To this day, some of the heaviest sustained bombing in the Twentieth Century was rained on Korea, especially in the North, during the three years of the Korean War, 1950-53. This bombardment occurred from naval ships offshore as well as from fighter-bombers in the air. The U.S./U.N. forces were intervening in a country experiencing an active fratricidal war created in August 1945 by a decision of the U.S. to force an artificial and arbitrary division of an historically homogenous Korean people. This quickly became a revolutionary war where the majority of the people were adamantly opposed and hostile to any continued occupation by outside powers, whether they were from Japan, the Soviet Union, or the United States.

A combination of factors contributed to the U.S./U.N./Rhee forces showing almost total disregard for human life of Korean civilians: (1) grotesque Western racism; (2) “divinely inspired” ethnocentrism; (3) delusions in Western minds unwilling to distinguish between “Third World” peoples’ self-determination struggles and the “First World’s” paranoid obsession with exaggerated and hated monolithic “communism;” and (4) a hostile local Korean population.

It is important to look at the historical context of use of bombing and assess the patterns of its use and the mind-set behind it.

**Aerial bombardment – first known occurrence was in 1849 over Venice, Italy**

Aerial bombardments are first known to have occurred in 1849 when Austria sent time-bomb filled balloons over Venice, Italy. On August 1, 1907 the US Signal Corps organized its first aeronautical division, and by 1909 it had a plane called the Wright Flyer. Also in 1909, the British, French and Germans acquired their first military aircraft. Turkish pilots used airplanes as a source of bombs, dropping explosives on Bulgarian troops during the 1913 Balkan wars.[i]

**Early Air Power, Including use of Gas Bombs – Early 20th Century**

**Firebombing and Gas Bombs**

The first example of aerial firebombing is believed to have been committed by the Italians in October 1911 against Tripoli, Libya (pop. ca. 30,000), and surrounding populations of 600,000 Arab nomads, in the last piece of Turkish North Africa, using live grenades thrown from open cockpits. Noncombatants were murdered ruthlessly, including destruction of a funeral parlor and a hospital.[ii]

The British are believed to have used gas and incendiary bombs from warplanes indiscriminately killing massive numbers of Russian civilians and troops during the 1919-20 intervention against the new Soviet Union,[iii] and against rebellious Kurds and Arabs in British-controlled Palestine and Iraq from 1920-24 (states created from the post-World War I breakup of the Ottoman Empire by the newly formed League of Nations), attempting to control a vast area without use of ground troops significantly depleted from World War I casualties.[iv] Winston Churchill, ex-British Colonial Under-Secretary, then Secretary of State for War and Air, advocated the use of “poisoned gas against uncivilized tribes”, especially to “cause disablement” of the turbulent tribes in Iraq and Kurdistan.[v]

**Italy Bombs Ethiopia**, October 1935 – May 1936

On October 3, 1935, Mussolini’s Italy invaded Ethiopia with an occupation that continued into
May 1936, supported by 500 planes flying 7,500 air missions dropping bombs and burning hundreds of villages, committing systematic terror against and extermination of countless thousands of civilians using large amounts of tear and mustard gas. The Italians showed no mercy. On New Year’s Day 1936, the Italians bombed the Swedish Red Cross ambulance in Ethiopia.[vi]

Guernica, April 26, 1937

As regular use of air power was being introduced in the early Twentieth Century, percentages of civilian casualties (obvious non-combatants) dramatically escalated. Bombings tend to cause indiscriminate casualties no matter how careful the bombardiers claim they are, or how precise they claim their technology. Often it has been said, incorrectly, that the first instance of bombing of civilian populations was committed by German Luftwaffe planes (the Condor Legion) on Monday, April 26, 1937, destroying much of the small undefended city of Guernica, Spain (pop. ca. 7,000). Guernica had special symbolic significance as it was considered the spiritual capital of the autonomous spirited Basque region. Flying under the command of the Spanish Nationalist Government of General Francisco Franco, the German planes dropped 5,771 explosive and incendiary bombs on market day during a three-hour period, destroying 271 houses in the center city, or seventy percent of its housing stock.[vii] The wealthy neighborhood of Franco’s sympathizer’s homes had been spared,[viii] intentional or not. Surrounding Basque villages in the region of northern Spain were also destroyed during the Spanish Civil War. Casualty figures in Guernica cannot be precise since all records were destroyed, but the Basque government claimed minimum numbers of 1,650 dead and 889 wounded.[ix]

The Basque region is comprised of seven traditional provinces in an area both east and west of the Pyrenees Mountains that define the border between Northeastern Spain and Southwestern France, extending down the coast of the Bay of Biscay.

Dramatic Escalation of Bombings

The pattern of bombings escalated after 1911 where countless civilian casualties became routine. Spanish shrapnel/bombs were dropped on Moroccan villages in 1913, using exploding steel balls, perhaps an early version of today’s cluster bombs.[x]

The record reveals the following: The British bombed restless natives, the Pathans in India (1915); revolutionary Egyptians and resisting natives in Darfur/West Sudan (1916); the Mashuds on India’s border with Afghanistan (1917); conducted systematic air attacks against German cities during World War I in 1917-18, designed to “weaken the morale of civilian inhabitants”; bombed rebellious populations in Somaliland, Afghanistan and Egypt (1919); the Enzeli in Iran and Arabs in Trans-Jordan (1920).

