighboring states. A mammoth recruiting, training, and job placement task eventually created a skilled workforce. There were problems faced by the thousands of subcontractors that also had to expand and train their workforces across the country.<sup>38</sup>

### Developing Napalm

In the same chronological fashion of building the B-29, it also had occurred to military specialists that they needed to create the weapons that the B-29 would ultimately deliver. It was an equally important task to vanquishing the enemy. A couple of years before the United States had entered the war in 1937, a meeting took place at Harvard University. There were many important individuals who attended the meeting that day, but the two most notable were Louis Feizer and Hoyt C. Hottel. Both of these men were in the top of the field of chemistry. This meeting was put together by the National Defense Research Committee (NRDC). The task of this meeting was to identify the best way to burn things down. Their task was to reexamine the

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<sup>37</sup> Sherry, "The Rise of American Power" 126

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 168

lethal qualities of thermo combustion. In Hottel's own words "we needed to learn more about incendiary bombs."<sup>39</sup> In their attempt to do so, they proposed a competition of sorts. The parameters of this competition were to see who could create the best and most effective incendiary bomb. They called this competition "Hottels Bake Off". The biggest names in industrial manufacturing got involved with this competition. The importance of this contest was paramount to winning the war.<sup>40</sup>

On May 28th, 1941 at a NRDC scientific conference in Chicago, Feizer heard of a peculiar incident that took place at a DuPont chemical plant. A group in one of their research divisions was working with a compound called divinyl acetylene, its hydrocarbon, an oil bi product. When mixed with a pigment, the product would turn into a tough adhesive film, however the film kept bursting in flames. This caught Feizer's attention at the conference, and he immediately went to work with it. During their experimentations of it, they learned that the liquid gradually changed into a sticky viscous gel. It was discovered by Hottel and Feizer that when a viscous gel burns, it does not become fluid, it retains its gel and stickiness and continues to burn.<sup>41</sup> They took this and began running tests to see what burned best with it. Initially they tried using divinyl acetylene, which burned well, but it was not as effective as they were hoping. Finally they tried it with gasoline, which worked exceptionally well. In addition, they added aluminum palmitate and aluminum naphthenate. This is where the term Napalm originates from, and it was from the combination of these key elements that it became the weapon of choice for the United States Air Force. The next task was to turn Napalm into a bomb. To do this, they

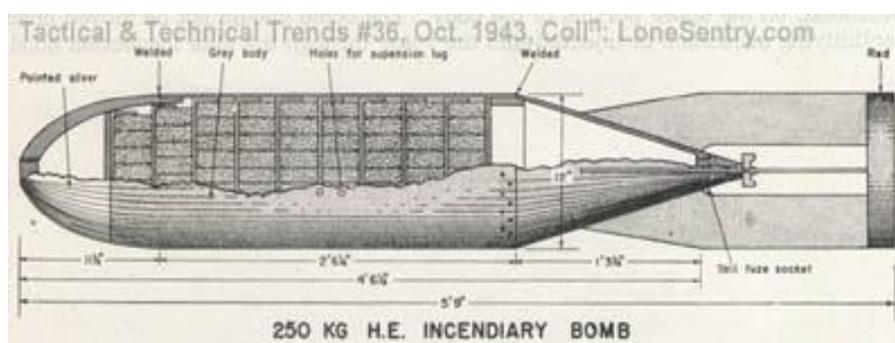
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<sup>39</sup>Malcolm Gladwell, *The Bomber Mafia*, (Podcast) July 16th 2020 <http://revisionisthistory.com/episodes/45-the-bomber-mafia>

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*

inserted a stick of TNT with a layer of white phosphorus wrapped around the middle of a canister filled with napalm. Phosphorus burns at a high temperature, so the TNT would go off and send the gel everywhere which had been set aflame by the initial explosion. The container they used was initially created for holding mustard gas. The weapon the NRDC was searching for had been found, and efforts to mass produce Napalm were put into immediate effect.



