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THE TWENTIETH AIR FORCE IN WORLD WAR II
Vindication Of The Strategic Air Doctrine In The Pacific

By

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In mid-1943, although the war against Germany was still of primary concern, the Allies were confronted with serious problems in Asia and the Pacific. The war against Japan had been solely defensive. It was not until more than a year later that the prelude to a major aerial offensive occurred in the Far East.

At 11:00 a.m. June 15, 1944, a task force of approximately fifty B-29 "Superfortresses" from the XX Bomber Command raided the Imperial Iron and Steel Works at Yawata, Japan¹. The pre-science of this bombing raid was significantly joined to an announcement made in the Pentagon on the following day. Headquarters Army Air Forces announced the existence of a Twentieth Air Force. These successive events heralded the inauguration of a new phase in the war against Japan--strategic bombardment.

In essence, the doctrine of strategic aerial warfare, which foreshadowed the near annihilation of the Japanese Empire, was vindicated in the paralleling achievements of the Twentieth Air Force and the Boeing B-29 "Superfortress."

The planning for the Twentieth Air Force's initial strike into the heart of Japan had been laborious. There were infinite logistic and administrative problems. The combat command echelons were organized under severe stress because of apprehensive attitudes towards the "new concept", and the channels of command developed slowly.

On June 1, 1943, the 58th Bombardment Wing, Very Heavy (VH) was activated. It was established fourteen days later at Marietta Army Air Field, Georgia, and placed under command of Brigadier General Kenneth B. Wolfe on June 21, 1943². Within the following two weeks the United States Army Air Corps officially accepted the B-29³. General Wolfe then received his initial orders in a firm directive from General H. H. Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Corps: ". . . take necessary action to commit the B-29 airplane to combat without delay . . ."⁴ Following the activation of the 58th Combat Wing and a series of complicated negotiations at high staff levels, the XX Bomber Command was established on November 27, 1943, at Salina, Kansas under the command of General Wolfe.⁵

By this time, with the persuasion of General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, the "Superfortress" had been exclusively dedicated to the internal destruction of the Japanese homeland. Several factors influenced his reasoning: the war in Europe did not appear to warrant maximum use of the B-29; China, wavering under Japanese assaults, needed immediate Allied support; and because the global mobility of the B-29 would be limited by the early complexities of its extensive specialized supply and maintenance support, it seemed appropriate to localize operations in one theater of operations.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) wanted to provide operational control of the strategic bombardment of Japan by establishing the Twentieth Air Force under command principles radically different

from those governing the other air forces.⁶ On April 10, 1944 the JCS accepted the official charter under which the Twentieth Air Force was to function:⁷

" . . . a strategic Army air force, designated the Twentieth, was to be established, to operate directly under the JCS with the Commanding General, AAF, of VLR [Very Long Range] bombers . . . all major decisions as to deployment, missions, and target objectives would be made by the JCS and executed by Arnold . . ."

The Twentieth Air Force had finally become an active organization but another year was to pass before its high command conflicts would be resolved. There was no unity of command in the Pacific, and little enthusiasm on the part of the theater commanders for the type of mission to which the B-29 had been committed. Consequently, General Arnold decided to retain direct command of the Superfortresses which further burdened his heavy responsibilities as Chief of the Army Air Forces.⁸

By the time the Twentieth Air Force was established on April 4, 1944 its combat force, the XX Bomber Command, had been organized, trained, and deployed overseas. Its units were dispersed between Salina, Kansas and Chengtu, China. After the XX Bomber Command, with its 58th Wing, was assigned to the India-China operations area, the XXI Bomber Command received the 73rd Wing and was organized under the leadership of Brigadier General Roger M. Ramey to prepare for operations in the Marianas.⁹

As the Superfortresses steadily arrived in India, the XX Bomber Command was preparing for its shakedown mission. Under the command of Brigadier General La Verne (Blondy) Saunders, 98 B-29s from the

58th Wing departed from India bases June 5, 1944 on a raid 2,000 miles into Thailand to bomb the Makasan railroad shops at Bangkok.¹⁰ Ten days later, General Saunders, in his lead aircraft "Lady Hamilton," directed the initial land-based aerial attack on Japan.¹¹ Although the physical punishment inflicted on the enemy was slight, the psychological effect was tremendous. After almost four years of complex preparations, strategic warfare had reached the threshold of a new era in military aviation.