The South Africans bombed the Hottentots (Khoikhoi natives) in Southwest Africa (1922, 1925, 1930, 1932, etc.); the Spanish bombed Moroccan villages near Tetuan (1924); joint French and Spanish forces dropped thousands of tons of high explosive bombs in 1925 on the villages of Rifis and Jibala in Morocco, including the use of gas, and on the totally undefended holy town of Sheshuan where countless women and children were massacred; and the French bombed Damascus, Syria and surrounding towns in the Druze region (1925-26).[xi]

The 1925 bombing of the undefended Moroccan town of Sheshuan was an act of revenge for a dreadful defeat the Spanish ground forces suffered there in late 1924 at the hands of Moroccan guerrillas. General Francisco Franco, who had founded the Spanish Foreign Legion in 1920, had conducted a ruthless occupation against Moroccans until the German air force moved his forces to Spain at the beginning of the civil war in 1936. The earlier defeat of the Spanish military at Sheshuan was nothing that Franco would forget. Sheshuan was bombed to ruins with most of its inhabitants murdered from the air with remaining survivors mostly maimed and blinded. And this massacre was assisted by a squadron of volunteer U.S. American fliers (mercenaries) who had joined The French Flying Corps, who in turn, with the Spanish, planned the bombing. Franco would use the brutal occupation of Morocco, and the total destruction through bombing of Sheshuan, as the model that would guide his forty-year occupation of Spain (1936-1975). Sheshuan in effect laid the foundation for the relentless bombing committed during the Spanish Civil War, symbolized by the destruction of the Basque capital at Guernica in 1937.[xii]

And this record of increased dependency upon bombings with virtually no consideration for...
civilian life was to lay the foundation for the unprecedented bombings that were to occur during World War II, especially by the Allies and the United States in Europe and Japan.

Though the United States was not the first country to use indiscriminate bombings, as can be seen from the above record, it subsequently became the master of relentless bombings where millions of civilians were cumulatively murdered in Germany and Japan during World War II; then in Korea in the early 1950s; subsequently in Laos, Cambodia, and Viet Nam in Southeast Asia, early 1960s-1973; Libya in 1986; Panama in 1989; Iraq, 1990 to present; Serbia-Kosovo in mid-to-late 1990s; Afghanistan, 2001 to present; Pakistan, starting in 1998, but intensely drone bombed since 2004.

First Use of U.S. Air Power

I. MEXICO. U.S. military operations in Mexico, 1913-14, produced four historic firsts for its military air power: (A) aerial bombing, (B) aerial combat, (C) aerial reconnaissance support of ground troops, (D) airplane hit by hostile ground fire.

A. May 10, 1913 witnessed the first instance of aerial bombing in the Hemisphere when Didier Masson, a French mercenary piloting a Glenn Martin “pusher” plane smuggled into Mexico from Arizona, began a series of bombing raids for Mexican Gen. Alvarado Obregon against Mexican federal gunboats in Guaymas Bay, in the Gulf of California, Mexico. It is not known if civilians were present on the ground where and when the bombing was occurring.[xiii]

B. On November 30, 1913, two U.S. pilots flying for opposite sides in the Mexican Revolution engaged in the first aerial combat, firing pistol shots at one another over Naca, Mexico.[xiv]

C. The first use of U.S. military (Naval) aircraft in aerial photographic and reconnaissance support of U.S. troops occurred when Navy planes were supporting Marine ground troop operations in Vera Cruz, Mexico, April-May 1914, after Mexican authorities arrested eight U.S. sailors from the USS Dolphin and U.S. President Wilson’s demand of an apology from Mexican President Huerta was ignored.[xv] There is no known account of any U.S. planes bombing or firing on any ground targets in this first aerial support of U.S. troops in a combat operation. The planes were on reconnaissance and photography missions for the ground forces.

D. On May 6, 1914, one of the reconnaissance planes over Vera Cruz, Mexico became the first U.S. airplane hit by hostile ground fire.[xvi]

Note: Other accounts indicate that General Victoriano Huerta, who forcefully succeeded to the Mexican Presidency after assassinating the popular President General Francisco Madero in Mexico City in 1913, was backed by Dutch Royal Shell and British oil cartel interests in Mexico, and was receiving arms from Germany, and that Wilson landed troops at Vera Cruz to intercept those arms. So before WWI began, British and German interests in Mexican oil were in collusion to insure business as usual for the cartels.[xvii]

II. HAITI. U.S. air power in Haiti in 1919 witnessed the first known use of U.S. aerial bombings of civilians and the utilization of aircraft in close air-support of ground combat troops.[xviii] U.S. warships were sent into Haitian harbors at least 24 times between 1849 and 1913 to “protect American lives and property,”[xix] landing Marines on at least three of those occasions (1888, 1891, 1914)[xx]. Changes in Haitian leadership in 1915, perceived as a threat to long standing American interests, greatly alarmed U.S. President Woodrow Wilson who quickly sent an initial contingent of 330 U.S. Marines to Port-au-Prince on July 28, which quickly grew to a force of 2,000,[xxi] prodded by U.S. “Americans who were concerned about their investments.”[xxii] Especially troubling to “Americans” was the fact that the Haitian National Assembly refused to ratify a U.S.-crafted constitution that assured U.S. corporations the right to purchase Haitian properties.[xxiii] Within six weeks, representatives from the United States controlled Haitian customs houses and administrative institutions with many more Marines being dispatched over the years.[xxiv]

