

During a visit to Japan, Yuzuru John Takeshita, a former Tulelake Internment Camp prisoner, was told the story of how his friend and her classmates were removed from school to work in a factory to make paper balloon bombs.

Curiosity led Takeshita to research the history of these bombs at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. While there, he found information about Mitchell Monument and the explosion in Bly. *"It mentioned that six people were killed and it listed the names. I saw these names and it shook me. My daughter was about the age of some of the victims"* (quote printed in San Francisco Examiner, August 23, 1987).

Such was the impact on Takeshita, that he contacted former Japanese students who participated in making the balloons and informed them about the fatalities in Bly.

Moved by regret and compassion for the loss, those former Japanese students asked Takeshita to deliver 1,000 paper cranes to the families of the victims.

Paper cranes, the Japanese symbol of healing and by extension, peace, were sent as a good will gift more than once. In addition, six cherry trees were also delivered to Bly with their condolences and were planted at a re-dedication ceremony in 1995.



1950 - Ted Durment of Weyerhaeuser points to marks left by bomb fragments on this Ponderosa Pine tree.

In August 20, 1950, the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company, which owned the bomb site, dedicated a memorial to the six who perished.

The monument, constructed of native stone and displaying a bronze plaque bearing the names of the victims, is the pivotal attraction of the Mitchell Recreation Area.

Now managed by the Fremont-Winema National Forest, this recreation site offers six day-use picnic areas in a ponderosa pine setting. Facilities include picnic tables, fire grills and an accessible restroom; no drinking water is available. Visitors can also enjoy bird watching, wildlife viewing, coldwater fishing, hiking and horseback riding in the surrounding area. *(Caution: FS Road 3400 is paved, however, the actual monument area is not suitable for large RV's.)*

For more information contact:

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United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service • Pacific Northwest Region

Mitchell Monument

THE ONLY PLACE ON THE U.S. CONTINENT
WHERE DEATH RESULTED FROM
ENEMY ACTION DURING WORLD WAR II.



Elsie Mitchell's parents at the monument site during the August 20, 1950 dedication

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May 5, 1945 dawned bright and clear. Eager to make the most of the beautiful spring day, Reverend Archie Mitchell, his pregnant wife Elsie, and five of his Sunday school students set out for a picnic about ten miles northeast of Bly, Oregon.

Upon reaching Leonard Creek, on Gearhart Mountain, Archie let Elsie and the children out to explore the area, while he parked the car.

As he turned off the engine, Archie heard his wife call to him to look at what they had found. He observed the group huddled around some foreign object and saw one of the children reach for it.

Before he could even step out of the car, an explosion shattered the serene morning. Archie Mitchell was the sole survivor.



The only WWII casualties to occur on continental U.S. soil as a result of enemy action were as follows:

- Mrs. Elsie Mitchell..... Age 26**
- Jay Gifford..... Age 13**
- Edward Engen Age 13**
- Dick Patzke..... Age 14**
- Joan Patzke..... Age 13**
- Sherman Shoemaker..... Age 11**

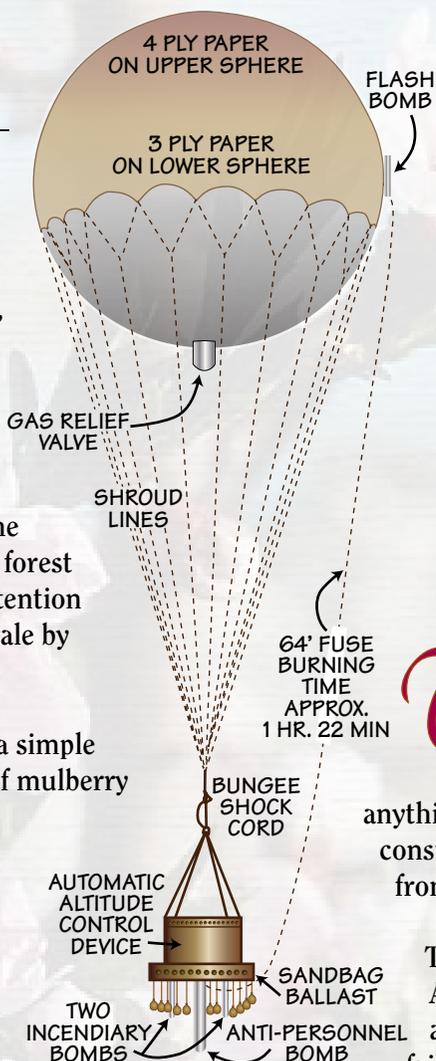
Less than one year earlier, Japan launched a brilliant campaign against the United States, retaliation for the 1942 Doolittle Raid on Tokyo. The Japanese had long been aware of the jet stream—an easterly-blowing wind current that was, at that time, undiscovered by the rest of the world.

Employing their exclusive information, the Japanese built balloon bombs called fugos ~ “wind ships.” Designed to traverse the Pacific Ocean and release their lethal cargo once they reached North America, the bombs would explode in the timberlands of the Pacific Northwest, sparking immense forest fires. This would divert American attention from the war effort and dampen morale by instigating panic and chaos.

The fugos were deadly weapons of a simple design. Layers were constructed of mulberry paper and held together with persimmon paste. The balloons measured approximately 33 feet in diameter when inflated. Nineteen-foot shroud lines connected the balloon to its lethal undercarriage, which contained a ring of about 30 sandbags for ballast, a ballast-control device, an altitude-control device, and five bombs.

Upon its release, the balloon floated upwards until it reached the jet stream, at a height of around 30,000 or 40,000 feet. As the fugo traveled in the wind current, the gas inside gradually cooled and contracted, causing the device to sink. When the balloon descended a few thousand feet, the altitude-control device would continue to work at lowering the balloon’s elevation.

DIAGRAM OF JAPANESE FUGOS



Remains of a balloon ballast on display at the Klamath Museum in Klamath Falls, Oregon.

The United States government knew the country was under attack but ordered the media not to disclose anything, hoping to minimize public consternation and prevent the Japanese from discovering their mission’s success.

The silence proved invaluable: the American populace was not alarmed and Japan, believing the mission had failed, ceased all balloon launchings only six months after the first one was released in November 1944.

After the Mitchell party tripped a balloon bomb in 1945, the government finally alerted the public to the danger. By then, however, Japan was no longer sending fugos.

The Mitchell Monument was listed on the National Register of Historic Places at the Smithsonian on Feb. 20, 2003. The “Shrapnel Tree” was designated an Oregon Heritage Tree in 2005.