Late in July 1944 Major General Curtis E. LeMay, as commander, took charge of XX Bomber Command operations.¹² He immediately instigated a vigorous training program based on the known quantities of the strategic air doctrine.¹³ The first positive results of his program came in October 1944 when the XX Bomber Command virtually demolished the Okayama airplane assembly plant in Formosa with more than 1,200 tons of bombs.

In the meantime the XXI Bomber Command in the Marianas was preparing for combat. The Command's 73rd Wing made its first shakedown flight against Dublon Island in the Truk Group on October 30, 1944 with a force of seventeen B-29s under the command of Brigadier General Emmett (Rosey) O'Donnell.¹⁴ On November 24, 1944 General O'Donnell, flying his lead B-29, "Dauntless Dotty", led 111 Superfortresses--the largest force yet assembled--from Isley Field, Saipan on the wing's first mass flight into the industrial center of Japan.¹⁵ The tempo increased with persistent night raids and in January 1945, after command of the XXI Bomber Command passed to

General LeMay,¹⁶ the stage was set for the last, most dramatic phase of the Pacific War.

The deactivation of the XX Bomber Command in India became imminent.¹⁷ Subsequently, in April 1945 Brigadier General Roger M. Ramey took the 58th Wing and its collection of pets--monkeys, cockatoos, even a black bear cub--to Tinian. The B-29 offensive against Japan, which had its proving ground in China, was to realize its triumphant climax with operations from the Marianas Islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. While preparing for the giant offensive, XXI Bomber Command was further reinforced by the arrival of the 313th and 314th Wings. It now had the air strength of more than 350 "Superfortresses."¹⁸

Despite persistent missions in the face of supply problems, temperamental South Pacific weather, and bitter enemy retaliation, the Twentieth Air Force was severely criticized by the War Department. Facing as it was the difficulties which beset any pioneering organization, the XX Bomber Command experienced constant frustration during its first three months of operation in the Marianas. The tangible evidence of damage inflicted by bombing raids against Japan was discouraging. In twenty-two missions involving 2,148 sorties, the Twentieth Air Force combat units had dropped a mere 5,398 tons of bombs on the enemy--and only half of the B-29s had bombed primary targets.¹⁹

Secretary of War Stimson acknowledged that ". . . Japan's production capacity [had] not been fundamentally weakened."

Alexander P. deSeversky, noted exponent of air power, declared:
" . . . Twentieth Air Force is an almost flawless example of how
real strategic air forces ought not to be used. It is nothing
but auxiliary aviation de luxe."²⁰

However, in the Marianas an emphatic rebuttal was quietly
conceived. On the morning of March 9, 1945 General LeMay's wing
commanders summoned their crews to briefing rooms to hear an order
which many must have absorbed in shocked silence--the XXI Bomber
Command was to begin an immediate series of low level maximum ef-
fort night incendiary attacks upon Japan's major industrial cities.
Tokyo was named the first target.

After dusk on the evening of March 9, 1945, 334 B-29s carrying
2,000 tons of bombs left Saipan, Tinian, and Guam runways on one
of the most important missions ever flown by the Army Air Forces.
The aerial armada swept northwest across the Pacific toward the
island empire of Japan. And in one cataclysmic blow, the city
of Tokyo was virtually obliterated in the terrible rain of
incendiaries. Never again--not even in atomic bombings--was so
much destruction to result from any single bombardment mission,
nor was any mission to lead so directly to revolutionary new
tactics in aerial bombardment. A Japanese newspaperman succinctly
revealed the answer:²¹ " . . . we thought the whole of Tokyo was
reduced to ashes . . ." One-fourth of the Empire's capitol city
had been destroyed, rendering 1,008,005 persons homeless. The
official toll of casualties listed 83,793 dead and 40,918 wounded.

Not even the earthquake and fire of 1923 at Tokyo and Yokohama inflicted so terrible a disaster on Japan.²² While Tokyo searched for its dead, the attack turned against other cities-- Nagoya, Osaka, Kobe, and even Tokyo again were caught up in the fiery tidal wave.