However, this time the U.S. Marine forces remained continuous occupiers for 19 years until
1934, always rationalized “to protect property and preserve order.”[xxv] During the occupation, American troops “murdered, destroyed, reinstituted virtual slavery and demolished the constitutional system;” wrote Noam Chomsky, with estimates of number of Haitians killed ranging from 15,000.[xxvi] to 50,000.[xxvii] Typically possessing a European mindset arrogantly conditioned by “Guns, Germs, and Steel,”[xxviii] the U.S. Marines “successfully” conducted this early counterinsurgency warfare killing thousands while suffering but insignificant casualties of their own – reportedly 26 killed in action and 79 wounded out of a total of several thousand combat troops.[xxix]

The United States bombings against Haitian civilian populations occurred as early as 1919 and continued into 1920. Haitian Indigenous armed resistance increased during the period 1919-20, and was met by the first known application of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, which was used extensively in Nicaragua ten years later. This doctrine included the conscious policy of terrorizing urban populations from bombings, and was applied against Les Cayes, Haiti’s, Haiti’s third largest city with large casualties.[xxx] Combat aviators flying seven Curtiss HS-2L flying boats and six Curtiss “Jenny” bi-planes with 25-pound bombs loaded into canvas mailbags experimented with “dive-bombing,” releasing the bombs with a tug of rope from about 250-feet during a steep dive of 45 degrees.[xxxi] Pilots freely used these new aerial tactics against the “hostile” civilian communities, as well as against the presence of their armed resisters called cacos under the direction of charismatic Charlemagne Peralte. The U.S. Marines, excitedly using air bombings and strafings to support troops on the ground, killed Peralte and rousted the cacos by March 1920. The Marine Corps reported “hundreds of casualties” in their successful counterinsurgency campaign, bragging about their defeat of local opposition forces.[xxxi]

High casualty figures were reported by the New York Times in 1920. A U.S. American present in Haiti reported that “American marines, largely made up of and officered by Southerners, opened fire with machine guns from airplanes upon defenseless Haitian villages, killing men, women and children in the open market places; natives were slain for ‘sport’ by a hoodlum element among these same Southerners...The natives were armed largely with obsolete and useless firearms, some even with scythes, according to Mr. Franck, and it is to this fact rather than to the boasted marksmanship of the marines that he attributes the deaths of 3,000 blacks and of only twelve whites.”[xxxii] Harry A. Franck was a noted traveler and authority on the West Indies and he had been in Haiti in January 1920 on a tour of the Caribbean for The Century Magazine. He had heard the atrocity stories “from many reliable sources, including sources friendly to the Americans.”[xxxiv] A similar casualty figure was reported in 1920 by the NAACP which had taken on a project to liberate Haitians from U.S. occupation. Their on-site report found “that 3,000 Haitians had been killed by U.S. Marines, torture had been practiced, and rigid censorship imposed, Haitian freedom...had been destroyed by the U.S.”[xxxv] And this was after only the first five years of a 19-year occupation.

III. Oklahoma, May 31 – June 1, 1921. Tulsa, Oklahoma was the scene of the second known use of U.S. planes to intentionally bomb civilians. [The first known use of airplanes (Italian) to bomb civilians is believed to have occurred when Italy bombed Tripoli in 1911. See “Early Air Power, Including use of Gas Bombs – Early 20th Century” above.]

From May 31-June 1, 1921, angry Whites organized and launched a ruthless campaign against the thriving Black community in the emerging U.S. oil capital, Tulsa, Oklahoma. According to survivors, the Oklahoma National Guard used airplanes to fire bomb the Greenwood section of Tulsa in a massacre of Blacks. This was never openly acknowledged by officials. Survivors and witnesses to the massacre kept this atrocity to themselves until word leaked out in the 1980s, over sixty years later. Whites had been silence from shame, the Blacks from fear.[xxxvi]

According to a number of Black witnesses, including at least four first-hand written accounts, about a dozen airplanes, apparently from the National Guard, and perhaps one plane owned by Sinclair Oil, “raised fire” from the air, while strafing with rifles, and firebombing with incendiary devices, including turpentine balls. The White terrorists destroyed 1,256 houses and other buildings, including churches, stores, businesses, newspaper offices, a school, a hospital, and a library, in a thirty-six square-block area of the prosperous Black section of Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma.[xxxvii]
Original reports indicated 31 killed, hundreds injured, 3,000 Blacks left homeless. [ADD Footnote: Bergman, 401]; Subsequent accounts suggest hundreds killed, thousands injured [Muwakkil, Salim. (April 17, 2000). “Paying Back the Slavery Debt.” Chicago Tribune].

The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: “more than 300 blacks were killed and 10,000 left homeless after a mob of white deputies and Oklahoma National Guardsmen descended on the all-black Greenwood section of Tulsa, burning everything in sight.” Tulsa officials deputized men who burned Greenwood with the “help of uniformed police.” [Brune, Adrian. (March 18, 2002). “Tulsa’s Shame.” The Nation].

