
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the 10 October meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is Barrett Tillman, author of *Whirlwind: The Air War against Japan, 1942-1945*. B-29 Combat veterans will discuss the bombing of targets in the Pacific and Japan, including missions from Alaska – many ending with internment in Siberia.

The Pacific Theater was ideally suited for long range bombing by the Army Air Forces (AAF) and Naval Aviators flying off aircraft carriers. It is hard for people to comprehend the immense distances of the Pacific Theater. Thirty-eight hundred miles separated Honolulu from Tokyo, a distance greater than that from New York to Paris. Aviators spent hours in their planes even to reach their targets. Americans needed to develop a plane that would reach Japan, and they did with the B-29.

Having a 141 foot wingspan and ninety-nine foot length, the B-29, or "B-san" as the Japanese called it, inspired a sense of awe. The very heavy bomber or "Superfortress" could reach a top speed of 390 miles per hour and had a 3,200 mile combat range. The silvery streamlined shape included pressurized crew spaces and remote-controlled gun turrets. Even with the technological innovations the B-29 was not without its problems, mainly its four Wright Cyclone engines, with eighteen cylinders producing 2,200 horsepower (compared with the B-17's nine cylinder engines and 1,200 horsepower), which created cooling problems and a fire hazard. Problems aside the "B-san" was rushed into production, and made its war debut as an immature weapons system.

The Superfortresses began their war service in the China-Burma-India Theater (CBI) in India in April 1944, having flown from Kansas, to Newfoundland, to Morocco, to Cairo, onto Karachi and then to Calcutta.

Assigned to the XX Bomber Command, they were part of the 20th Air Force, commanded by General Henry "Hap" Arnold in Washington D.C. He oversaw all B-29 operations to keep the air war in the spotlight and push for an independent postwar US Air Force. While in the CBI, the XX Bomber Command launched forty-nine missions; only nine targeted Japan.

XX Bomber Command's experience in the CBI Theater was notable primarily because it provided a testing ground for the B-29 and brought Major General Curtis LeMay to the Pacific Theater. "Hap" Arnold was unhappy with the progress of operations in the CBI and ordered LeMay to take over. LeMay refused until he learned all he could about the B-29, eventually arriving in India in August 1944.

Operations in the CBI met with only moderate success, as the "island hopping" strategy took Pacific islands held by the Japanese Empire. Once the islands of Guam, Saipan, and Tinian were taken, and runways built, B-29 operations were moved to the Pacific. Brigadier General Haywood "Possum" Hansell's XXI Bomber Command flew their first Marianas based strike against Japan began in November 1944. These operations made aviation history as the B-29s routinely flew 1,500 transoceanic miles to make their bombing runs – in a 15 hour round trip.

Hansell's superiors worried that he lacked the right personality for air combat command (based on his performance commanding the 3rd Bombardment Wing in Europe), and he was among the minority of air staff officers who opposed firebombing – as both morally objectionable and militarily unnecessary. He also had problems with his subordinates; many of his measures to increase efficiency lowered morale; and he was the junior AAF general officer in theater and in 20th AF.

The post-war bombing assessment found Hansell's emphasis on precision daylight bombing was more successful than first thought. He also worked with the navy to develop a working air-sea rescue program that saved half of all B-29 crews downed

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

over water. Despite this, “Hap” and his deputy, Maj. Gen. Lauris Norstad were unhappy, both with Hansell, and because the aircraft loss rate was too high – on every major mission a Superfortress was lost with 11 crewmen, at a cost of over \$600,000 per craft. On 6 January 1945, Norstad abruptly relieved Hansell, who was replaced by Maj. Gen. Curtis LeMay.

Under LeMay, the XXI Bomber Command (later joined by the XX Bomber Command who left the CBI Theater), continued to bomb Japan and efficiency improved. In March 1945, LeMay moved the bombings in a different direction from demolition bombs to incendiary bombs. The most effective incendiary weapon was napalm, which uses aluminum salts of naphthenic and palmitic acids to produce a thickening agent to gasoline. Having the consistency of applesauce, it clung to anything it touched and burned at high intensities. Incendiary bombs were designed to break apart at about 2,000 feet, spewing napalm over a wide area before ignition. Used first in the European Theater, these bombs proved more effective in Japan where the majority of the buildings were made of wood. The 10 March 1945 firebombing of Tokyo destroyed sixteen square miles of the city and tens of thousands of people lost their lives. The bombers had found a new weapon for their arsenal.

The final piece in the US aviation arsenal, that ultimately broke the back of the Japanese will, was delivered on 6 August 1945. Colonel Paul Tibbitt piloted a B-29 (the *Enola Gay*) over Hiroshima, dropping the first atomic bomb. A second bomb was dropped three days later. After this, Emperor Hirohito overruled his military cabinet and in a radio broadcast announced surrender.

While many argue over the effectiveness of air power in ending the war, senior civilian leaders in Japan acknowledge that the prolonged bombing by the B-29s and the atomic bombs brought about the Empire’s capitulation.

Further Reading:

- Barrett Tillman, *Whirlwind*, Simon and Schuster, 2010
- Kenneth Werrell, *Blankets of Fire*, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996
- Max Hastings, *Retribution*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2008
- Walter Boyne, *Clashes of Wings*, Simon and Schuster, 1994
- Otis Hays, *Home from Siberia*, Texas A&M Press, 1990

Announcements:

- Twin Cities Civil War Round Table** - Oct. 15, 2013 – Ownership 28th VA flag - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
- St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table** - Oct. 28, 2013 – 1st Minnesota W. Jorgenson - 715-386-1268 – rossandhaines@comcast.net
- Rochester WWII History Round Table** –507-280-9970; www.wv2roundtable-rochester.org
- Minnesota Military Museum**, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
- Air Show - Eden Prairie** - July 19-20, 2014; <http://www.airexpo-mn.org/> - 952-746-6100
- Honor Flight** - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
- CAF - Commemorative Air Force** - www.cafmn.org 651-455-6942
- Minnesota Air Guard Museum** - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
- Friends of Ft. Snelling**, www.fortsnelling.org
- Fagen Museum**, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

Round Table Schedule 2013-2014

- 24 Oct. Dog Company, 2nd Ranger BN
- 14 Nov. Deutsch Lecture: Codebreakers
- 12 Dec. Pearl Harbor
- 9 Jan. Eastern Front
- 13 Feb. Encounters with WW2 Leaders
- 13 Mar. Operation COBRA and Falaise
- 27 Mar. World War II in China
- 10 Apr. Rabaul and the SW Pacific
- 8 May Landing on Omaha Beach
- 10-27 May Tour of Normandy

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BG Haywood Hansell



MG Curtis LeMay

