

Tokyo Desolation Described By Reporter

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TOKIO — I viewed Tokio last Friday in company with the first group of correspondents to visit that once proud city.

Destruction was expected, but nothing like what we saw. We rode along streets with a Japanese correspondent of the Domei news agency as our guide. He pointed out where important landmarks had once stood—theatres, belching factories, homes of princes, slums, and magnificent government buildings.

These are gone now. Tokio is twisted, torn and gutted. Buildings and landmarks have disintegrated into a sea of blasted wreckage. In their places hangs a deathlike pall. It seemed as if we were visiting a ghost city.

You can ride for miles and see nothing but rusted tin, charred bricks and ashes with an occasional lonely man or weary woman picking through ruins in hopes of finding some lost belongings. Better than 80 per cent of the buildings have been completely leveled, it is estimated by competent Jap authorities.

Take for instance the Hoja industrial and slum districts. On the night of March 10, about 300 B-29s hit that area with fire bombs, starting fires along the edge of the district. A stiff breeze was blowing which fanned the initial fires to a raging inferno and trapped over 100,000 people in its hungry maws. When it had spent itself, not a slum shack nor factory was left standing. The same thing happened when B-29s hit a residential area May 25, and later the Kanda school district and the Asakusa amusement district.

Riding through once imposing streets where government buildings were located, the story was all the same. The official residence of the Finance Minister of Justice Ministry and the Palace of Prince Hanin were among those rendered useless. By a stroke of fate, one of the buildings still in use was the new War Ministry building. The Imperial Palace with its green-covered grounds remained intact by design.

Because fire bombs were used, there are no huge craters, and electric lines and communications are in fairly good condition, which is in direct contrast to the plight of the city itself. We went to Tokio's largest department store, once famed as the Marshall Field & Co., of the far east. This added to the ghost-like atmosphere which the city produced. Where before the war the shelves, cases and marble floors were richly stocked, nothing is in them now. Long queues of somberly dressed men and women were waiting for what was left.

While we had entered the city even before American troops, and Japanese adults and children clustered in groups viewing us in foreign uniforms, the attitude of the people was not bitterly resentful of the foreign invaders. From all evidence in Tokyo, there was a complete breakdown of the defense system and the home economic organization even before use of the atomic bomb.