

Z SQUARE 7, A B-29 TRUE STORY

March 9 and 10, 1945 Over Tokyo

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Tokyo after the bombing.

General Curtis LeMay initiated major changes in the bombing procedures of Japan switching to incendiary bombs, at low altitude, at night, wanting more accuracy and reducing the defensive firepower of the B-29 to increase the bomb load. It was decided to bomb the four principal Japanese cities, Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe and Nagoya, at night from altitudes between 4,000 feet and 9,000 feet. Up to now 25,000 feet had been considered dangerously

low.

On March 9, 1945 a strong wind had been rattling the panes in the doors and windows all day. For the past few nights single B-29s had appeared over the sky, without dropping any bombs but flying very low and setting off the searchlights and anti-aircraft fire. A lot people on the ground had the uneasy feeling that something was due to happen.

The copilot of Z Square 8 of the 500th Bomb Group, Lt Robert Copeland, made this diary entry, "We briefed this morning for another trip to Tokyo. We'll take off at 1835 tonight and hit there in the morning at 0115 approx. We're going in at between 7,000 and 7,800 feet. 150 of the 250 ships taking part in the strike will be ahead of us so there should be some large fires when we get there. We're carrying 40 M-18 incendiary clusters. No guns will be carried."

On March 9 and 10, 1945, before dawn, 279 B-29s dispatched from the 73rd, 313th and 314th, 31 from the 500th Bomb Group, attack Tokyo urban areas with 1,665 tons of incendiary bombs from between 4,900 feet and

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9,200 feet. Fifteen square miles of the Tokyo urban area is burned out. 14 B-29s are lost, 1 from the 500th Bomb Group.

The bombers' primary target was the industrial district of the city where the factories, docks and the homes of the workers who supplied the manpower for Japan's war industry were located. The district hugged Tokyo Bay and was densely-packed with wooden homes. All the ingredients were here for creating a perfect fire storm.

The first ships in were 12 Pathfinders whose job it was to light up the outer reaches of the target area with four or five big fires for the main force. Arriving about 10:30 PM, they were met by searchlights, accurate intense flak and strong headwinds. The others began to arrive shortly afterwards, flying lower, circled and crisscrossed the area, leaving great rings of fire behind them. Soon other waves came in to drop their incendiaries, droning over the bay in a sky-train that lasted for hours, pouring millions of incendiaries inside the roughly patterned circles laid out by the Pathfinders. The chosen areas were saturated. During the first half hour it was like flying over a forest of Christmas trees. The bombs flickered like faraway candles. Then the fires spread and merged. The wind seemed to blow the fires in all directions. At the end it was like a super-blast furnace. The M-69s, which released 100-foot streams of fire upon detonating, sent flames rampaging through densely packed wooden homes. Asphalt boiled in the 1,800-degree heat. All that night the general direction of the fires across the lowlands surged one way and then another as new fires started and the ground wind shifted. The fires could be seen from 150 miles away.

Heat thermals from the fires hurled the bombers thousands of feet upwards in a few seconds. Gusts were so powerful that some 500-pound bombs, according to some pilots, were thrown back into the bomb bays. The crewmen were bounced around inside the planes. The smoke and cinders that seeped into the planes a mile high sickened the men in the last ships.

By dawn the wind had died down and most of the fires had burned themselves out among the big granite buildings west of the Sumida River and at the Arakawa River, which formed the east edge of the target area. Sirens sounded the "all clear" around 5 AM.

Incendiaries and the lower altitude permitted a substantial increase in bomb load per plane. The weight and intensity of this attack caught the Japanese by surprise. No subsequent urban area attack was equally as destructive. It is widely considered to be the most devastating air raid in history.