“Removal at gunpoint from their homes throughout the day, the African Americans were lined up on the street, their hands raised above their heads, and slowly marched out of the district. Others were taken in trucks and cars…With the city jail full, the blacks were detained at the Convention Hall, a few blocks beyond Greenwood’s western boundary…Guards shot at the heels of those who couldn’t keep pace…By Thursday, June 2, 6,000 blacks had been rounded up at the fairgrounds, about one mile northeast of Greenwood, where platforms used to groom cows were transformed into sleeping floors [Hirsch, 108-09].

Many members of the recently formed (1919) national service organization of WWI veterans, the American Legion, were involved in their military uniforms with their weapons, taking credit for having “saved the damn city from militant blacks” [Hirsch, pp. 93-94, 285].

IV. Blair Mountain, West Virginia

Logan County, West Virginia, was the scene of the third known use of planes to intentionally bomb civilians, during one of the largest civil uprisings in US history, and largest armed insurrection since the Civil War. Between late August and early September 1921, 10,000 to 15,000 coal miners congregated in efforts to unionize as they were confronted by 2,000 armed sheriff’s deputies, paramilitaries hired by the coal companies, and US troops. President Warren Harding threatened to dispatch federal troops along with Army Martin MB-1 bombers. Private planes were hired to drop homemade bombs on the miners. A combination of gas and explosive bombs leftover from WWI were dropped in several locations near the towns of Jeffery, Sharples and Blair. Orders from General Billy Mitchell directed Army bombers from Maryland to provide aerial surveillance to oversee the repression and battle against the strikers. More than one million rounds were fired in the battles. Up to 30 deaths were reported among the sheriff’s deputies and paramilitary units, with 50-100 miners killed. Federal troops arrived on September 2 to mop up. Nearly 1,000 (985) miners were indicted for murder. The confrontation in effect severely hurt United Mine Worker membership out of fear of repeated battles with coal companies and their trusted local police.

As of mid-2010, subsidiaries of two of the United States’ largest coal producers – Arch Coal, Inc., and Massey Energy – hold permits to blast and strip mine huge chunks of the upper slopes and ridge of Blair Mountain, removing much of the mountaintop.


V. Nicaragua, 1926 – 1933

The fourth known incidence of U.S. bombings where civilians were known to be present on the ground occurred in Nicaragua in 1926-27, and continued until 1933. The U.S. had militarily intervened in Nicaragua on numerous occasions, the most recent being an occupation that lasted from 1912 to 1925. The Marines soon returned the next year in May 1926 when civil disputes broke out when Liberal forces under the leadership of Dr. Sacasa landed in Bluefields to protest the Conservative Diaz Presidency. The Marines quickly responded by landing at three points on the Atlantic Coast to “protect U.S. interests” and “restore democratic processes.” They did not expect, however, to be confronted by a resilient guerrilla force adamantly against the presence of U.S. military forces. Thus, they remained until 1933. Even U.S. adventurers/mercenaries joined the Conservative cause. Two were killed in their efforts to thwart Sacasa’s Liberals, as other “patriotic” U.S. mercenary pilots being paid $500 a month bombed Liberal enclaves in Managua as early as 1926 [xxxvii] even before the Marines entered that city in January 1927, bolstering the forces of the beleaguered U.S.-supported Conservative President Diaz [xxxix]

Preserving US Investments in Nicaragua

There were many U.S. investments in Nicaragua. The Guaranty Trust Company and J. & W. Seligman & Co. had loaned millions to the Nicaraguan Government, and to the U.S.-created “The National Bank of Nicaragua.” The banks were also the majority owners of Nicaragua’s
Pacific Railroad which had been turned over to the U.S.’s J.G. White Management Corporation for its operation. Brown Brothers & Co. and the Seligmans (The Guaranty Trust Company later replaced Brown Brothers in the Nicaraguan field) took over various loans/debts owed by Nicaragua, knowing that the U.S. stood behind the lenders, securing customs receipts, pledges of stock from the Pacific Railroad, and was able to assert control of Nicaragua’s budget process to limit “extravagance” for its domestic needs.[x]

The December 25, 1926 edition of the New York Times reported that “Extensive mahogany growths are owned by Americans on the east coast of Nicaragua” and the “payment of duties [export taxes] by American exporters of lumber” was in dispute. Export duties legally due to the Nicaraguan government were being confiscated to pay off loans owed U.S. investors.

“The Marines have been landed [in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua] upon the request of American citizens now living in and doing business in certain parts of Nicaragua. They report that their lives and property are in danger…”[xii]

One of the “lootings” of Nicaragua as charged by a Nicaraguan economist related to “[T]he Emery claim…for mahogany and other concessions in Nicaragua held by Americans. The concessions were earlier repudiated under Nicaragua leader Zeledon and now the American claimants sought to recover.”[xiii]

Bolshevism Feared in Mexico and Nicaragua

On November 17, 1926, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert E. Olds told a reporter that the Mexican government was “seeking to establish a Bolshevik authority in Nicaragua to drive a ‘hostile wedge’ between the U.S. and the Panama Canal.” U.S. politicians claimed Olds was eager for war with Mexico over its lucrative oil fields in Vera Cruz. However, on January 2, 1927, Olds wrote a confidential memo arguing that the Mexican involvement in the affairs of Nicaragua was “a direct challenge to the United States…We must decide whether we shall tolerate the interference…in Central American affairs or insist upon our dominant position….Until know Central America has always understood that governments which we recognize and support stay in power, while those which we do not recognize and support fail. Nicaragua has become a test case. It is difficult to see how we can afford to be defeated.”[xliii]

