

THE FIREBOMBING OF TOKYO – THE WRATH OF THE B-29S

“OPERATION MEETINGHOUSE”

MARCH 9, 1945 - TOKYO WW2 FIREBOMBING – THE SINGLE MOST DEADLY BOMBING RAID IN HISTORY
AMERICANS WERE UNAWARE OF THIS

AN EXTREMELY BRUTAL EVENT- **YOU DECIDE** - WAS IT NECESSARY AND JUSTIFIED?

THE PLANNING, THE BOMBING & THE CONTROVERSY

AND A FEW “WHAT IF”S?

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USAF GEN CURTIS LEMAY

“There are no innocent civilians. It is their government and you are fighting a people, you are not trying to fight an armed force anymore. So it doesn't bother me so much to be killing the so-called innocent bystanders.”

“Killing Japanese didn't bother me very much at that time. . . I suppose if I had lost the war, I would have been tried as a war criminal.”

A major portion of the following article on the firebombing of Tokyo is an excerpt from Warren Kozak's Curtis Book entitled: “ LeMay: Strategist and Tactician”

NOTE

The final pages of this article contain a somewhat related story of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki entitled “The Five Myths of the Atomic Bomb “.

INTRODUCTION

In early 1945, once the Japanese had been driven out of the Pacific islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, the Air Force mounted a bombing campaign against the Japanese home islands. Soon, however, the strategy shifted from high-level bombing to mass low-level night raids dropping twirling metal racks that threw out burning blobs of napalm. The first large-scale raid on the windy night **of March 9, 1945, burnt up a large densely populated area of central Tokyo.**

This raid, known as **"Operation Meeting House"** was conducted and **is regarded as the single most destructive bombing raid in human history.** **Sixteen square miles (41 km²) of central Tokyo were annihilated; over 1 million were made homeless with an estimated 100,000 civilian deaths. The Japanese later called this event Night of the Black Snow.**



The Tokyo firebombing has long been overshadowed by the U.S. atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which preceded the Japanese surrender that ended World War II the following August. But the burning of the capital, which resulted in more immediate deaths than either of the nuclear bombings, stands as a horrifying landmark in the history of warfare on noncombatants when considering that Hiroshima (Aug 6) and Nagasaki (Aug 9) were both bombed just 5 months later.

To view the below video please copy and paste the links shown below into your browser.

THE FIREBOMBING OF TOKYO – A STORY:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5Dqv7iFiZc>

THE STORY BEGINS



March 9, 2017, marked the seventy-second anniversary of the American firebombing of Tokyo, World War II's deadliest day.

More people died that night from napalm bombs than in the atomic strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But few in the United States are aware that the attack even took place.

The lack of ceremonies or official state apologies for the firebombing is unsurprising considering that many Americans see World War II as the “just war” fought by the “greatest generation.” These labels leave the war and the atrocities Americans committed during it largely untouched by critique.

The little that is available to study on the firebombing, at least here in the US, is told from the perspective of American crewmen and brass, through usually biased American military historians.



Those seeking a better understanding of the March 9 tragedy must wade through reams of history primarily devoted to strategy; the heroics of American soldiers; the awesome power behind the bombs unleashed that day; and a cult-like devotion to the B-29 Superfortress, the plane that dropped the napalm over Tokyo and the atomic bombs, and was the inspiration for George Lucas's Millennium Falcon.

The overriding narrative surrounding the events of March 9, 1945, is that the American pilots and military strategists such as Gen. Curtis LeMay, the architect of the firebombing, had no other option but to carry out the mission. The Americans had “no choice” but to burn to death nearly one hundred thousand Japanese civilians.

Most historians seem to believe that LeMay should be commended for making “tough choices” in wartime, for it was these tough choices that allegedly saved lives on both sides by ending the war sooner.

What little criticism exists of the firebombing is attacked for failing to put the bombing in proper context and not providing alternate solutions for ending the war. These attacks are also riddled with “they did it too” justifications.

World War II was carried out with brutality on all fronts. The Japanese military murdered nearly six million Chinese, Korean, and Filipino civilians by the end of it.

However, to argue that Japanese civilians deserved to die — that children deserved to die — at the hands of the US military because their government killed civilians in other Asian countries is an indefensible position, in any moral or ethical framework.

