

MISSION: BURN JAPAN!

DURING WORLD WAR TWO, MANY MILITARY PLANNERS ADVOCATED THE THEORY THAT THE WAR COULD BE WON BY AIRPOWER ALONE. HOWEVER, THIS THEORY REMAINED UNPROVEN UNTIL GENERALS HAP ARNOLD AND CURTIS LEMAY UNLEASHED THE MIGHT OF THE BOEING B-29 SUPERFORTRESS ON THE JAPANESE HOME ISLANDS — PART ONE

BY JAMES THOMPSON

Doom for Japan — bombs rain down on the Home Islands as raids from the Pacific bases increased. As the crews gathered more experience and new aircraft became available from the factories, it would soon become common to have 500 plane raids pounding the Home Islands.

By the beginning of the 20th Century, the art of war had not changed very much from the practices of Napoleonic times. Land armies were larger. Weapons possessed more firepower, but the decisive point in the action came when invading forces occupied key areas of the enemy state, after destroying its armies. The air weapon changed all that: So much so that war or the threat of it, now is predicated on the ability of one power to obliterate another by means of destruction from the air, without occupying its territory. Whether accomplished by bomb or missile, the ability of major nuclear

powers to destroy each other through the use of aerial launched weapons, is not only the determining factor in any future conflict but, conversely, has also dictated the course and diplomacy of an uneasy peace.

Without such weapons of mass destruction, governments might be more adventurous and the truce presently observed by the two super powers over the last 70-years might

be even more tentative than it is. With the exception of so-called brushfire wars, neither the US, nor Russia, the two major military powers to emerge from WWII, has dared unleash its first-line destructive arsenals on one another, thereby risking mutual destruction through retaliation. Viewed in this perspective, the nuclear threat has, in fact, kept the peace for all these years between Russia and the USA, although rogue nations like North Korea and Iran are changing the balance. But its awesome destructive capability against entire cities and vast urban areas had its beginnings before the nuclear age in the great cataclysmic raids of WWII where US and British bomber forces obliterated targets such as Hamburg, Dresden and Tokyo with conventional bombs dropped during concentrated periods of particularly violent action. True, thousands of planes and tens of thousands of bombs had to be used to achieve the destructive effect of single nuclear bombs dropped on

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but the results from those previous mass raids utilizing conventional weapons, were just as terrifying and, in fact, more people lost their lives in those firestorm attacks, than in the more publicized and famous single-weapon nuclear bombings.

The terror effect of nuclear bombing, and its implied threat which today hangs over the head of the civilized world like the Sword of Damocles, also had its beginnings in the mass urban area bombing of WWII. Shortly after WWI, strategic bombing theorists in Italy, England, and the USA, stated that the threat of total destruction from the air would dominate the future military thinking of all war planning. They were premature. It was not until the early 1940s that the mechanical means and necessary tactics were developed to put their theories into practice, and although in the early years of WWII, Rotterdam, Coventry, and London were attacked from the air and endured destruction then without precedent, the losses suffered by their inhabitants did not begin to approach those later endured by the citizens of German and Japanese cities. Although statistics can be manipu-

lated, it is worth noting that for every ton of bombs the Luftwaffe dropped on England, the RAF, alone, dropped 135-tons on Germany — most of it between the years 1943-1945.

A varied lineup of aircraft was utilized by the USA and Great Britain to achieve the frighten-