Japan was crippled, and in a desperate attempt to defend its island empire, resorted to savage kamikaze attacks which wrought serious damage on the United States Naval fleet in waters off Okinawa. Several Twentieth Air Force units were temporarily withdrawn from the strategic attack on Japan.²³ They were deployed to Okinawa for tactical operations, and subsequently destroyed Japanese bases in the Kyushu and Shikoku Islands where the suicidal attacks had been launched.²⁴

Units of the Twentieth Air Force participated in another joint operation during the summer of 1944, further demonstrating the versatility of the B-29. In preparation for the ensuing invasion of Okinawa, the 505th Group from the 313th Wing on Tinian used its stripped-down, radar-equipped B-29s to drop more than 12,000 mines in Japanese coastal waters between March and August 1944 completely isolating the enemy forces. This was the largest blockade in military history. It literally strangled Japan.²⁵

In the meantime, the main B-29 force continued concentrated incendiary bombing on the principal cities of Japan. The effect was devastating.²⁶ Only Kyoto, the fifth largest city in the empire which was a cultural and religious center, escaped the

ravage. Diligently employing the strategic bombing concept, the Twentieth Air Force almost gutted Japan.

By mid-May 1945, the B-29s had dropped 3,000,000 leaflets containing the terms of the Potsdam Ultimatum. The Japanese people were implored to petition their emperor for peace. The warning leaflets were dropped in pre-strike missions as the ominous bombing continued. By the end of the war, the B-29s had burned 178 square miles out of 69 Japanese cities.²⁷ General LeMay remarked:²⁸ " . . . we had two or three weeks of work left on the cities, a bit more to do on precision targets, and were just getting started on transportation . . . another six months and Japan would have been beaten back into the dark ages--which was practically the case anyhow."

The fifth and last wing to enter operations was the 315th Bomb Wing (VH) under the command of Brigadier General Frank A. Armstrong.²⁹ This wing increased Twentieth Air Force strength to 1,000 planes and 83,000 men. While other B-29 organizations were concentrating on incendiary bombing and mining activities, the 315th Wing executed a special assignment--high altitude radar bombing on some of the last remaining precision targets. In fifteen missions, this wing performed some of the most remarkably accurate bombing of the entire war, and practically eliminated the Japanese oil industry.³⁰

In July 1945, the command structure in the Pacific Theatre was exposed to extensive reorganization because of the redeployment

of air strength from the Atlantic theater and expansion of facilities in preparation for the final crushing blow against Japan.³¹ The Twentieth Air Force was incorporated into the United States Strategic Air Forces (USASTAF) with the XXI Bomber Command located in the Marianas. General LeMay subsequently became commander of the Twentieth Air Force. Shortly thereafter, he was named Chief of Staff, USSAF.³² Command of the Twentieth Air Force then passed to Lieutenant General Nathan F. Twining on August 2, 1945.

Early in 1945, units of an atomic bomb organization had begun to move into the Marianas. Shrouded in secrecy, the 509th Bomb Group, which was attached to the Twentieth Air Force's 313th Bomb Wing, began planning its operations in a tiny corner of Tinian Island.³³

The effect of incendiary bombing on Japanese cities excited serious concern on the part of the atomic bomb planning and research staff. Air Staff officials feared that no suitable target for their untried weapon would remain. Consequently, General George C. Marshall issued an order reserving certain Japanese cities as future targets.³⁴

While the bombing continued on precision targets, the 509th Bomb Group reached its peak of readiness. Japan declined peace, and the Presidential directive was issued.³⁵ The 509th Group was to ". . . deliver its first special bomb as soon as weather would permit visual bombing after about 3 August [1945]."³⁶

At 1:45 a.m. (Marianas time) August 6, 1945, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Tibbets lifted his B-29, the "Enola Gay," from the tiny island runway. And at 8:15 a.m. (Hiroshima time), the A-Bomb spiraled into the northwest corner of Hiroshima with a force equivalent to a massed strike of 2,000 B-29s expending 20,000 tons of TNT.³⁷

Three days later the City of Nagasaki suffered the violence of an even more powerful A-Bomb. And at 7:00 a.m. August 10, 1945, the Japanese Emperor sued for peace, pronouncing the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Empire.³⁸