By January 1927, the U.S Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg was accusing the forces of Juan Sacasa threatening the Nicaragua Diaz government by working in concert with the revolutionary government of Mexico under President Calles. The perceived threat: Nicaragua was likely to become a “Bolshevist regime, hostile to the United States…under instructions from Moscow…to actively support Latin-American strikes against American concerns.”[xliv]

As one can imagine, the U.S. American eyes were seeing RED, the future of their lucrative investments and profitable playground threatened. In 1927, the contingent of Marines were surprisingly confronted by small groups of armed Nicaraguan Indigenous resistance, a ragtag campesino army organized under the leadership of and coordinated by Augusto Sandino. The Marines became increasingly frustrated as they chased Sandino’s people’s army through the mountains of northern Nicaragua.

Sandino’s Detailed Record of U.S. Marine Bombings of Civilians in Northern Nicaragua

Because Sandino kept a journal of his activities, as well as those of the U.S. Marines, there is a detailed record of the consequences of air power without consideration for the well-being of civilians. This early example of U.S. counterinsurgency reveals a callous, and racist attitude, that exacted diabolical destruction on civilians, on their houses and other community buildings.

The Marines introduced air power to Nicaragua in early 1927. They initially bombed much of the city of Chinandega with number of casualties unknown.[xlv] In the mountain city of Ocotal near the Honduran border, for the first time the Marines were confronted by a large gathering of Sandino’s army. The Marines had the support of five De Havilland biplanes and Boeing O2-B1s planes that began dropping fragmentation bombs (aerial antipersonnel bombs that scatter shrapnel over a wide area upon explosion), a number of seventeen-pound bombs, and multiple machinegun fire strafing the city. This was the second known example of organized dive-bombing by U.S. air forces supporting ground forces, having rehearsed this tactic eight years earlier in Haiti during 1919-1920. The Marines reported “scores of men fell from the
bombing and strafing” as the “miracle of Marine air” produced “streets…strewn with the dead and dying.”[xlvi]

The Marine Corps successful experience of using aircraft in a close air support role with ground troops in Haiti and Nicaragua were later incorporated into the important Small Wars Manual which has formed the basis for Marine Corps counterinsurgency doctrine[xlvii] A news correspondent who accompanied U.S. troops reported that the U.S.-Nicaragua military campaign offered the “first practical laboratory for the development of post-war aviation in coordination with ground troops.”[xlvi]

Despite the advantage of superior weaponry and total air power the Marines were frustratingly unable to contain the “unexpected stiffness of Sandino’s resistance…better equipped and organized than there has been reason to think.” More than 1,000 additional Marines were ordered to Nicaragua in January 1928, increasing their numbers to 2,570.[xli] Eventually, the U.S. forces would number 12,000 Marines supported by their expanding air forces and the local U.S.-created constabulary, against Sandino’s popular army that at one point numbered 3,000.[li]

The U.S. Marines six-year counterinsurgency campaign against Sandino and his campesino army formed glimpses of the standard elements of twentieth-century air-ground warfare: extended reconnaissance flights, ground-to-air communication signaling, using aircraft to evacuate wounded soldiers, psychological warfare using leaflet drops, and long-distance movement of troops and supplies.[li]

According to Marine records from Nicaragua, their tactics, as supplemented by the emerging Nicaraguan National Guard, included burning crops, destroying peasant homes and huts, bombing and strafing civilian populations killing and injuring thousands of Nicaraguans.[lii]

Scorched Earth is an old U.S. policy carried out again and again since the early 1600s.

In an effort to restore order satisfactory to the United States and its efforts to maintain virtual control over Nicaragua, the U.S. supervised the November 1928 elections between new Liberal candidate, General Jose Maria Moncada, and Adolfo Benard, Conservative (replacing Diaz as a candidate), with U.S. Marines guarding the polls, and 20 planes soaring over various polling stations to insure safety of the ballot boxes. The U.S. Marine chair of each precinct carried the ballots to the department capitals for recounts. Brig. General Frank B. McCoy, was head of the U.S. electoral mission in Nicaragua.[liii] Sandino did not agree with Moncada’s efforts at a truce under U.S. terms and continued fighting for five more years until the frustrated Marines left in 1933.

However, a former US Marine who fought against Sandino’s forces in 1928-1930, tells a different story. Bill Gandall, 77, was present at a demonstration in front of the US Embassy in Managua in 1986. He expressed deep remorse over his and other Marine’s actions in Nicaragua nearly 60 years earlier. And in a Colman McCarthy column in the Washington Post, Gandall said “We never caught him [Sandino] because no matter how we tortured, we could never get people to inform.” He described the 1928 elections as “fraudulent” and described the Marine’s version of U.S. democracy as one marked by brutality: “I shot a guy at the polls…[and] after that, it was taking part in rapes, burning huts, cutting off genitals. I had nightmares for years. I didn’t have much of a conscience while I was in the Marines. We were taught not to have a conscience.”[liv]

Sandino himself reported in his writings that the brutal “Yankees sow terror among the peaceful inhabitants”, violating women and girls, while “in the towns and villages they destroy houses and furniture as well as provisions and crops…newly planted fields and domesticated animals.”[lv]

