WHIRLWIND is the first book to tell the complete, awe-inspiring story of the Allied air war against Japan—the most important strategic bombing campaign in history. From the audacious Doolittle raid in 1942 to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, award-winning historian Barrett Tillman recounts the saga from the perspectives of American and British aircrews who flew unprecedented missions over thousands of miles of ocean, as well as of the generals and admirals who commanded them. Whether describing the experiences of bomber crews based in China or the Marianas, fighter pilots on Iwo Jima, or carrier aviators at sea, Tillman provides vivid details of the lives of the fliers and their support personnel. Whirlwind takes readers into the cockpits and gun turrets of the mighty B-29 Superfortress, the largest bomber built up to that time. Tillman dramatically re-creates the sweep of wartime emotions that crews endured on fifteen-hour missions, grappling with the extreme tedium of cramped spaces and with adrenaline spikes in flak-studded skies, knowing that a bailout would put them at the mercy of a merciless enemy or an unforgiving sea. A major character is the controversial and brilliant General Curtis LeMay, who rewrote strategic bombing tactics. His command’s fire-bombing missions incinerated half of Tokyo and many other cities, crippling Japan’s industry while still failing to force surrender. Whirlwind examines the immense logistics and construction efforts necessary to support Superfortresses in Asia and the Mariana Islands, as well as the tireless efforts of engineers to build huge air bases from scratch. It also describes the unheralded missions that American bomber crews flew from the Aleutian Islands to Japan’s northernmost Kuril Islands. Never has the Japanese side of the story been so thoroughly examined. If Washington, D.C., represented a “second front” in Army-Navy rivalry, the situation in Tokyo approached a full-contact sport. Tillman’s description of Japan’s willfully inadequate approach to civil defense is eye-opening. Similarly, he examines the mind-set in Tokyo’s war cabinet, which ignored the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, requiring the emperor’s personal intervention to avert a ghastly Allied invasion. Tillman shows how, despite the Allies’ ultimate success, mistakes and shortsighted policies made victory more costly in lives and effort. He faults the lack of a unified command for allowing the Army Air Forces and the Navy to pursue parochial goals at the expense of the larger mission, and he questions the premature commitment of the enormously sophisticated B-29 to the most primitive theater in India and China. Whirlwind is one of the last histories of
World War II written with the contribution of men who fought in it. With unexcelled macro- and microperspectives, Whirlwind is destined to become a standard reference on the war, on multiservice operations, and on the human capacity for individual heroism and national folly.

My Personal Review:
The story of the B29 campaign against Japan is a microcosm of how the USA did its part to win World War II. Whirlwind tells the remarkable stories of:

1. The stupendous achievement in engineering technology and industrial production that went into the design, production, and deployment of the plane. The B29 was a gigantic plane, two of which would placed wing-to-wing would cover an entire football field. It was highly advanced with fire control by analog computing and remote-control of multiple gun turrets by a single crewman. The USA was able to produce thousands of these planes and create in the remote areas of China and the Pacific Islands the almost inconceivable infrastructure required to keep them flying.

2. The astounding degree of cooperation among engineers, production workers, and the branches of the armed forces to get this weapon into the war. A remarkably short time passed between the conception of this plane, its production, and its deployment. This was one aspect of America's wartime spirit of intensively hard work to win the war.

3. The huge amount of resources the USA committed to the effort. The first B29's were flown from bases deep inside Japanese-occupied China (I did not know this). The logistics of setting up these remote bases and keeping them stocked with fuel was a war within a war. Then the B29s were rebased to the Pacific islands and the effort scaled up a 100 fold.

4. The amount of effort required to work the "gremlins" out of the highly complex plane and to make it effective. Nearly 20% of the planes aborted due to mechanical failures on the early missions. Most of the planes that did get airborne missed their targets due to bad weather and poor bombing control. Careers of many famous Army Air Corps men were ended while others were advanced in the course of dealing with these problems and turning the planes from a liability into a weapon of terrible effectiveness.

5. The human stories of the men who flew the planes, the generals who conceived of the air campaign, and of the Japanese pilots who tried to defend against them. The story is vividly told through their perspectives and made to come to life. The reader will experience these events so vividly as to feel that he took part in them.

Whirlwind is a well-written, easy-to-read book that provides a detail of information and color that will provide fresh insights even of those who have intensively studied the B29 campaign in other books.