

## Chapter 8

### The Aftermath of the Decision

In the previous chapter, you were asked to decide whether the United States should drop an atomic bomb on a Japanese city without first demonstrating to the Japanese the awesome power of this weapon. This chapter reports what the United States did and how the war was ended. As you read this chapter consider if in any way, what you learn changes your opinions on the use of nuclear weapons.

#### The Potsdam Declaration

President Truman had been told that the first atomic bomb would be ready for use by August 1, 1945. The President received this information while at a conference in Potsdam with Soviet and British leaders. At the time the Potsdam Conference concluded, the components of an atomic bomb, including 100 pounds of uranium 235, were on their way across the Pacific. Nicknamed "Little Boy," probably because of its great size and five-ton weight, the bomb was assembled on the island of Tinian. Here a crew specially trained to fly the B-29's slated to drop the bomb was waiting. In the meantime, President Truman ordered the release of the Anglo-American Potsdam Declaration to Japan. While holding out hope for fair treatment, this surrender ultimatum omitted two important matters: (1) the future of the Emperor, and (2) the nature of the weapon poised for use against the Japanese. The declaration did say:

*We call upon the government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese forces, and to provide proper assurances of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction.*

Hundreds of thousands of leaflets containing this warning were dropped all over Japan. No doubt millions of Japanese saw and read the warning which was written in their language. The Japanese government, however, made no official reply and unofficially dismissed it as American propaganda.

#### The Bomb and Its Effects

On August 4, 1945 the bomb was ready. President Truman gave orders that this and the other atomic bombs should be used as soon as possible. On August 6, 1945, the weather was perfect, as the first of three planes approached Hiroshima from an altitude of five miles. It was 8:15 am. The *Enola Gay* released its single bomb close to its target, the center of the city. Immediately afterwards, the plane turned upward sharply to avoid the shock wave of the blast. The bomb hurtled toward the city, where some 350,000 people were just starting their day's activities. It exploded 1,850 feet above the ground, the altitude at which experts believed the destructive effects of the bomb would be greatest.

In the city below, the air raid sirens had already sounded the all-clear. At that very moment, a blinding fireball exploded, raising temperatures briefly to one million degrees Fahrenheit. Within seconds, some 50,000 people, mostly civilians, were dead; fires were started up to two miles away. Altogether 71,379 people were killed or missing. Another 68,023 were seriously injured, most terribly burned, and eventually died of radiation exposure. Nearly 5 square miles of the city were reduced to rubble, and 8 out of every 10 buildings in Hiroshima were destroyed.

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The heat of the blast melted the eyes of soldiers that had witnessed the explosion from their positions at anti-aircraft guns. Children were killed instantly on their way to school and longshoremen died at their docks. What few medical supplies remained in Hiroshima were soon used up. The doctors who survived the blast were unable to do much more than ease the pain of the dying. The human dimensions of this tragedy are best described by a single example, multiplied 71,379 times:

*A first grader, Issaku Watanabe, was walking with a friend to their school at the instant of the explosion. Shocked and numbed, they turned in their tracks and started back to Issaku's house. On the way, Issaku's friend died. He himself, face inflated like a grotesque balloon, somehow managed to get home. The only clothes left on his body were a pair of underpants: even his shoes had disintegrated. By the time he reached home he was trembling all over.*

*While his mother ran to take him in her arms, he cried, "Don't touch me! Everything hurts so! Just let me sleep." In the house everything had been turned upside down. Issaku's mother managed to push two sofas together in the guest room. The boy lay down for a time. He could feel the skin in the palm of his hands had by now peeled completely away: he knew that his head was badly burned; his eyes and mouth grossly swollen.*

*As Mrs. Watanabe stood sadly over him what she could do for him, he muttered, "Mother, I can't see your face."*

*"Open your eyes slowly," she said, Then you will be able to see me. By now Issaku's pain had grown much worse. In obvious agony, he squirmed on the bed and threw up.*

*"What is it?" [his mother cried. "What hurts you worst?"*

*"My arms and legs," he muttered, his words barely audible.*

*What was she to do? There was no medicine in the house that could relieve the pains of such severe burns. In stricken silence, she sat down besides her suffering son; she was too saddened even to be able to cry....Sometime latter...Issaku was put on a wooden trestle and carried to a reception center. He was running a temperature. His mother kept putting wet towels on his forehead but they did no good. He was soon delirious, and at six in the morning he died...<sup>17</sup>*

## **The Soviet Union Declares War on Japan**

On August 7 and 8, the stunned Japanese government gathered what information it could to learn exactly what happened in Hiroshima. At 5 p.m. on the 7th, Prince Konoye, the Emperor's representative, was finally granted his long-delayed meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov. Molotov immediately informed the ambassador that the Soviet Union would declare war on his country within seven hours. Thus, all hopes ended that the Soviet Union would help Japan.

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17 The Pacific War Research Society, *The Day Man Lost* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1972), pp. 245-246, 288.

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The next day, August 8, Soviet troops stormed across the Manchurian border and attacked Japanese forces. The Japanese army put up very little resistance.

On August 9 a second atomic bomb was dropped, this time on Nagasaki. Originally, this bomb had been scheduled for use on August 11, but a great effort was made to prepare the bomb and plane before several days of predicted bad weather. As a result, another 39,000 people were killed before the Japanese surrendered unconditionally.



**Nagasaki after the Bomb**

## **Japan Surrenders**

On August 10, the Japanese government informed the Allies that it would agree to the Potsdam terms if the Emperor was allowed to keep his position as head of the government. America's reply was vague. The Japanese were told that the Emperor would be "subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied powers" who would "take such steps as [it] deems proper to bring about the terms of surrender."

On August 15, the Emperor decided to end the fighting. His announcement was broadcast all over Japan. This was the first time in a very long history that a Japanese Emperor directly addressed his people.

American experts on Japan had predicted that the Emperor could end the war by ordering all his subjects to surrender. This is indeed what happened. In China, in Indochina, in Thailand, in Malaya, and on dozens of small islands in the Pacific, more than 5 million Japanese soldiers heeded the Emperor's request to lay down their weapons.

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In the peace that followed, Emperor Hirohito was permitted to maintain his role in the Japanese government. He died in 1989, much honored and loved by his people.

## Suggested Student Exercises:

1. Identify or define and briefly tell the importance to this chapter of each of the following:

- |                        |                                    |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| a. Tinian              | e.- g. damage done by the bomb     | k. Watanabe            |
| b. Little Boy          | (at least 3 examples)              | l. Nagasaki            |
| c. Potsdam Declaration | h. - j. three things that happened | m. how the war ended   |
| d. <i>Enola Gay</i>    | to Issaku                          | n. fate of the Emperor |

2. Write your personal reactions to the information in this chapter.

3. Did the information in this chapter cause you to alter your opinion regarding the decision to drop the bomb on a Japanese city without warning? Why or why not?



**Celebrating victory over Japan Day in New York City**