



OBON SOCIETY

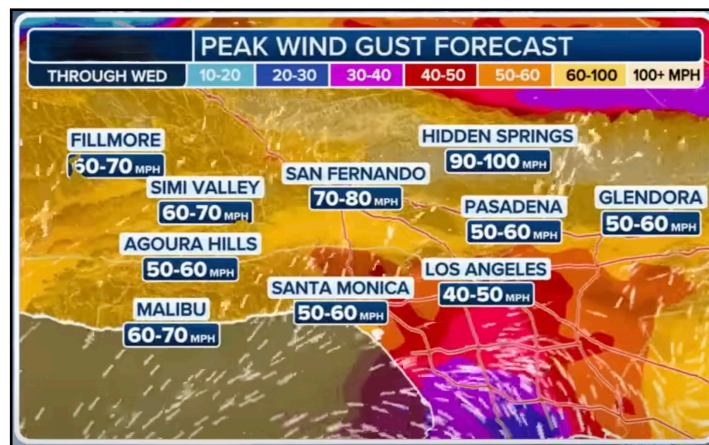
NEWSLETTER

January 2025

Iwo Jima, California Wildfires & the M69

Part Three: MISSION CREEP

Violent winds, with gusts reaching above 90 MPH, quickly spread the California Wildfires. Some residents had only a matter of minutes to flee their homes as the flames jumped hundreds of feet. Today these Los Angeles residents are probably the only people who can imagine, and sympathize, with what other people experienced back in 1945 when the American military leaders ordered our B29s crews to attack Japanese cities with fire.



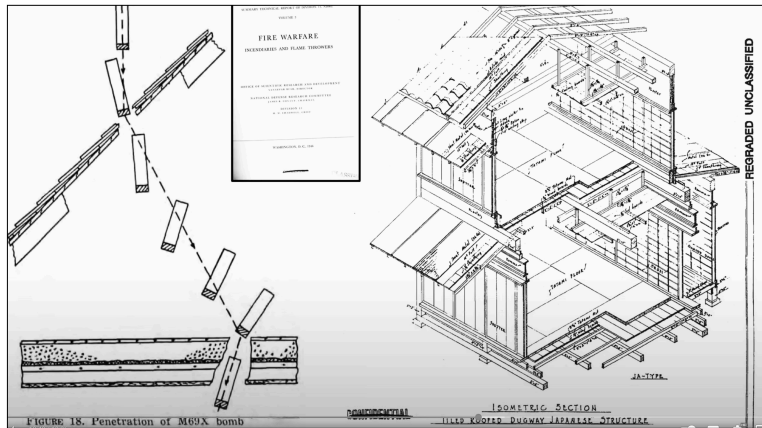
The objective of eliminating Japan's "*principal industrial centers*" didn't take long. The machinery and the surrounding infrastructure was quickly reduced to ashes. After the factories had been silenced the American military planners shifted their attention to the residential houses where the Japanese families resided. Attacking non-military targets might be regarded as "*mission creep*."



Traditional wooden Japanese homes existed throughout Japan

Every Japanese city was made up of thousands of wooden houses, commonly two stories tall. Generations of family resided there. Highly skilled carpenters made routine repairs that kept the original structure sturdy and livable for more than 500 years. It was common in every city to find wooden shrines and temples dating back more than 1,000 years. The building materials were very dry.

American engineers studied Japanese construction, noting the thickness of the roof tiles, walls and floors. They also analyzed the types of building materials and their strength. According to their experiments a six pound object, falling at 154 MPH, generated enough force to break through a tile roof and penetrate the top floor of a house. The M69 was specifically designed to accomplish this goal.



National Defense Research Council report titled "Fire Warfare" showing M69 breaking through a roof and floor. On the same page a detailed blueprint with measurements of the common traditional Japanese family home.

Other researchers constructed traditional Japanese houses in the desert of Dugway, Utah. They intentionally set them on fire and measured the exact time each house required to burn. It is chilling to see how methodical and thorough the National Defense Research engineers approached the assignment.



National Defense Research Council report showing stages of a Japanese house burning after 10, 15 and 20 minutes.

The M69 bomb was the most effective of the bombs tested, and showed itself to be a potent weapon against Japanese construction.

3.4.7 **Incendiary Tests in Experimental Japanese Room**²⁸

The tests at Dugway had shown that small incendiary bombs, particularly the AN-M69 and the M74, were effective in starting fires in Japanese dwellings, and that these dwellings were vulnerable to incendiary attack and easily destroyed by fire.

National Defense Research Council report describes the efficiency of M69 bomblets at igniting residential houses

By 1945 the Japanese military draft called up every able-bodied Japanese male to defend Okinawa and the homeland. Japanese cities, at that time, were inhabited only by the women, children, elderly and disabled.