42

### Strategic Bombing

With the bomb to create destruction, the plane to carry it to the target, and the man willing to spearhead the entire operation, we are now at the point where the tactic to put it all together was formulated. Strategic bombing as determined by the United States Army Air Force (USSAF), dictated a specific tactical doctrine of how the USAAF was going to go about achieving their goals. It was decided that large formations of heavily armed bombers would fight their way through the enemy's defenses and conduct very precise bombing in daylight to destroy

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<sup>42</sup> A chart describing the design of a napalm bomb that was used

carefully selected targets.<sup>43</sup> One of the major problems that the USAAF faced early on in the war was there was no feasible way to bomb Japan due to the distance that would need to be travelled. It was too far of a distance for any plane at the time to make it to the target and back without running out of fuel. The U.S. Navy only had so many aircraft carriers that could only carry so many bombers, so it wasn't an option to launch major air raids from the sea. There is one instance in which they did just that, and that was right after Pearl Harbor, The Doolittle Raid.<sup>44</sup> In efforts to create a strategic plan to target Japan, it made the most sense to conquer the islands that surround Japan. Once the islands were conquered, the USAAF would begin constructing runways where operations would be run from. The idea was, the more islands could be conquered, the more bases they could build and bomb Japan from. The closer the island was to mainland Japan, the more bombing raids the USAAF could run, and with less fuel.



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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Searle, *"It Made A Lot of Sense To Kill Skilled Workers"* 4

<sup>44</sup> The Doolittle raid was put together by Lt. Colonel James Doolittle, this operation was a one way mission to bomb Tokyo. It had minimal tactical effects and was done more so to send a message to Japan that the U.S. would get its revenge on behalf of Pearl Harbor.

<sup>45</sup> A photograph of an air strip built in Okinawa in 1945

There were two key islands which the United States needed to occupy in order to run the most effective campaign from. These two islands were Okinawa and Iwo Jima.<sup>46</sup> Okinawa was taken April 1st, 1945. Iwo Jima was taken on February 19th, 1945. Okinawa is approximately 400 miles away from Japan, and Iwo Jima is about 1,032 miles away. Once these islands were taken, the U.S. was perfectly positioned to run an uninterrupted campaign against Japan. They were for the most part uninterrupted because the Japanese imperial navy was all but destroyed by this point in the war, which meant there weren't going to be any significant efforts to reconquer the island due to the Japanese not having the ability to bring men there. However the Japanese resorted to the ruthless tactic of Kamikaze missions to attack U.S. ships. This was both effective and frightening for American navy men who feared the possibility of being subjected to this fate. Before these islands were taken, the U.S. was running the majority of its raids from China.<sup>47</sup> The USAAF saw very little success from these bombing raids. There were a number of factors that went into this. Bombers were basically guessing when to drop on their targets, and the second was that the jet stream patterns from Japan into China were completely messing up the bombers strategic plans on when and where to drop the bombs.<sup>48</sup>

The bombing raids originated from bases built in China. After islands in the Pacific were conquered, the USAAF moved operations to the Pacific. General Wolfe was in charge of operations based in China, while General Hansell was placed in charge of operations from the

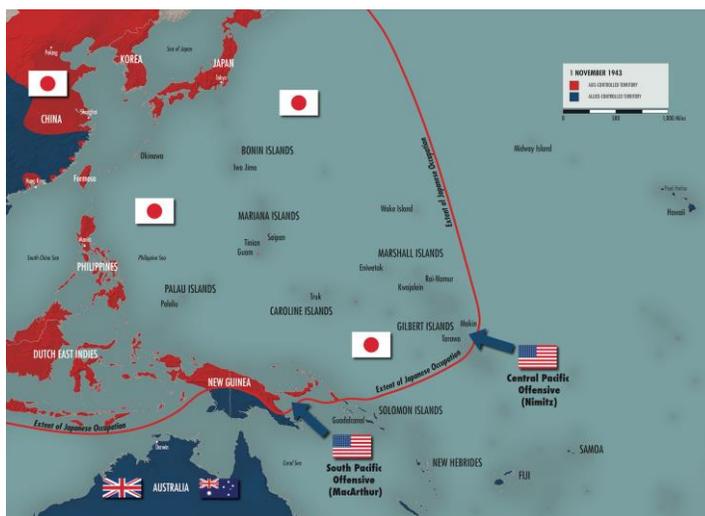
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<sup>46</sup> The reason the picture of the Marines raising the flag became such a prominent piece of American propaganda was because after the island was taken, it became a cornerstone in the victory. The most important were that the Norden bomb sight was not effective at seeing through the foggy skies in Japan

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Searle, *"It Made A Lot Of Sense To Kill Skilled Workers"*, 9

<sup>48</sup> RJ Overy *The Air War 1939-1945*, 100

Islands. Curtis LeMay replaced Wolfe on July 4, 1944. The first wave of bombing waves in Japan initially began with a zero percent success rate up until January of 1945. They were focused on high altitude, daylight precision bombing. The principal cause for the inaccuracies was the Japanese weather. The Norden bombsight could not compensate for crosswinds of such magnitude.<sup>49</sup>



