



Bat Bombs

It is well known that the Chemical Warfare Service played a key role in developing flame warfare equipment and techniques during World War II. Napalm was a product of CWS-sponsored research. The incendiary bombs that devastated Germany and Japan sprang from CWS programs.

Less well known is the "Bat Bomb" program of 1943. CWS scientists and technicians set to work developing tiny incendiary bombs, less than one ounce each, attached to bats. The idea was to release the bats over Japanese cities where they would naturally seek out dark places in buildings for new roosting sites. After a set time, the little bombs would ignite, setting fire to anything around them.

Where would the CWS get enough bats for this project? Where else but Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico! For over a year bats were trapped and tests conducted on this new

weapon. The tests largely failed to establish the bat bomb as a viable weapon, but they continued for quite some time. They were finally stopped when a number of bats were blown off course by high winds, landing in and around Carlsbad Army Air field. The bombs duly ignited, burning down a theater, the officers' club, and a general's sedan. After this, the CWS went on to less batty projects.

(From Leo P. Brophy, Wyndham D. Miles, and Rexmond Cochrane, *United States Army in World War II; The Technical Services; The Chemical Warfare Service: From Laboratory to Field*, Washington, D.C., Center of Military History, 1988; and John W. Mountcastle, *Trial by fire: U.S. Incendiary Weapons, 1918-1945*, doctoral dissertation submitted to the Department of History, Duke University, 1979).