



The Atom Bomb

A bright flash lit the city. A few seconds later, a huge cloud of smoke rose up from the ground. Many buildings went up in the smoke. The United States had dropped the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima.

High in the sky, the big Superfortress that dropped the bomb flew away. The men in it looked back. The whole city was on fire. They didn't say a word. They had never seen anything like it before. Other cities had been bombed, but not like this.

But the men in the bomber could not know what had really happened. They could not hear the screams and cries below.

That single bomb killed 71,000 people. Babies, boys and girls, men and women were badly burned and injured.

The day was August 6, 1945. Three days later, a second atomic bomb was dropped on another Japanese city, Nagasaki. Over 35,000 people were killed when Nagasaki went up in a cloud of smoke.

The Japanese people were frightened. "What city will be next?" they asked, as they looked up at the sky.

People in other countries were shocked when they heard about the atomic bomb. "This is a terrible thing. How could the United States drop such a bomb and kill all these people?" they asked.

The United States was the first country to learn how to make the atomic bomb. The scientists who worked to make the bomb knew how terrible it was. American leaders did not want to drop the bomb because they knew it would kill thousands of people. But they felt it would end the war.

They thought that if the war was not stopped, American soldiers would have to invade Japan. Then even more American and Japanese soldiers would be killed.

The passages which follow are taken from eye-witness accounts by survivors of the first atomic bombing at Hiroshima. *Be aware that some of the descriptions are very graphic.*

“It was a horrible sight.... Hundreds of injured people who were trying to escape to the hills passed our house. The sight of them was almost unbearable. Their faces and hands were burnt and swollen; and great sheets of skin had peeled away from their tissues to hang down like rags on a scarecrow. They moved like a line of ants. All through the night, they went past our house, but this morning they had stopped. I found them lying on both sides of the road so thick that it was impossible to pass without stepping on them.”

“You could tell that many had gone down to the river to get a drink of water and had died where they lay. I saw a few live people still in the water, knocking against the dead as they floated down the river. There must have been hundreds and thousands who fled to the river to escape the fire and then drowned.

The sight of the soldiers, though, was more dreadful than the people floating down the river. I came onto I don't know how many, burned from the hips up; and where the skin had peeled, their flesh was wet and mushy...

And they had no faces! Their eyes, noses, and mouths had been burned away, and it looked like their ears had melted off. It was hard to tell front from back...”

“Between the Red Cross hospital (roughly one mile from the center of the blast) and the center of the city I saw nothing that wasn't burned to a crisp. Streetcars were standing at Kawayo-cho and Kamiya-cho and inside were dozens of bodies, blackened beyond recognition. I saw fire reservoirs filled to the brim with dead people who looked as if they had been boiled alive...In one reservoir there were so many people that there wasn't enough room for them to fall over. They must have died sitting in the water.”

“ I had never seen such a horrifying sight as those five shivering boys. Blood was pouring in streams from the deep cuts all over their bodies, mingling with their perspiration, and their skin was burned deep red, like the color of cooked lobsters. At first it seemed, strangely, that their burned and lacerated backs and chests were growing green grass! Then I saw that hundreds of blades of sharp grass had been driven into their flesh, evidently by the force of the blast.”

I found the aid station surrounded by dead bodies, or I should say 'charred' bodies, for I had no way of telling whether the unfortunate people were actually dead or alive. They were all black. I think some were alive, for I saw slight movements of hands and feet.”

The decision to drop the first atomic bombs was made by President Harry S Truman. The following passages explain the reasoning of President Truman in making this momentous decision. The first comes from a biography of Truman written by his daughter, Margaret Truman. The second quote was made by Truman's Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson.

“The following day my father convened a conference of his chief advisors in the little White House at Babelsberg to make the final decision about the use of the bomb. More than two months of thought by the best available minds was at his fingertips. Once more he polled the men in the room. One man had changed his mind. Commander of the Army Air Force General Hap Arnold now thought that Japan could be bombed into submission with conventional weapons. He pointed out that, in a single raid, B-29 bombers had obliterated sixteen square miles of Tokyo. One city after another had been devastated with awesome results, once the B-29s began dropping incendiary bombs rather than high explosives. But none of the other military men - especially General Marshall - concurred with General Arnold. Anyway, my father was that conventional bombing, even if it worked - and no one doubted that it might take months, even a year - would cause more Japanese deaths than the use of two atomic bombs. The fire raid on Tokyo, by the Japanese government's estimation, had killed 78, 650 people. My father's decision - and I think this has been largely forgotten - was aimed at saving Japanese as well as American lives. His later comments on his decision make this clear: ‘It was not an easy decision to make. I did not like the weapon. But I had no qualms if in the long run millions of lives could be saved.’”

“Had we continued (without using the A-bomb) until the projected invasion on November 1, additional fire raids of B-29s would have been more destructive of life and property than the very limited number of atomic raids which we could have executed in the same period...”

The face of war is the face of death; death is an inevitable part of every order a wartime leader gives. The decision to use the atomic bomb was a decision that brought death to 100,000 Japanese. No explanation can change that fact, and I do not wish to gloss it over. But this deliberate premeditated destruction was our least abhorrent choice. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki put an end to the Japanese war.”