On November 27, 1927, the Marines bombed “peaceful villages…dropping incendiary and asphyxiating bombs on the humble shacks of defenseless campesinos” and on the day before the U.S. dropped “incendiary and gas bombs, killing thirty-two women and eleven children.”[lv]

On December 23, 1927, Sandino’s friend, Florencio Lopez in Ciudad Antigua, described the attack on that village on December 6 by two airplanes using machine guns and bombs over a period of an hour-and-a-half in which the greater part of the houses of the town were destroyed while the church suffered fifty-two large ruptures, gravely wounding elderly
Norberta Quinonez, fracturing Paulina Centeno’s left forearm, and seriously wounding a little girl named Quinonz.[lvii]

Sandino’s January 8, 1928 description revealed how the Yankees “have sown terror, destroying in a cowardly fashion everything they have found in their way, filling the country with mourning and consternation, murdering, violating, robbing, and burning the homes of peaceful campesinos, leaving thousands of children as orphans, and widows and invalids with no help at all, since to commit these acts of savagery they use fleets of airplanes and large-caliber cannon, contrary to all human law, certain of impunity because of their knowledge that our army lacks these elements of combat.”[lviii]

On January 19, 1928, Sandino described that “Our wounded die for lack of adequate medical treatment of their wounds caused by bombs and shrapnel,…not only soldiers, but also of the civilians, among whom are many women and children, because the enemy airplanes are causing more damage in the towns than in our trenches. Ciudad Vieja, Guanacaste, and San Albino have been turned into smoking ruins.”[lix]

Remarking on the sieges of El Chipote (Sandino’s headquarters), Sandino described the bombing attacks that cause “massive destruction of the crops and cattle that belonged to the local people, carried out for the purpose of denying us provisions, caused many, many men to come to us to swell our ranks. And women as well…”,...including some from Honduras and El Salvador.”[lx]

A March 25, 1928 letter from Sandino described the merciless airplane bombing of the modest huts of campesinos who live in the mountains of Murra but only “as long as they were certain that there was nobody in those huts who could respond to their aggression.”[lx]

In a War July 1932 Bulletin, Sandino noted that surprisingly large units of U.S. troops have crossed into Nicaraguan territory from the Mosquito Cost of supposedly neutral Honduras with the Marine quarters located at the Yankee United Fruit Company banana station in the Honduran Port of Trujillo.[lxii]

Again, these tactics are not new, having been used from the origins of the US civilization in its genocide against Indigenous Americans, including the origins of the place of my birth in Geneva, NY, and the same ones I observed or studied about in Korea, Viet Nam, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, etc., that included use of airpower.

Again, memories of local survivors described many dead as a result of the bombings and the Marine ground campaigns, supplementing the Marine’s own accounts that the streets were “strewn with the dead and dying”[lxiii] from their air power. Though the July 26, 1927 Ocotal bombing forced Sandino back to the mountains in ever more decentralized revolutionary combat strategies, the Marines were never able to definitively defeat his army.

The Marines even bombed villages in Honduras perceived as sympathetic with Sandino’s guerrillas, though Honduran troops patrolling the border for five years captured only one Sandino supporter, and allowed him to escape.[lxiv] The Marines finally withdrew in 1933 when a peace agreement was reached prior to a betrayal that directly led to the assassination of Sandino by Somoza, the new U.S. puppet dictator.

World War II – Germany and Japan

During World War II, of course, there were devastating, indiscriminate bombings of cities in Germany and Japan with virtually no regard for civilian casualties. The Germans had bombed Rotterdam in Holland (1940), Coventry in England (1940), and other cities as well. However, these German bombings were minor when compared with British and U.S. bombing of German cities.[lxv] Roosevelt, Churchill and the US Chiefs of Staff met at Casablanca January 14-23, 1943, to plan future strategy that included large-scale air attacks with the aim of “Destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system and the undermining of the morale of the German people to the point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened.”[lxvi] However the first 1,000 plane saturation bombings had already begun in Cologne, May 30-June 1, 1942, with the Germans claiming 5,500 casualties.[lxvii]

Saturation bombings of forty German cities[lxviii] began in earnest in 1943 with thousand-plane bombing raids, such as Magdeburg, Wurzburg, towns along the Ruhr River, Hamburg (killing at least 50,000 in a single night on July 27, 1943.[lxix] and Berlin, Essen, and Frankfurt,
often at night. These bombings made no pretense of striking only military targets. In a relatively short period of time 500,000-600,000 German civilians were killed in these bombings, and another 800,000-1,600,000 injured.[xx]

The incredible terror bombing of Dresden alone (February 13, 1945), with phosphorous and other high explosive and incendiary bombs, by more than 1,200 allied bombers, murdered in a single night at least 100,000 civilians.[xxi] One source cites deaths as high as 135,000 at Dresden.[xxii]

While the Pacific theatre was witnessing the last battles on various islands, the Allies emulated the German carnage when they relentlessly targeted Japanese cities with saturations of incendiary bombs. U.S. air power in the Pacific was placed under the direction of 38-year-old Major General Curtis LeMay on January 20, 1945, twenty-five days before the Dresden bombing atrocity. He had previously been in the Europe Theater overseeing much bombing there.[xxiii] His assistant was Robert McNamara, a young Lt. Colonel in the Army Air Forces, later to be Secretary of War under President Johnson. Lemay later became the architect of the unrestrained air war in Korea, 1950-53.

