



# STUDY GUIDE

## WAS IT WRONG TO DROP THE ATOM BOMB ON JAPAN?

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**KEY TERMS:** atomic-bomb      condemned      'atomic-diplomacy' school  
Ketsu-Go      emperor

<b>NOTE-TAKING COLUMN:</b> Complete this section <i>during</i> the video. Include definitions and key terms.	<b>CUE COLUMN:</b> Complete this section <i>after</i> the video.
<p>What is criticism for President Truman's decision to use atomic weapons based on?</p> <p>How bad were the Japanese military and civilian losses by July of 1945?</p> <p>If President Truman had decided upon going forth with invading the home islands of Japan instead of dropping nuclear weapons, what would have happened to the thousands of Allied prisoners of war?</p>	<p>What are the fundamental flaws with the reasoning that critics of President Truman's decision to drop the bomb use?</p> <p>What factors contribute to the case for dropping the bombs?</p>

## DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Professor Miscamble explains that, “Even in retrospect, far removed from the pressures that Truman faced in 1945, his critics can offer no serious andmconvincing proposal regarding a viable and less costly alternative,” that “...criticism is based on limited historical knowledge of both the situation Truman confronted and the basis for his decision... [and that] aided by the unfortunate influence of some very bad history... These historians disgracefully alleged that Truman proceeded to drop two atomic bombs on a Japan, which he knew was on the verge of surrender, so as to intimidate the Soviet Union in the already developing Cold War.” Do you agree with President Truman’s critics? If no, why not? If yes, what is your reasoning and evidence? Why do you think that President Truman’s decision is criticized at all? Should it be? Why or why not?
- What did President Truman mean when he indicated that he approved the use of nuclear weapons because he didn’t want, “an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other?” What happened in Okinawa (and many other Japanese-held islands in the Pacific Theater) that was so bad? Why?
- The basic idea of Utilitarianism is doing what is in the best interest of the most people. Professor Miscamble provides us with a Utilitarian argument when he states in the video that, “Truman’s use of the bomb should be seen as his choosing the least awful of the options available to him.” What is Utilitarian about this assessment? Do you agree with Professor Miscamble’s analysis? Why or why not?
- At the end of the video, Professor Miscamble asks, “Given the alternatives, what would any moral person have done in Truman’s position?” Did President Truman have any other options beyond invading the home islands or droppingthe bombs? If not, why not, If yes, what were they and why do you think he didn’t he pursuit them? How would you answer Professor Miscamble’s question?
- We learn in the video that, “...the Japanese government had mobilized a large part of the population into a national militia which would be deployed to defend the home islands. Considering that most of the Japanese people had adopted the fierce attitude of never giving up and literally fighting to the last man and woman, what do you think would have happened to the Japanese if President Truman had opted for invading the home islands instead of using nuclear weapons? How do you think that alternate history would have shaped Japan’s future and its relationship to the U.S.? Do you think it would have been better than the way it turned out? Why or why not?

## EXTEND THE LEARNING:

### CASE STUDY: General LeMay Firebombing

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “The Fire Raids on Japan,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What factors contributed to General LeMay changing the tactics of the bombers over Japan?
- How many M-69s did each bomber carry? What did they do? What was so devastating about the new tactics? How effective were they?
- Why do you think that most of the airmen who flew the missions didn't have a moral problem with what they were doing? Do you think they were justified in employing those tactics? Why or why not? How much more of the firebombing do you think would have happened if President Truman hadn't tried to end the war by dropping the bomb? What would the long-term consequences of that would have been? How do you think the firebombing of Japan compared to the devastation of Dresden, from a moral perspective?



# QUIZ

## WAS IT WRONG TO DROP THE ATOM BOMB ON JAPAN?

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- 1. Before the atom bombs were dropped, Japanese military and civilians losses had reached approximately:**
  - a. 95,000
  - b. 500,000
  - c. 750,000
  - d. 3,000,000
  
- 2. The Atomic Diplomacy Theory states that President Truman only dropped the bombs to intimidate the Soviet Union.**
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
- 3. In the event of an American land invasion, Japan was ready to use Ketsu-Go, which was:**
  - a. The government's insistence on renewing diplomatic relations.
  - b. A plan to inflict as many U.S. casualties as possible.
  - c. The strategy to evacuate Japan and flee to Korea.
  - d. A food rationing provision created by the Emperor.
  
- 4. After both bombs were dropped, Japan's military wished to:**
  - a. Surrender immediately.
  - b. Import U.N. Peacekeepers.
  - c. Keep fighting the United States.
  - d. Sign the Non-Cooperation Treaty.
  
- 5. All of the viable alternate scenarios to end the war would have led to greater:**
  - a. American casualties.
  - b. Allied casualties.
  - c. Japanese military and civilian casualties.
  - d. All of the above.



# QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/world-war-two/the-pacific-war-1941-to-1945/the-fire-raids-on-japan/>

# The Fire Raids on Japan

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historylearningsite.co.uk. The History Learning Site, 19 May 2015. 2 Dec 2015.

The fire raids on Japan started in [1945](#). The fire raids were ordered by [General Curtis LeMay](#), who some see as the 'Bomber Harris' of the [Pacific War](#), in response to the difficulty [B-29](#) crews had in completing pinpoint strategic bombing over Japanese cities. LeMay, therefore, decided that blanket bombing raids on cities to undermine the morale of civilians were an appropriate response. After the attack on [Pearl Harbour](#) in December [1941](#) (referred to as "unprovoked and dastardly" by [President Roosevelt](#)), no-one was willing to speak out on behalf of the Japanese citizens.



On November 1st, [1944](#), a [B-29 Superfortress](#) flew over Tokyo for the first time in what was a propaganda victory flight as opposed to anything else. The B-29 was designed to carry a 20,000 lb bomb load for a distance of 5000 miles. It was designed for long flights and the crew had pressurised compartments to give them a degree of comfort on these flights. Based in the Marianas and China, the B-29 groups were under the direct command of General H Arnold and the Joint Chief-of-Staff in Washington DC.

The difficulty of strategic bombing had been seen on June 15th, 1944, when a raid on Yawata's iron and steel works resulted in just 2% of the complex being damaged. On August 20th, a raid on the same plant led to 18 bombers being shot down out of 70 planes – an attrition rate of 25%. The target was barely touched. Such losses for so little reward convinced many crews that strategic bombing was untenable.

[Curtis LeMay](#) had experienced the [bombing](#) of cities in Germany as the leader of the 8th Air Force. Now in the [Pacific](#) theatre, he was convinced of one thing – that any city making any form of contribution to Japan's war effort should be destroyed.

As the Allies had advanced through the Pacific Islands using [MacArthur's](#) 'island hopping' tactic, they captured Saipan, Tinian and Guam. These islands became bases for the [B-29's](#) of 21st Bomber Command. The bases for the B-29's had to be huge. At Saipan the airstrips were 200 feet wide and 8,500 feet long and they were served by 6 miles of taxiways and parking bays. The runways at Tinian were 8,000 feet long and 90 miles of roads were built just to serve the bomber base there. The runways on Saipan and Tinian were ready by October [1944](#), just 2 months after the fighting on the islands had finished.

The first bombing raid against Tokyo occurred on November 24th. The city was 1,500 miles from the Marianas. Brigadier-General Emmett O'Donnell flying the 'Dauntless Dotty' led 111 B-29's against the Musashima engine factory. The planes dropped their bombs from 30,000 feet and came across the first of a number of problems – accuracy. The B-29's were fitted with an excellent bomb aimer – the Norden – but it could not make out its target through low cloud. Also flying at 30,000 feet meant that the planes frequently flew in a jet stream wind that was between 100 and 200 mph which further complicated bomb aiming. Of the 111 planes on the raid, only 24 found the target.

In January [1945](#), Curtis LeMay flew to the Marianas to take control of 21st Bomber Command. The 20th Bomber Command, which had been based in India and China, was also transferred to the Marianas and LeMay was given command of this as well. Both units became the 20th Air Force. By March 1945, over 300 B-29's were taking part in raids over Japan.

However, flights over Japan remained risky as there were very many young Japanese men who were willing to take on the risk of attacking a B-29, despite its awesome firepower (12 x .50 inch guns and 1 cannon). When Japan introduced its 'George' and 'Jack' fighters, the number of casualties for the 20th Air Force increased and the damage done by the bombers was not really worth the losses. In March 1945, the capture of [Iwo Jima](#) meant that [P-51 Mustangs](#) could be used to escort the B-29's. P-61 'Black Widows' gave night time protection to the bombers during night raids. The Mustang was more than a match for the 'Jack' and 'George' fighters and daylight bombing raids over Japan became less hazardous with such protection.

LeMay still experienced one major problem though. The investment the Allies were getting for the number of bombs dropped was small. The bombers were not having a discernable impact on manufacturing in Japan. Pinpoint bombing was simply not giving the returns that LeMay wanted. He was also acutely aware that any potential invasion of Japan would be massively costly for the Americans if the Japanese Home Defence Force was well-equipped with reasonably modern weapons. If the manufacturing industries of Japan could not be destroyed, then there was no doubt in his mind, that the force would be well equipped – to the detriment of the Americans.

LeMay, having already seen the success of a fire raid on Hankow when B-29's flew much lower than their normal 30,000 feet and dropped incendiary bombs.