On March 10, 1945, Lt. Robert Copeland's diary noted, "We took off last night at 1835 and after a dull trip hit the coast of Japan at 0210. Even before we made landfall we could see the fires at Tokyo. We were at 7,800 feet and there was smoke towering above us. The radar run was perfect and we dropped in an open spot visually. The city was a "Dantes" inferno when

#24 Navy Aviation Crews

#25 Includes Infantry

#27 Pershing Tank Crew and Infantry

#29 "MAIDEN USA" 42-78180 CREW AT ZACHARY TAYLOR

Ivan Fail's "The Tuskegee Airmen"

ELVIS PRESLEY SINGS "AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL"

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Ivan Fail's "D Day, The Normandy Invasion"

B-29 Specifications

About The Book

we dropped. We got some ack ack that was close enough to hear, but we weren't hit. One night fighter made a run on us but we turned into him and lost him."

Not knowing whether General LeMay was joking or not, he is reported saying that, prior to getting the first strike reports, he was sure his career would be ending on the spot. The raid was a success beyond General LeMay's wildest expectations.

The B-29 gave the United States greater range and firepower while innovations such as low-altitude nighttime attacks multiplied the potential for terror and destruction. The Tokyo attack was aimed in part at demolishing Japanese morale and hastening a surrender. Planners also wanted to wipe out small factories and drive away their employees as a way of choking the economy.

Two days later, a similar attack on Nagoya destroyed two square miles. In a period of ten days starting March 9, a total of 1,595 sorties delivered 9,373 tons of bombs against Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka and Kobe destroying 31 square miles of those cities at a cost of 22 airplanes. The generally destructive effect of incendiary attacks against Japanese cities had been demonstrated.

The B-29 was finally beginning to have an effect.

From Bill Royster, B-29 Veteran

I think that most people think the most destructive air raid in history was the Atomic Bomb. NOT SO. The Japanese empire was almost totally destroyed by summer 1945. The B-29s had run out of targets and you look at our targets in the summer of 45 you will see that most of them are smaller cities. The Atomic Bomb was needed to bring them to their senses.

From General Earl Johnson, 9th Bomb Group, Tinian

Your description of the damage of the first Tokyo low-altitude, fire raid should remind people of the destructive results of that first fire raid. An earlier one had been tried on a city in China but without the terrible results of this one on Tokyo.

I remember the briefing at North Field, Tinian in the afternoon of March 9th. I can't remember the position of the crew I was to fly with but in the briefing I think many of us thought we were going on our "last" mission. But when my crew got to the IP which was at the entrance to Tokyo Bay, I could see the lights of Tokyo plainly and it looked to me like we were coming across Lake Michigan and heading

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into the lights of Chicago at 5,500 feet, as I recall. The city of Tokyo was all lit up but, of course, by the time we got to "bombs away" most of the lights had been turned off and one could see flashes of anti-aircraft guns on the ground. But the funny thing was they were so "surprised" they weren't hitting anything. Later in the raid when they figured out what was going on, the anti-aircraft batteries and night-fighters did began to cause a little damage. Nonetheless, I think the raging fires and updrafts caused about as much damage to B-29s toward the tail-end of the raid as did the Japanese defenses.

Of course, this was the first of five raids in 9-days which hit Nagoya, Kobe, Osaka and, again to Nagoya (which didn't burn too well). Those five (5) raids spelled defeat for Japan but it took four more months plus the atomic bombs to "convince" the Japanese Generals that they had better quit. I think many Japanese citizens wanted to quit back in March or April but they were never listened to. I have a very good Japanese friend, Mitsuya Goto, who was 18-years old at the time, and rode his bicycle down from his grandfather's farm north of Nagoya after that fire raid only to find the family house burned to the ground. He has told me many times that he "felt" or "knew" the war was lost but, of course, the Japanese Generals would listen to no one especially an 18-year old boy or others who were not "Generals".

As terrible as atomic bombs are, their damage cannot match that damage to Tokyo on that first raid and I would guess the damage on Kobe or Osaka probably "outdid" the damage to the atomic bomb on Nagasaki but, of course, Nagasaki had "weather problems".