Operation Meetinghouse saw more than three hundred B-29 bombers flying at ten thousand (as opposed to their usual thirty thousand feet) to avoid the effects of a 100 to 200 MPH jet stream, and setting Tokyo ablaze in the late hours of March 9. The American planes dropped five hundred thousand M-69 bombs (nicknamed “Tokyo Calling Card”), which were designed specially to consume the largely wooden residential structures of Tokyo.



Clustered in groups of thirty-eight, each M-69 weighed six pounds. The five-hundred-pound clusters would disperse at two thousand feet. A white phosphorus fuse that looked like a gym sock ignited flaming jellied gasoline that spurted one hundred feet in the air on impact.

Like a sticky fiery plague, the globs of napalm clung to everything it touched. The M-69s were so effective at starting fires in Tokyo that night that gale-force winds turned thousands of individual fires into one massive firestorm. Temperatures around the city raged between 600 and 1800 degrees Fahrenheit. In some areas, the fires melted asphalt.



Burnt block after block of homes in Tokyo in 1946.

LeMay planned the attack to coincide with 30 MPH winds to intensify the effect of the bombs. Ultimately, sixteen square miles of Tokyo were reduced to ash. LeMay claimed that the Japanese government relied on residential "cottage" war production, thus making the civilians living in Tokyo a legitimate military target.

However, by 1944 the Japanese had essentially terminated its home war production. A full 97 percent of the country's military supplies were protected underground in facilities not vulnerable to air attack on the day of the bombing. The Americans knew this.

The United States had broken Japan's Red and Purple cipher machines well before 1945, allowing them access to the most classified enemy intelligence. American generals understood the war would soon be materially impossible for the Japanese.

The US Naval blockade had also prevented oil, metal, and other essential goods from entering Japan long before March 9. Japan was so cut off from basic supplies that it was constructing its planes partially out of wood.

The Japanese population at this point in the war was most concerned with starvation.

The 1945 rice harvest was the worst since 1909. Surveys commissioned by Japan's government in April 1945 reported the population was "too preoccupied with the problems of food" to worry about fighting a war. Victory for the Allies was guaranteed by the start of the year.

The most damning evidence against the firebombing can be traced to August 19, 1945, when Walter Trohan of the Chicago Tribune finally published a piece gracefully titled ***"Roosevelt Ignored M'Arthur's Report on Nip Proposals" that he had been sitting on for seven months.***

Trohan wrote:

Release of all censorship restrictions in the United States makes it possible ***to report that the first Japanese peace bid was relayed to the White House seven months ago.*** . . . The Jap offer, based on five separate overtures, was relayed to the White House by Gen. MacArthur in a 40-page communication, [who] urged negotiations based on the Jap overtures. . . .

The offer, as relayed by MacArthur, contemplated abject surrender of everything but the person of the Emperor. ***President Roosevelt dismissed the general's communication,*** which was studded with solemn references to the deity, after a casual reading with the remark, ***"MacArthur is our greatest general and our poorest politician."***

The MacArthur report was not even taken to Yalta- Yet another What If?

In January 1945 — two days before Franklin Roosevelt was to meet with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in Yalta — ***the Japanese were offering surrender terms almost identical to what was accepted by the Americans on the USS Missouri in the Japan Bay on September 2, 1945.***



The Japanese population was famished, the country's war machine was out of gas, and the government had capitulated. ***The Americans were unmoved.*** The firebombing and the nuclear attacks were heartlessly carried out. If anyone is guilty of disregarding the "context" of the firebombing of Tokyo, it's the sycophantic and biased American historians who deride these critical facts.

Let us not forget what happened on the ground that day. It has been too easy to bury the stories. Largely ignored by mainstream reviewers, Edwin P. Hoyet's *Inferno: The Fire Bombing of Japan, March 9 - August 15, 1945*, is one of the only oral histories from March 9.

Toshiko Higashikawa, who was twelve at the time of the bombing, recalled: "There was fire everywhere. I saw one person caught by the claws of the fire dragon before you could say, Jack Robinson! Her clothes just went up in flames. Another two people were caught and burned up. The bombers just kept coming." Toshiko and her family fled to a neighborhood school, seeking shelter from fire. The family bottlenecked in a doorway, and Toshiko could hear children shouting: "Gya. Help! It's Hot! Momma! Uwa! Daddy! It hurts! Help!." Moments later, Toshiko lost the grip of her father's hand in the frantic crowd. Her father was holding her younger brother Eichi in his other arm. Toshiko and her sister made it out of the schoolhouse alive. She never saw her father and brother again.