LeMay decided that Tokyo would be the first target for a massive raid on Japan itself. The raid was planned for the night of March 10th and the B-29's were to fly at between 5,000 and 8,000 feet. As Japan was not expected to send up night fighters, the guns from the planes were taken off as was anything that was deemed not useful to the raid. By effectively stripping the plane of non-essentials, more bombs could be carried for the raid. Along with Tokyo, Kobe, Osaka and Nagoya were also targeted. As each had flourishing cottage industries that fed the factories of each city, LeMay hoped to starve these factories of required parts. He also hoped that the fires that would be started would also destroy the larger factories as well. As the target for the raid was so large – a city area – the B-29's did not have to fly in strict formation, especially as little resistance was expected from the Japanese.

The incendiary bombs dropped were known as M-69's. These weighed just 6 lbs each and were dropped in a cluster of 38 within a container. One B-29 usually carried 37 of these containers, which equated to just over 1,400 bombs per plane. The bombs were set free from the container at 5,000 feet by a time fuse and then exploded on contact with the ground. When they did this, they spread a jelly-petrol compound that was highly inflammable.

For the attack on Tokyo, over 300 B-29's were involved. They took off for a flight that would get them to Tokyo just before dawn, thus giving them the cover of darkness, but with daylight for the return journey to the Marianas. They flew at 7,000 feet. This in itself may have baffled the city's defenders as they would have been used to the B-29's flying at 30,000 feet.

The raid had a massive impact on Tokyo. Photo-reconnaissance showed that 16 square miles of the city had been destroyed. Sixteen major factories – ironically scheduled for a future daylight raid – were destroyed along with many cottage industries. In parts of the city, the fires joined up to create a firestorm. The fires burned so fiercely and they consumed so much oxygen, that people in the locality suffocated. It is thought that 100,000 people were killed in the raid and another 100,000 injured. The Americans lost 14 B-29's; under the 5% rate of loss that was considered to be 'acceptable'.

On March 12th, a similar raid took place on Nagoya. The raid was less successful as the fires did not join up and just over 1 square mile of the city was destroyed. On March 13th, Osaka was attacked. Eight square miles of the city were destroyed. Nearly 2.5 square miles of Kobe was also destroyed by incendiary raids. In the space of ten days, the Americans had dropped nearly 9,500 tons of incendiaries on Japanese cities and destroyed 29 square miles of what was considered to be important industrial land.

Few men who flew on the raids felt that what they did was immoral. The Japanese treatment of prisoners and civilians in its occupied zones was all too well known to the flight crews and many felt that the Japanese had brought such attacks on themselves. The incendiary raids were carried out at night and the chance of a crew returning from such a raid was high. Only 22 bombers were lost in this ten-day period – an overall loss of 1.4%. If crews needed to land early, they could do so at Iwo Jima and the return flight to the Marianas was covered by 'Dumbos' and 'Superdumbos' – polite nicknames for the planes that escorted back the B-29's and provided lifeboats for them if they had to ditch in the sea. These planes, usually Catalina's and B-17's, also radioed ahead the position of crews that had ditched in the sea and ships could pick them up with due speed.

LeMay was highly impressed with the destructive results of the raids – as were the Joint Chiefs-of-Staff. For the Japanese government, the raids must have brought huge despair as they had no way of fighting back and it was obvious to all civilians who knew about the raids, that Japan was defenceless against them.

[LeMay](#) developed the tactic so that incendiary raids took place during the day. Without the cover of night, the B-29's flew at between 12,000 and 18,000 feet. Any attacks by Japanese fighters were covered by [P-51 Mustang](#) and P-47 Thunderbolt fighters. The Americans believed that the massive damage done to Tokyo by the fire raids would have persuaded Japan's leaders to surrender but they did not. Instead, the B-29 bomber would be needed for another raid – an atomic one. On August 6th, the [Enola Gay](#) took off for [Hiroshima](#). On August 9th, Bockscar took off for [Nagasaki](#). Japan surrendered shortly after.

**“Stacked up corpses were being hauled away on lorries. Everywhere there was the stench of the dead and of smoke. I saw the places on the pavement where people had been roasted to death. At last I comprehended first-hand what an air-raid meant. I turned back, sick and scared. Later I learned that 40% of Tokyo was burned that night, that there had been 100,000 casualties and 375,000 left homeless.”**

**“A month after the March raid, while I was on a visit to Honjo on a particularly beautiful cherry-blossom day, I saw bloated and charred corpses surfacing in the Sumida River. I felt nauseated and even more scared**



than before.”

“We ourselves were burned out in the fire raid of May 25th 1945. As I ran I kept my eyes on the sky. It was like a fireworks display as the incendiaries exploded. People were aflame, rolling and writhing in agony, screaming piteously for help, but beyond all mortal assistance.”

Fusako Sasaki