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There were two types of methods used by the USAAF during the war that were believed the best way to bring victory. These methods were area bombing and precision bombing. These tactics both utilized incendiary bombs, but for different purposes. Precision bombing was a concept where in order to best utilize forces, it was required to pre-determine key spots to target on any given raid which would weaken the enemy.<sup>51</sup> This was all created in the precision bombing doctrine which air power fanatics had conjured up during the war.<sup>52</sup> This meant

<sup>49</sup>Thomas Searle, *“It Made A Lot Of Sense To Kill Skilled Workers”*, 14

<sup>50</sup> A map which shows which islands belonged to the Japanese.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Sherry *Rise of American Air Power*, 57

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid* 58

targeting aqueducts, specific manufacturing sites, military bases etc. The thought process behind pre-determining your targets was that through maximizing the damage done to necessary elements of an operating country, it would force them into submission with minimal civilian casualties. Precision bombing seemed like the best method to use, however in practice was much more difficult than expected. Due to all of the challenges the Air Force had been dealing with, it made precision bombing ineffective because the raids were not hitting their intended targets.



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Since precision bombing was not working as it was intended to, area bombing was the next step to success. The thought process behind area bombing was to completely level everything in sight.<sup>54</sup> Bombers would take off from their base with the intent to strike a general area and release thousands of tons of napalm over that area. This took the humanitarian factor completely out of the equation.<sup>55</sup> By enabling pilots to engage in this practice, there would be an increase in civilian casualties, but there wouldn't be any worry of whether or not their target was hit. Precedent had already been set by the Allied powers in Europe during the bombing campaign

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<sup>53</sup> A photograph of a bombing raid in Osaka 1945

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Searle, *"It Made A Lot Of Sense To Kill Skilled Workers"*, 8

<sup>55</sup> RJ Overy *The Air War 1939-1945*, 148

against Germany. Specifically the bombing of Dresden on February 13th, 1945. Once they had levelled Dresden, it became clear to military officials like Haywood Hansell, Curtis LeMay, and Douglas MacArthur that the same tactics should be applied in Japan.<sup>56</sup>

It was also strategically advantageous to the USAAF that Japanese cities were made mostly out of wood and the U.S. knew exactly what they were getting themselves into when the green light was given on area bombing. LeMay knew this, and in 1945, was promoted

### Operation Meetinghouse

Now that the USAAF could plan missions with goals of pure destruction, the strategy around enabling this was a much simpler game plan. It had been common practice for the USAAF to run bombing missions from high altitudes making it almost impossible for Japanese anti-aircraft guns to shoot them down.<sup>57</sup> This caused an issue however for American bomber crews who were having difficulties with the Japanese jet streams which were creating a much more difficult time for bombers to execute their mission. Missions were also usually run in broad daylight to give bomber crews the best probability of being able to see their target. In early March the USAAF high command met to discuss a coordinated raid on four major Japanese cities: Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Kobe.<sup>58</sup> Due to the issues the bombers were having, LeMay made a series of decisions that would break the USAAF procedure. The first was a series of night attacks would be made on major Japanese cities. The second was that bombing would be carried out from five thousand to eight thousand feet. The third was that no armament or ammunition

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid 77

<sup>57</sup> Edwin Hoyt. *Inferno: The Firebombing of Japan, March 9th-August 15th, 1945*, (Oxford: England Madison Books, 2000) 5

<sup>58</sup> Ibid 8

would be carried and the size of the crews will be reduced accordingly. The fourth was that all aircraft will attack individually. Finally, that Tokyo will be the first target.<sup>59</sup> The first three out of the five commands had broken proper USAAF command. Night missions were considered dangerous, bombing at such a low altitude defeated the purpose of the B-29's high altitude capabilities, and removing the machine guns and ammunition from the planes, left them defenseless. However, LeMay saw these changes as promising for a successful raid. He said "I'm removing the ammunition because I'm afraid that the crews will be shooting at each other more than the Japs. Then we'll save three thousand pounds, which will give us another ton and a half of bombs. This meant a 65 percent increase in bomb capacity."<sup>60</sup> The pilots on this mission were initially shocked by the news of LeMay's commands. To them, going on a mission without machine guns to defend themselves seemed suicidal. But the men trusted LeMay, and he had not steered them wrong this far, so they went with it. To boost morale, LeMay had a meteorologist tell the men that there would be high winds when the mission began, which meant the incendiary bombs would create fires that would spread out farther.<sup>61</sup>

