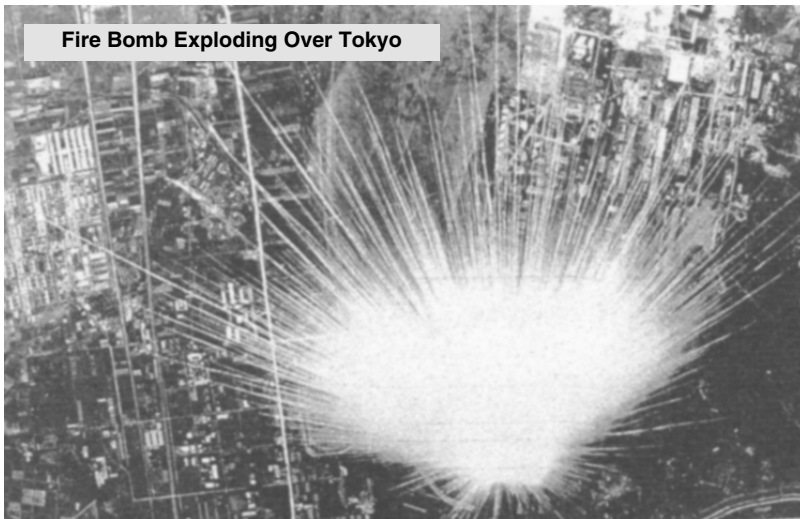


Bizarre, Fascinating, and Wacky World War I & II Secrets. The Disastrous Fire-Bombing of Japan



by Cecil Owen

Japanese men, women, boys, and girls are running aimlessly down the streets. They are screaming and screeching as loudly as it is humanly possible to do. Everyone is completely terrified, as they are trying to escape the onrushing flames. Their clothes are being burned off their trembling bodies. Next the hair on their heads are beginning to ignite rapidly. These Japanese people are desperately seeking a way to escape, but there is no escape! The flames and heat waves seem to be chasing everyone down the streets. Soon the heat is around 1000 degrees Fahrenheit and the huge flames are



Fire Bomb Exploding Over Tokyo

leaping several hundred feet into the air. These Japanese men, women, boys, and girls, by the hundreds, are suffering an agonizing death in the extra hot flames! This is a hideous nightmare that is fast becoming a reality. The time is Friday night March 9, 1945, and the place is Tokyo, Japan.

The fire is not the result of an earthquake, tidal wave, exploding volcano, not even an atomic bomb blast. This is the greatest urban disaster, man made or natural, in all of history. And this is just the beginning of the sorrows and sufferings the Japanese people would have to endure. In that one horrible night, 97,000 people were killed, 125,000 people were injured, and 1,200,000 people were left homeless. A total of 265,171 buildings were destroyed, and 15.8 square miles of the city of Tokyo were burned to ashes.

The 21st Bomber Command was not having too much success with its bombing of Japanese cities. So the old bomber commander, Brigadier General Haywood S. Hansell, was replaced with the tough new commander, Major General Curtiss Lemay. He decided that the only way to bring Japan to her knees was to fire-bomb their industrial



Major General Curtiss Lemay

might. Therefore he ordered 334 B-29 super fortresses to hit Japan's capital city, Tokyo, with 2,000 tons of fire bombs. These fire bombs were M47 701b "napalm", a ferocious substance developed by DuPont

and Standard Oil chemical companies. It is a compound of jellied gasoline containing magnesium, which makes it stick to almost anything. If it sticks to your bare flesh, it will burn quickly down to your bones. It is very painful, and almost impossible to dislodge from off your body. This napalm was also used by our infantry troops in flame throwing tanks and carried by one soldier in two portable units. The first B-29 super fortresses flew over Tokyo on an intersecting course.

They dropped one napalm bomb every 100 feet over the target. As a result, the following bombers could see their target in flames,

inside this burning "X". For three whole hours, wave after wave of B-29 war birds dropped their cargo upon the large dense city of Tokyo below. Aided by a 28 mph wind, in less than 30 minutes the fires raged out of control.

Even the water in the rivers reached boiling point. The fires were so intense that they created up-drafts that tossed the big B-29 super fortresses around like they were feathers. (A B-29 war bird weighs 138,000 lbs. fully loaded) As a result of this raid, 42 of them were damaged, and 14 were lost.