LeMay’s proudest moment came on the very day, less than a month after Dresden, when he launched the 160-day incendiary campaign that was to last from March 9 to August 15, 1945. On the very first night, March 9, in less than three hours, the firebombing by 298 U.S. B-29s low-flying under 10,000 feet dropped jellied-gasoline M-47 and M-69 fire bomb clusters over fifteen square miles of virtually defenseless Tokyo where residential areas had been marked in advance. Up to 2,000 tons of incendiary bombs destroyed nearly 270,000 buildings, burning alive at least 100,000 civilians while injuring many thousands more, leaving at least 800,000 people homeless. It is believed that more people died from fire where temperatures reached 1,800 degrees at Ground Zero in one few hour period than ever before in human history. USAF headquarters in Washington was ecstatic. Tokyo was considered the greatest victory of the U.S. air force ever, at the cost of fourteen B-29s. The Boeing plant was booming the in Seattle, Washington economy, cranking out 135 B-29s a month.[xxiv]

This firebombing was popularly cheered on by news organs such as Time magazine, who explained that “properly kindled, Japanese cities will burn like autumn leaves.” Rather than denying this firebombing that was slaughtering civilians in the hundreds of thousands beyond most people’s comprehension, a spokesman for the Fifth Air Force claimed that “the entire population of Japan [was] a proper military target.”[xxv]

Colonel Harry F. Cunningham proudly described U.S. policy: “We military men do not pull punches or put on Sunday School picnics. We are making War and making it in the all-out fashion which saves American lives, shortens the agony War is and seeks to bring about an enduring Peace. We intend to seek out and destroy the enemy wherever he or she is, in the greatest possible numbers, in the shortest possible time. For us, There are no civilians in Japan.”[xxvi]

From the safety of his Quonset hut headquarters on Guam 1,500 miles away, the island the U.S. military had taken from Spain in 1898 during the Spanish American War, LeMay directed the low-flight firebombings of Japan. In late March the napalm supply had become depleted and it took until mid-April for the production to once again catch up. In all of Germany 79 square miles had been destroyed by bombing in five years; in Japan 178 square miles in a half-year.[xxvii] By mid-June, bombings of Japan’s five other large industrial centers – Nagoya, Kobe, Yokohama, Osaka, and Kawasaki – and fifty-seven mid-size and small cities produced thousands more persons murdered, 2 million buildings destroyed, and many millions homeless.[xxviii]

To review: U.S. and other Allied air forces totally or partially burned sixty-six Japanese cities to the ground through intensive, unprecedented incendiary bombing, murdering or maiming over 800,000 Japanese civilians while destroying over two and a half million homes, displacing 6 million.[xxix] This was prior to the “cosmic” atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The urban incendiary bombings were more lethal than the combined dropping of the indiscriminate 15-kiloton Atomic bomb by the B-29 bomber, Enola Gay, piloted by Colonel Tibbets, flown from the Pacific Atoll Island of Tinian, August 6 on Hiroshima, and the Plutonium-core 20-kiloton bomb by the B-29 bomber, Bock’s Car, piloted by Major Sweeney
(filling in for the usual pilot, Frederick Bock), August 9 on Nagasaki. About 100,000 people, 95,000 of whom were civilians, a quarter of Hiroshima’s citizens, were killed instantly, with another 100,000, most of them civilians as well, who died of long drawn-out deaths. The consequences to the residents of Nagasaki, a city of 275,000: 75,000 killed, with another 75,000 to die slowly from burns and radiation sickness. The combination of 160 days of fire bombings of sixty-six Japanese cities and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, left 330,000 civilians murdered, over 475,000 wounded, 6 million displaced, and over 2.5 million houses destroyed. The civilian casualties exceeded military dead and wounded.

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This record of U.S. and allied bombings established the policy, the mind-set, that there was truly no difference between so-called “civilized” nations, and fascist or other “evil” incarnations. The very manner in which these “constitutional democracies” chose to overwhelm fascism, in effect, institutionalized abandonment of any moral standards applied to war conduct, despite rhetoric and international laws to the contrary. The practice of indiscriminately exterminating civilian populations by conventional bombing established the breakdown of morality which in turn “justified” use of the Atom bomb, providing a “cheaper” means for accomplishing the same result. Terror was now official policy.

Ironically, on August 8, 1945, the U.S. joined the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France in signing the London Agreement identifying war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes against peace punishable in international tribunals. This was only two days after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and one day before the similar bombing of Nagasaki where 175,000 civilians were immediately vaporized. Amazingly, the allied systematic bombing was exempted from such criteria identified in the London Agreement. Telford Taylor, chief counsel at the Nuremberg trials, declared in his concluding report, that bombings by Germany and the Allied nations were not criminal because “air bombardment of cities and factories has become a recognized part of modern warfare, as practiced by all nations.” This statement, if taken seriously, totally invalidates the fourth Hague Convention which forbids aerial bombing of civilian targets. It also is the reason that Albert Camus concluded that diabolical violence was the victor in World War II, that we all now “live in terror because persuasion is no longer possible.”