The mission began at the Guam air strip at around 10 pm on March 9, 1945 . Tokyo was approximately 1,500 miles away, and the 314th was off carrying thousands of tons of napalm. By midnight the first wave of the 314th had arrived in Tokyo flying below ten thousand feet. The Japanese air defenders were on high alert that night, scouring the skies at approximately 30,000 feet. The 314th arrived completely undetected, until it was too late. Only fourteen minutes into the raid, an inferno had been ignited in Tokyo. The atmosphere in Tokyo was a nightmare, fires

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid 8

<sup>60</sup> Ibid 12

<sup>61</sup> Ibid 9

blazing as far as 16 square kilometers, with hundreds of thousands of buildings on fire.<sup>62</sup>

The Japanese had approximately 638 anti-aircraft guns, 90 fighter jets, and 8,000 professional and civilian firefighters stationed throughout Tokyo. This was never going to be enough to deter the results that the 325 bombers had brought that night. However, in hopes to lessen sinking morale in the empire, Japanese newspapers printed stories about Japanese pilots who saw some success during the raid. One such pilot was Lt. Heikichi Yoshizawa.

“Lieutenant Yoshizawa, who shot down two B-29’s and damaged several others in a series of B-29 raids on Tokyo, also damaged another B-29 when the enemy attacked the Kanto District.. Although his plane was damaged by enemy gunfire, he deliberately launched a ramming attack on another enemy plane and downed it, thereby meeting a glorious death.”<sup>63</sup>

Snippets like this were printed in many Japanese newspapers throughout the empire. This was to keep the illusion that the Japanese were somehow winning during these raids. The truth was quite the opposite. LeMay’s bombers were bringing the most destruction Japan had ever faced, over 100,000 Japanese people were killed. It took 70 years to rebuild Tokyo.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> U.S. Government, “*U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey*” 15

<sup>63</sup> Edwin Hoyt, *Inferno: The Firebombing of Japan, March 9th-August 15th, 1945*, 6 this quote comes directly from a newspaper snippet that Hoyt used in his book.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid* 42



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### What Happens Next

For the remaining six months that the war lasted, to the second atomic bomb which was dropped on Nagasaki on August 15th, 1945, the Americans firebombed ninety Japanese cities. This campaign by the Americans is considered the most deadly aerial campaign ever to take place. However, none of the fire bombings, or even the atomic bombing matched the casualties of the night of March 9th. The firebombing of Tokyo truly marked a new era for American air power. There was no other air force in the world which was as feared as the Americans. This was the mentality of the American government that enabled men like Curtis LeMay to tap into new powers, which created the most dominating military service on the planet. Two years after the Japanese surrendered, the United States officially recognized the Air Force as the 5th branch of the armed forces. Curtis LeMay was moved to the Joint Chief of Staff where he ran the Air Force from the Pentagon. His obsession with napalm bombing would follow him through the Korean war and into Vietnam. “We’ll bomb North Vietnam back to the stone age.”<sup>66</sup> By this point in

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<sup>65</sup> A photograph of Tokyo the night of the attack

<sup>66</sup> Curtis LeMay, *America Is In Danger*, (Michigan: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968) 4

time LeMay was unpopular amongst the American people for his ruthless tactics, and his blatant disregard for human life. He retired from the Air Force in 1965 and died October 1st, 1990. In a meeting held in the United Nations in 1980, a vote was taken to ban the usage of napalm against civilian targets.

The lessons from World War II bombing should never be forgotten. The supreme commander of the United States Forces in the European theatre and the 34th president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower left office giving one of the important addresses to the American people of the 20th century. He recognized the growth of the military industrial complex becoming an international player. He warned the American people the dangers that would follow from this. In a century, there were four major wars which led to great suffering and death. The corporations that were involved in creating the bombers from World War II have made it a part of their business to constantly be creating and selling weapons of war.

“This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence-economic, political, even spiritual-is felt in every city, every state house, every office of the Federal government. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. Down the long lane of history yet to be written America knows that this world of ours, ever growing smaller, must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be, instead, a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect.”<sup>67</sup>

With a growing military industry, it is essential that people recognize when governments try to racialize enemies, or divide us based on racial differences. The lessons which were learned

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<sup>67</sup> Dwight Eisenhower, “Eisenhower’s Farewell Address” (Speech, Washington D.C. January 17, 1961) (<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=90&page=transcript>)

in World War II should act as beacons to never allow such destruction to take place ever again.

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