[From General Earl Johnson, 313th Wing](#)

[I kept your e-mail asking questions about General LeMay ordering low altitude fire-bombing. This type of bombing was tried on a city in China by China-based B-29's plus a test was run on a "quick built test city" in this country. Then the decision was made to manufacture the necessary fire-bombs which took many months then they had to be transported by boat out to the Marianna Islands.](#)

[By early March 1945, all the equipment from these tests was "ready to go". The B-29 guns and turrets were rendered "non-operative" on the theory that B-29 gunners might shoot-down friendly B-29's plus the fact that the Japanese would be so surprised they would not be able to launch effective defensive attacks at night. This turned out to be true. Almost all losses of B-29's were due to updrafts from the fires or from having two](#)

Lt Robert Copeland,
copilot, Z Square 8

Pyote Bomber Base
With A Photo Album

History of "Diamond
Lil" With A Photo
Album

History of "FIFI" With
A Photo Album

"Hap" Halloran
induction Combat
Airman Hall of Fame

Blackie Blackburn
with a photo album

Hap's Memorable
Flight On FIFI

C. Douglas Caffey, A
WW2 Veteran, Book
Of Poetry

C. Douglas Caffey
Collection Of Poetry

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B-29's run together in the smoke and updrafts. The defense against Japanese night fighters turned out to be a minor problem. Crews did not use the Norden Bombsight except in rare occasions but they bombed by radar for there was really no reason the firebombs had to land on a specific area since the fires would soon spread which is what happened depending upon the ground wind. I think on that first Tokyo raid of March 9-10, 1945, over 13 square miles was leveled by something over 300 B-29's.

Hope this clears up your questions about fire-raids. Actually most people believe they did more to win the war than both atomic bombs.

Thanks to Bill Royster and General Johnson for giving us some insight into this first fire raid on Tokyo on March 9 & 10, 1945. This was the beginning of the end for the Japanese Empire and a significant time in World History.



From Sallyann Wagoner

Tokyo — Survivors of the U.S. firebombing of Tokyo in World War II and family members sued the Japanese government Friday for \$10.3 million, alleging it did not assist victims in the aftermath.

Friday's action is the first group lawsuit of its kind seeking damages for a wartime air raid on Japan,

Japanese media said. The raid on March 10, 1945, incinerated wide areas of the capital and killed 100,000 people in a single night of fire.

The group filed the suit in Tokyo District Court, court spokesman Yoichi Sakamoto said.

The 112 plaintiffs alleged the government neglected to provide aid to raid victims. They also accused Japan of starting the war and inviting the attack by refusing to surrender, the Kyodo news agency said.

They also argued that it was unconstitutional for the government to provide compensation to soldiers and their families, but not to civilians,

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citing Italy and Germany, which compensate both civilians and soldiers after losing the war, Kyodo said.

The plaintiffs — who range in age from 57 to 88 — are seeking an apology from the government in addition to \$93,860 each in damages, the news agency said.

U.S. military planners at the time said the assault was necessary to break Japanese morale and wear away resistance to surrender. Bombers also hoped to wipe out small urban factories keeping Japan's economy alive.

"In the raid, many people were injured or lost their lives," said Hiroshi Hoshino, the leader of the plaintiffs. "It is necessary to pass down these facts exactly to generations to come."

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declined comment on the lawsuit, saying he had not seen the complaint.

The Tokyo attack was among dozens of raids on Japanese cities, and one of the most devastating.

Thank you, Sallyann for this latest news article concerning the March 9 & 10, 1945 fire raids on Tokyo.

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Frank L. Grube....Lompoc, Ca. 93436...(805) 740-1804
flgrube1@aol.com

Honor

Battle of Iwo Jima

**Iwo Jima Medals of
Honor**

Cpl Ira Hayes, USMC

Battle of Okinawa

**Okinawa Medals of
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Japanese Surrender

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