The Japanese surrender had come without a single American soldier having set foot on Japanese soil--and with a Japanese army of 2,000,000 men still intact. After the B-29s had gained complete supremacy in the skies over the Japanese Empire, ultimate victory was only a matter of time. The Twentieth Air Force was an apparent exception to the generalization that support of the Army ground forces was the primary mission of the air force. Like its weapon, the Twentieth Air Force had been forged by men fundamentally concerned with strategic bombardment. Its implied task had been to crush Japan's will to resist.³⁹

The success of the entire bombardment campaign stemmed from the courage, intelligence, and industry of the members of the Twentieth Air Force. General Carl Spaatz⁴⁰ described the B-29 force which he had just taken over as "the best organized and most technically and tactically proficient military organization the world has seen to date."⁴¹

1. THE ARMY AIR FORCES IN WORLD WAR II, Vol V., 1953, p. 3.
2. History XX Bomber Command, 27 Nov 43 - 31 Jan 44, pp. 8-9.
3. AAF AGAINST JAPAN, Haugland, 1948, p. 417.
4. AAF in WW II, Vol V., p. 53.
5. Ibid. p. 54. Originally under the control of Hq AAF in Washington, the 58th Wing was reassigned on 11 October 1943 to the Second Air Force, which had supplied much of the wing's hand-picked combat personnel. When Wolfe assumed command of the XX Bomber Command his former deputy, Colonel Leonard F. Harman, took command of the 58th Wing. At the same time the 73d Very Heavy Bomb Wing with four constituent groups was activated.

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Commander</u>	<u>Station</u>
XX Bomber Command	B/Gen Kenneth B. Wolfe	Smoky Air Field, Kan.
58th Bomb Wing (VH)	Col. Leonard F. Harman	" " " "
468th Bomb Gp (VH)	Col. Howard E. Engler	" " " "
472d Bomb Gp (VH)	(remained as opnl tng unit)	" " " "
40th Bomb Gp (VH)	Col. Lewis R. Parkes	Pratt " " "
444th Bomb Gp (VH)	Col. Alva L. Harvey	Great Bend AAF. "
462nd Bomb Gp (VH)	Col. Richard H. Carmichael	Walker AAF, N. Mex.
73rd Bomb Wing (VH)	Col. Thomas H. Chapman	Smoky Air Field, Kan.

(The 497th, 498th, 499th, and 500th Bomb Groups (VH) were in the process of activation.)

6. AAF in WW II, Vol. V, p. 34.
7. JCS 742/6, 6 April 1944.
8. In his book GLOBAL MISSION (New York 1949, p. 348), General Arnold explains: ". . . with operating areas set up as they were, I could do nothing but retain command of the B-29's myself--something I did not want to do . . . there was nothing else I could do. . . . I could find no one out there who wanted unity of command, seemingly, unless he himself was made Supreme Commander."
9. THE AAF AGAINST JAPAN, Haugland, 1948, p. 421.
10. Ibid., p. 422.

11. General Saunders lost his left leg as a result of a crash in India several weeks later.
12. General LeMay, who became Commander, SAC in 1948, assumed command of the XX Bomber Command, relieving General Saunders who took command of the XXI Bomber Command.
13. AAF AGAINST JAPAN, Haugland, 1948, p. 429.
14. Ibid., p. 438. Lt. Gen. O'Donnell was assigned to the Pentagon in 1953 as Deputy C/S, Personnel, USAF.
15. Ibid., pp. 439-440.
16. B/Gen. Haywood S. Hansell, commander of the XXI Bomber Command was summoned to the states in January 1945 to help direct the expanding B-29 program. He was succeeded by Gen. LeMay who vacated command of the XX Bomber Command. Gen. Ramey acceded to command of the XX Bomber Command.
17. Re: AAF in WW II, Vol. V., p. 168. USASTAF had directed "the inactivation of the Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, XX Bomber Command, with transfer of personnel and equipment made prior thereto to the Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, Eighth Air Force. The effective date of inactivation to be 0001 K, 16 July 1945." Because of radio delay, however, the actual end of the XX Bomber Command was 18 July 1945.
18. AAF AGAINST JAPAN, Haugland, 1948, p. 450.
19. AAF in WW II, Vol. V., pp. 600-609.
20. Ibid., pp. 450-451.
21. AAF AGAINST JAPAN, Haugland, 1948, pp. 451-455.
22. AAF in WW II, Vol. V., pp. 617-618.
23. Ibid., pp. 456-458.
24. Re: AAF WW II, Vol. V., pp. 662-674. The 313th Bomb Wings's prime target was the Shimonoseki Strait, which was the most important shipping thoroughfare in the Empire. The southern entrances into the Pacific (Shikoku) had been blockaded, and were no longer used. By mid-August the Japanese merchant marine had been reduced to about 1,500,000 tons afloat (exclusive of the useless tankers) and sea-borne traffic had almost ceased. The 313th Bomb Wing had sent out 1,528 sorties and planted 12,053 mines. This had been accomplished in the midst of a rigorous bombing campaign at a loss of 16 aircraft (only 9 to enemy action).