Twenty one industrial plants were also destroyed in this raid. By the end of March 56.3 square miles of Tokyo was reduced to cinders and ashes. This is over one half of the entire city. Less than 24 hours after the attack on Tokyo, 285 more B-29 bombers were loaded and took off for Nagoya. (Japan's third largest city)

It was the center of Japan's aircraft industry. This time 1,790 tons of fire bombs were dropped on this hapless city. But this night, Sunday, March 11th, there was no high wind to fan the initial fires into bigger blazes. So Nagoya just had 394 separate fires to contend with. On this raid, eighteen more industrial plants were either damaged or destroyed.

On Tuesday, March 13th, the United States sent 301 B-29 bombers to Osaka, a

large Japanese city with an estimated population of 2,142,480 people. It produced one-tenth of Japan's war time total of ships; one-seventh of her electrical equipment, one-third of her machinery and machine tools. The army ordinance arsenal furnished twenty percent of the army's ordinance requirements. Only 274 B-29 war birds reached Osaka, but that was enough. In three hours, 1,732.6 tons of fire bombs were dropped. This destroyed 119 major industrial plants. 134,744 houses were reduced to ashes, with 1,363 more damaged. With at least 4,667 dead and 8,463 injured. It was the Tokyo firestorm all over again; with people of all ages suffocating in make shift shelters, or be-



"Dauntless Dotty" B-29 Super Fortress Leader of First Fire-Bombing Raid on the City of Tokyo

ing roasted alive as they rushed through the flames.

Next it was Kobe's turn, Japan's sixth largest city. Kobe was a seaport with a long irregular water front. On either side of the harbor were important heavy industrial installations. This was Japan's most important overseas seaport, and a hub for inland transportation. On Thursday night, March 16, 307 B-29 bombers flew over the city of Kobe. However this time the payload had to be different, because the airforce were temporarily out of M47 napalm bombs. So they were carrying M17A1 fire bombs, which were 500 lb. clusters of 4 lb. magnesium thermite bombs. These bombs would be effective against the dockland and industrial buildings, but they would be less destructive on the paper and bamboo

houses. In two hours and eight minutes, the 307 B-29 bombers dropped 2,355 tons of fire bombs. About one-fifth of Kobe was reduced to ashes, with 500 industrial plants destroyed and 162 more damaged. Among the buildings heavily damaged were the Kawasaki shipyards. (where Japan's 2,000 ton submarines were being built) 242,468 people were left homeless, as 65,951 homes were burnt up. Police records showed 2,669 people dead and 11,289 people injured.

March was one of the busiest months that major general Curtiss Lemay's 21st bomber command ever had. Flying 1,595 sorties (bombing raids), and dropping 9,365 tons of bombs in just ten days. This put a great strain on both the flight crews and the maintenance crews, but they recovered quickly. All of these

Japanese cities were torched by the fire bombs: Tokyo, Nagoya, Kobe, Osaka, Yokohama, and Kawasaki.

The bombings destroyed 105.6 square miles of these cities. Operations in support of the landings on Okinawa diverted the bombers from fire bombing attacks for two months, then they resumed in May and June. By July, about a fourth of all the houses in Japan were destroyed by all causes, which left twenty two million people homeless. The Japanese people even had a name for all these catastrophic fires, "the flowers of Edo!"

This story gives us a vivid picture of what war really looks like. It is a very bloody and gruesome picture. Given a year's time, General Lemay could have brought Japan to her knees, maybe. But, the U.S. were already

planning to invade the homeland of Japan, on X-Day November 1, 1945. The high brass estimated at least one million American casualties, and at least two million or more Japanese casualties. Even thirteen year old Japanese school girls were being trained to fight, to the death, with sharpened wooded bamboo stakes. Today, many people, including some historians continue to criticize President Harry Truman for allowing the two atomic bombs to be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These bombs did kill many Japanese people, but please check the figures that have been presented. General Lemay's first fire bomb raid

on Tokyo killed many more people than both atomic bomb blasts.

I pray that the world will never have another global conflict like we had in World War Two. But no matter who we elect as our president, we will still face war.. sometime, somewhere!

Matthew 24:6 "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

Sources: American Heritage Picture History of World War Two by American Heritage / Bonanza Books, World War Two 50th Anniversary History by The Associated Press, World War Two Magazine September 1995 by Christopher Lew, Illustrated World War Two Encyclopedia Volume 18 by H.S. Stutman