

Some 20,000 others. More might have been done by broadcasts warning people in Europe that Nazi "labor camps" were in fact death traps. The Allies rejected a plan to bomb the rail lines into Auschwitz, the largest concentration camp in Poland, although bombers hit industries five miles away. And few refugees were accepted by the United States. The Allied handling of the Holocaust was inept at best and disgraceful at worst.

A GRINDING WAR AGAINST JAPAN The sobering thought that the defeat of Japan remained to be accomplished cast a furtive pall over the victory celebrations in Europe in the spring of 1945. American forces continued to assault the Japanese Empire in the early months of 1945, but at a heavy cost. While fighting continued in the Philippines, marines invaded Japanese-controlled Iwo Jima Island on February 19, 1945, a speck of volcanic rock 760 miles from Tokyo that was needed as a base for fighter planes escorting bombers over Japan and as a landing strip for disabled B-29 bombers. Nearly six weeks was required to secure an island five miles square from defenders hiding in underground caves. The cost was more than 20,000 American casualties, including nearly 7,000 deaths.

The fight for Okinawa, beginning on Easter Sunday, April 1, was even bloodier. The largest island in the Ryukyu chain, Okinawa was large enough to afford a staging area for the planned invasion of Japan. Assaulting Okinawa would be the largest amphibious operation of the Pacific war, involving some 300,000 troops. The fight raged until late June. An estimated 100,000 Japanese died. Casualties also included about 42,000 Okinawans. When resistance on Okinawa collapsed, the Japanese emperor instructed his new prime minister to seek peace terms, but with conditions that proved unacceptable to the Allies.

THE ATOMIC BOMB By that time, however, President Truman had learned of the first successful test explosion of an atomic bomb. It resulted from intensive research and development, begun in 1940, when President Roosevelt set up a committee to study atomic weaponry. The government spent over \$2 billion on the top-secret Manhattan Project. Gigantic plants sprang up at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Hanford, Washington, to provide material for atomic bombs, while a group of physicists under J. Robert Oppenheimer worked out the scientific and technical problems of bomb construction in a laboratory at Los Alamos, New Mexico. On July 16, 1945, the first atomic fireball rose from the desert. Oppenheimer said later that in the observation bunker "a few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent."



The American Chemical Society exhibit on atomic energy

J. R. Oppenheimer points to a photograph of the huge column of smoke and flame caused by the bomb upon Hiroshima.

How to use this awful new weapon posed a profound dilemma. Some scientists favored a demonstration explosion in a remote area, but military use was decided upon because only two bombs were available, and even those might misfire. Four Japanese cities were potential targets. Priority went to Hiroshima, a port city of 400,000 people in southern Japan, which was a major assembly point for Japanese naval convoys, a center of war industries, and headquarters of the Second General Army.

On July 25, 1945, President Harry S. Truman, who had been thrust into office after Roosevelt's death in April, ordered the atomic bomb dropped if Japan did not surrender before August 3. Although an intense debate has emerged over the decision to drop the atomic bomb, it is clear that Truman believed that the bomb was "a military weapon and never had any doubt that

it should be used." He was convinced that the atomic bomb would save lives by avoiding a costly American invasion of Japan against defenders who would fight like "savages, ruthless, merciless, and fanatic."

The ferocious Japanese defense of Okinawa had convinced military planners that an amphibious invasion of Japan itself, scheduled to begin on November 1, 1945, could cost as many as 250,000 Allied casualties and even more Japanese losses. Moreover, some 100,000 Allied prisoners of war being held in Japan would probably be executed when an invasion began. It is important to remember as well that the bombing of cities and the consequent killing of civilians had become accepted military practice during 1945. Once the Japanese navy was destroyed, American ships had roamed the Japanese coastline, shelling targets onshore. American planes had bombed at will and mined the waters of the Inland Sea. Tokyo, Nagoya, and other major cities had been devastated by firestorms created by incendiary bombs. The firebomb raids on Tokyo on a single night in March 1945 killed over 100,000 civilians and left over 1 million people homeless. The use of atomic bombs on Japanese cities was thus seen as a logical next step to end the war without an invasion of Japan. As it turned out, American scientists greatly underestimated the physical effects of the atomic bomb. They predicted that 20,000 people would be killed.

On July 26 the heads of the American, British, and Russian governments issued the Potsdam Declaration, demanding that Japan surrender or face "prompt and utter destruction." The deadline passed, and on August 6, 1945, a B-29 bomber named the *Enola Gay* took off at 2 A.M. from the island of Tinian and headed for Hiroshima. At 8:15 A.M., flying at 31,600 feet, the *Enola Gay* released the five-ton uranium bomb nicknamed Little Boy. Forty-three seconds later, as the *Enola Gay* turned sharply to avoid the blast, the bomb tumbled to an altitude of 1,900 feet, where it exploded as planned with the force of 20,000 tons of TNT. A blinding flash of light was followed by a fireball towering to 40,000 feet. The tail gunner on the *Enola Gay* described the scene: "It's like bubbling molasses down there . . . the mushroom is spreading out . . . fires are springing up everywhere . . . it's like a peep into hell."

The shock wave, firestorm, cyclonic winds, and radioactive rain killed some 80,000 people, including thousands of Japanese soldiers assigned to the Second General Army headquarters and 23 American prisoners of war housed in the city. By the end of the year, the death toll had reached 140,000 as the effects of radiation burns and infection took their toll. In addition, 70,000 buildings were destroyed, and four square miles of the city turned to rubble.



The aftermath of "Little Boy."

This image shows the wasteland that remained after the atomic bomb "Little Boy" decimated Hiroshima in 1945.

In the United States, Americans greeted the news with elation: the bombing promised a quick end to the long nightmare of war. "No tears of sympathy will be shed in America for the Japanese people," the *Omaha World-Herald* predicted. "Had they possessed a comparable weapon at Pearl Harbor, would they have hesitated to use it?" Others were more circumspect. "Yesterday," the journalist Hanson Baldwin wrote in the *New York Times*, "we clinched victory in the Pacific, but we sowed the whirlwind."

Two days after the Hiroshima bombing an opportunistic Soviet Union, eager to share in the spoils of victory, hastened to enter the war in Asia. The Allies had long been urging Stalin to join their fight against the Japanese, but the Soviet dictator had delayed as long as possible so as to conserve economic and human resources. Now, however, with the Japanese on the verge of capitulation, he rushed to engage the Japanese in order to share in the spoils of victory. Truman and his aides, frustrated by the stubborn refusal of Japanese military and political leaders to surrender and fearful that the Soviet Union's entry into the war would complicate negotiations, ordered the second atomic bomb dropped. On August 9, a B-29 aircraft named *Bockscar*,

carrying a bomb dubbed Fat Man, flew over its primary target, Kokura. However, the city was so shrouded in haze and smoke from an earlier air raid that the plane turned to its secondary target, Nagasaki, where it dropped its bomb at 11:02 A.M., killing 36,000 people. That night the Japanese emperor urged his cabinet to surrender on the sole condition that he remain as sovereign. The next day the U.S. government announced its willingness to let the emperor keep his throne, but under the authority of an Allied supreme commander. Frantic exchanges ended with Japanese acceptance of the terms on August 14, 1945, when the emperor himself broke with precedent to record a radio message announcing the surrender to the Japanese people.

On September 2, 1945, General Douglas MacArthur and other Allied representatives accepted Japan's formal surrender on board the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. MacArthur then settled in at his occupation headquarters across from the imperial palace in Tokyo.