Pattern of Killing Civilians Is Entrenched

The pattern of murdering civilians has continued. Subsequent U.S. military operations, both on the ground and from the air, in Southeast Asia (1954-1975), Grenada (1983), Panama (1989-90), and the Persian Gulf massacre (1991), cumulatively took upwards of six million lives, the overwhelming majority having been civilians knowingly or deliberately murdered, maiming millions more. Defenseless bombings of Libya (1986), Iraq (1993), Afghanistan and Sudan (1998), Iraq (1998-present), Yugoslavia/Kosovo/Serbia (1999), Afghanistan (2001 to present) murdered countless numbers of additional civilians as well, where civilian population and infrastructure were deliberate targets. This is wholesale terrorism of the rich against the poor.

William Blum concludes that what the U.S. and Europe calls a terrorist is in reality someone who has a bomb but doesn’t have an air force. Blum has identified 29 countries the U.S. has bombed since the end of World War II. Furthermore, various formulas of U.S. sponsorship, such as provision of weapons and/or training and funding, directly or indirectly, for counterinsurgency forces and contra terrorists, and death squads, in dozens of countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Chiapas, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, East Timor, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Turkey have produced upwards of six million additional civilian murders, with millions of others maimed for life. More wholesale terrorism of the rich against the poor. The United States government goes to great lengths to remain in denial about its crimes, using the old psychological trick of projection — calling others the evil ones. In 1999, the Department of Defense concluded: “We should expect conflicts in which adversaries, because of cultural affinities different from our own, will resort to forms and levels of violence shocking to our sensibilities.”

Iraq

Evidence from documents prepared by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), among the most secret offices of the U.S. national security apparatus, reveals that the U.S., and its dupe Allies in the U.N., deliberately destroyed Iraq public water supplies during the Persian
Since the end of the first Gulf massacre in February 1991 up to the U.S. invasion in 2003, the U.S. has made sure that any attempts to restore a healthy water system have been thwarted, stating that spare parts and water purifying chemicals possess a dual use that could be used by the Iraqi military as well. During the January-February 1991 bombing, Iraq’s eight multi-purpose dams were repeatedly hit, wrecking flood control, four of seven major pumping stations were destroyed, as were 31 municipal water and sewerage facilities, resulting in sewage pouring into the Tigris. Water purification plants were destroyed throughout Iraq. Municipal and industrial water storage, hydroelectric plants and distribution lines, and irrigations systems were systematically destroyed. The DIA report suggests that Iraq had developed an elaborate pure water system for its population, heavily dependent upon imported specialized equipment and purification chemicals. A shortage of pure drinking water, the document discloses, could “lead to increased incidents, if not epidemics, of disease and certain pure-water dependent industries becoming incapacitated.” The subsequent blockade of Iraq has assured that the destroyed water system not be corrected, which, as a consequence, has directly contributed to the deaths of perhaps an additional one million or more Iraqi civilians, the majority young children.

Korea

In light of this history, the fact that as many as three, possibly as many as four million civilians were killed during the Korean War should come as no surprise. The documented, historical record powerfully reveals that U.S. policies have never been concerned with respecting civilians or the international laws that are in force to protect them in times of war and military conflict. Despite official U.S. rhetoric to the contrary, the facts in the record strongly suggest that the U.S. deliberately and intentionally terrorizes civilians living in “enemy” territory with the expectation for coercing surrender, capitulation, or assimilation to the Western way of life. A Fifth U.S. Air Force memo, dated July 25, 1950, acknowledges that the Army has asked them to “strafe all civilian refugees.” Alarmed about continued advances by North Korean forces, on August 13, 1950 General MacArthur instructed the entire B-29 bomber force to “carpet bomb” wherever presence of enemy troops were identified. As the US/UN forces began to push the North Korean forces northward in the fall, on November 5 MacArthur ordered the air forces using incendiary munitions “to destroy every means of communication and every installation, factory, city, and village” beginning at the Manchurian border, progressing southward to the allied battle lines.[lxxxvii] This included the expectation to burn the cities to the ground.[lxxxviii] Only by the late 1990s did U.S. media begin reporting the atrocities that occurred nearly 50 years earlier. For example, the Washington Post reported in September 1999 that declassified U.S. Air Force reports disclosed that pilots sometimes “deliberately attacked people in white,” apparently suspecting them of being disguised North Korean soldiers.[lxxxix] In December 1999, and again in 2000, the New York Times similarly reported that U.S. Air Force planes bombed and strafed Korean civilians deliberately under direction of spotter planes.[xc] Endnotes


[x] Lindqvist, A History of Bombing, 37.

[xi] Ibid., 40-53.

[xii] Ibid., 50-51.


[xvi] Haulman, One Hundred Years of Flight: 11.


[xxiv] Bellegarde-Smith, Haiti, 74.


[xxvii] Bellegarde-Smith, Haiti, 80.

[xxviii] “Guns, Germs and Steel” is the name of a comprehensive journey through 13,000 years of human history written by physiologist Jared Diamond (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).


[xxx] Bellegarde-Smith, Haiti, 83.


Adrian Brune, “Tulsa’s Shame,” The Nation (March 18, 2002).


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Ibid., 137.

Ibid., 146-147.

Ibid., 156.

Ibid., 159.

Ibid., 163.
[ix] Ibid., 190-91.

[x] Ibid., 412.


[xiv] Ibid., 412-13.


[xvii] Lindqvist, A History of Bombing, 95.


[xxvi] Hoyt, Inferno, 75-117.


[xxix] Hoyt, Inferno, 137-38.


[xlv] Robert Frank Futrell, The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953 (Washington,
Ibid.

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