25. AAF In WW II, Vol. V., pp. 670-672.
26. MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, Asst Chief of Air Staff/Intell., 1946, p. 71. Describing the effects of the incendiary attacks, Muneo Toga, Economic Control Section, Bureau of Public Safety, stated: "Within half a year from the large scale incendiary bombings more than half of the important cities throughout Japan were reduced to ashes resulting in 2,000,000 houses burned and 10,000,000 people made homeless . . . reducing morale which made the people lose all hope of victory."

Toshio Saeki, Head, Mobilization Section, Employment Bureau, Welfare Ministry: "A systematic destruction of cities by incendiaries made every Japanese realize that any further resistance was futile."

27. THE AAF AGAINST JAPAN, Haugland, 1948, pp. 467-468.
28. Ibid., p. 467.
29. AAF in WW II, Vol. V., p. 658.
30. Ibid., pp. 661-662.
31. Re: AAF in WW II, Vol. V., pp. 678-690. The problem of command was intimately joined to the problem of strategy. To General Arnold and his staff the position of the seven different air forces engaged in the war with Japan--the 5th, 7th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 14th, and 20th--had long been a source of frustration. [Staff memo, Hq USSTAF, Centralization of Control of U. S. AAF Operating in the War Against Japan, 4 Nov. 44, p. 1.] The following command conflict, which resulted in an impasse thought to have been broken by President Roosevelt, the JCS approved an April 3 directive designating General Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief, Army Forces in the Pacific (CINCAFPAC). The Twentieth Air Force, however, remained under the direct control of JCS. And on 10 July 1945, a JCS directive provided that the new command (USASTAF) consist initially of the combat and service units currently assigned to or operating with the Twentieth Air Force, the headquarters and headquarters elements of the Eighth Air Force, and other elements agreed upon mutually by USASTAF, CINCPAC, (Commander in Chief, Pacific--charged with naval operations), and CINCAFPAC or to be assigned by higher authority. USASTAF was charged with the conduct of land-based strategic operations (air) against Japan "with the object of accomplishing the progressive destruction and dislocation of Japan's military, industrial, and economic systems to a point where her capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened."

32. THE AAF AGAINST JAPAN, Haugland, 1948, p. 469. General Twining, who became Chief of Staff, USAF, in 1954 had commanded the 13th and 14th Air Forces prior to his acceding to command of the 20th Air Force.
33. AAF in WW II, Vol. V., p. 708.
34. AAF AGAINST JAPAN, Haugland, 1948, p. 478. Initially the targets named, in order of preference, were: Kyoto, Hiroshima, Kokura, and Niigata. It was revised later, however, to: (1) Hiroshima, (2) Kokura, and (3) Nagasaki. Kokura, the secondary target was passed over because of weather, and the bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.
35. AAF in WW II, Vol. V., p. 715: Field Order No. 13 for the 509th Group was signed " . . . by command of Lt. Gen. Twining, Twentieth Air Force . . ." on 2 August 1945.
36. AAF in WW II, Vol. V., pp. 713-714.
37. AAF AGAINST JAPAN, Haugland, 1948, p. 480.
38. Ibid., p. 488.
39. Re: AAF in WW II, Vol. V., p. 522. General Spaatz assumed command as CINCAFPAC on 16 July 1945.
40. Ibid., pp. 751-752.

Supplementary Data

Twentieth Air Force Operations has been appended to this brief study as a separate volume. It presents a pictorial analysis of comparative bomb damage inflicted on Japanese industrial, transportation, and urban targets by Twentieth Air Force combat units during World War II.