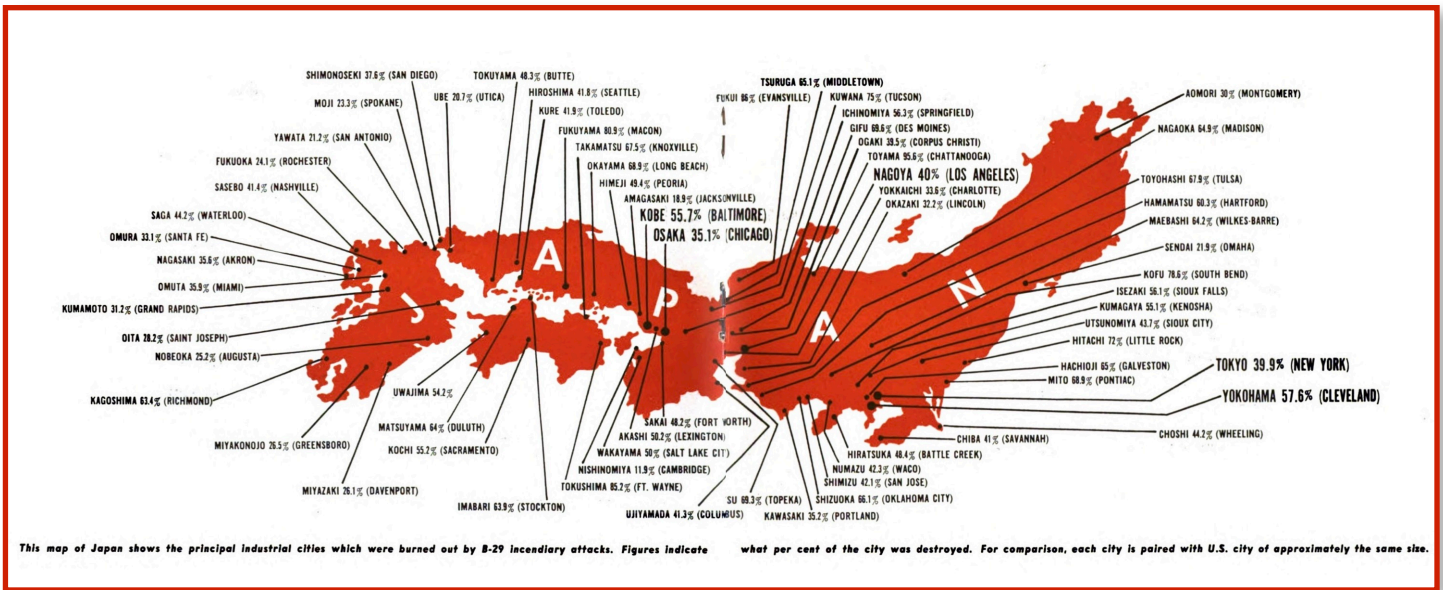
Every adult woman labored from morning to night growing food while their men were away to war. Grandmothers oversaw the youngsters who were in put charge of caring for the infants.

The Californians who witnessed the burning embers blown by the fierce Santa Anna winds are probably the only people who can imagine how the Japanese mothers felt when they first heard the roar of approaching airplanes, knowing they had less than a minute to grab their children and run.



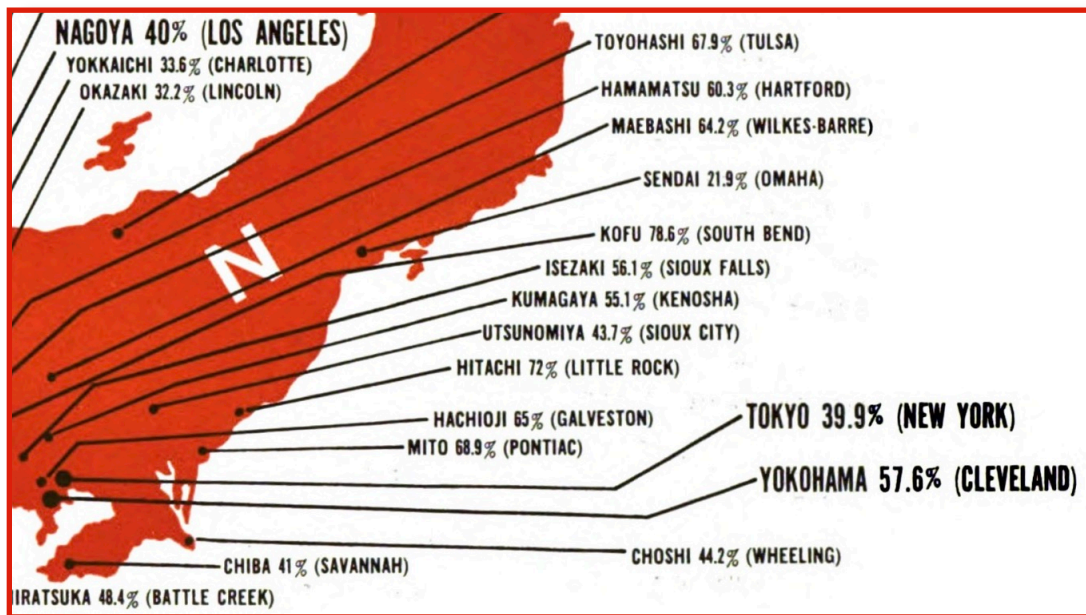
An attack squadron of B29s loaded with M69 firebombs fly past Mt. Fuji. B29s approached their target flying 350 MPH.

Los Angeles residents reported that they saw the smoke and flames coming so they fled in the opposite direction. Japanese mothers would have seen fire erupt simultaneously in the north, the south, east and west. There was no escape; smoke and flames were everywhere. From high overhead the American B29 crews complained of being sickened by the smell of burning flesh.



Japan cities attacked and burned. Map prepared by Commanding General of the Army Air Force.

Japanese residents endured firebombing throughout 1945. Several cities were attacked multiple times. The Commanding General of the Army Air Force prepared this map for the Secretary of War to show the location of the sixty-four Japanese cities destroyed with firebombs.



Each Japanese city was listed, followed by a percentage figure measuring the precise area burned. An American city of corresponding size and importance is listed to convey the damage done to Japan.

The city limits of Los Angeles measures 502 square miles; Cal Fire reported that 52 square miles burned in five days. Approximately 10% of the entire city was damaged.

Fortunately the cities of San Diego, San Francisco, Sacramento, Seattle, Denver, Las Vegas, Phoenix and all the others remain untouched by fire.

Coming next
Part Four: **Aftermath**