Koji Kikushima, who was thirteen at the time, tells the story of running down a street as fire chased her family and hundreds of others. The heat was so intense she instinctively jumped off a bridge into a river below. She survived the fall. In the morning she emerged from the river to see a “mountain of corpses” on the bridge. She never saw her family again.

Sumiko Morikawa was twenty-four that day. Her husband was off fighting in the war. She had a four-year-old son Kiichi, and twin eight-month-old girls Atsuko and Ryoko. As the fire began to burn the homes in her neighborhood, Sumiko ran towards a park pool with her kids. Nearing the pool’s edge, four-year-old Kiichi’s jacket caught fire. “It’s hot, mom. It’s hot,” he cried. Sumiko jumped into the pool with the twin girls and Kiichi. Then a fireball hit the boy in the head, and his mother doused him with water. But his head slumped over.



Sumiko fainted and woke to find her twins dead and her son breathing faintly. The water in the pool had evaporated from the heat. Sumiko ran Kiichi to an aid station and began to give him tea from her mouth. He opened his eyes for a moment and said “Mama” before dying.

There were nearly a million casualties that day in Tokyo and countless stories like the ones above. However, what is mostly absent from Hoyet’s book are personal reflections from men about what it was like that day. It’s because cities like Tokyo and Nagasaki were essentially devoid of them.

“We rarely saw any fathers in the town,” women from Nagasaki recalled for Paul Hamm in his book *Hiroshima Nagasaki*. “There were a lot of grandmothers, mothers, and children. I remember seeing one father-like person in my town but he was ill.”

The remaining population, and hence the main targets of the bombing, were disproportionately women, children, and the elderly. The majority of the military-age men were away fighting in the war.

So why did the Americans continue to raid and terrorize the Japanese civilian population knowing the war could have been over? Many argue that the Americans were flexing their muscles for Russia in anticipation of the ensuing Cold War. Countless pages have been written about this.

But what is too often overlooked is the racism of the day. It is America’s racism that best explains the extent of the firebombing and the nuclear attacks. The racist mindset that all too many Americans were comfortable with in the Jim Crow era easily bled onto the Japanese. The horror stories of the almost two hundred thousand Japanese Americans who lost their livelihoods as a result of Roosevelt’s internment camps are just one example of how Americans saw not only the Japanese but also Japanese Americans.

The firebombing of Japan was about testing new technologies on a civilian population. Significant funds had gone into the development of American military technology – 36 billion in 2015 dollars funded the creation of the atomic bomb. Napalm was new as well. The firebombing of Tokyo marked the first time it was used on a dense civilian population. The Americans wanted to test their new inventions on a group of people who they thought were less than human.

LeMay famously remarked, “Killing Japanese didn’t bother me very much at that time. . . I suppose if I had lost the war, I would have been tried as a war criminal.”

LeMay later leveraged his war credentials and racism to earn a spot on segregationist Gov. George Wallace's 1968 presidential ticket.

Terms like "greatest generation" betray Americans by keeping them willfully disconnected from their past. These labels flatten complex legacies and prevent a thorough questioning of power.

Why did no one from the greatest generation stop these needless bombings? How can a country whose leaders constantly invoke its "exceptionalism" regularly fall back on the platitude "All sides were committing atrocities so why focus on the Americans?" ***These are the questions our high school textbooks need to be asking.***

As Howard Zinn put it in "Three Holy Wars," his final speech before he died:

This idea of good wars helps justify other wars which are awful, obviously evil. And though they're awful — I'm talking about Vietnam, I'm talking about Iraq, I'm talking about Afghanistan, I'm talking about Panama, I'm talking about Grenada, one of our most heroic of wars — the fact that you can have the historic experience of good wars creates a basis for believing, well, you know, there's such a thing as a good war, and maybe you can find, oh, parallels between the good wars and this war, even though you don't understand this war.

But, oh, yes, the parallels. Saddam Hussein is Hitler. That makes it clear. We have to fight against him. To not fight in the war means surrender, like in Munich. There are all the analogies. . . . You compare something to World War II; you immediately infuse it with goodness.

After the war, US Marine Joe O'Donnell was sent to document the destruction of Japan. His book *Japan 1945: A U.S. Marine's Photographs from Ground Zero* is something everyone who labels World War II good and just should see.

"The people I met," O'Donnell recalls, "the suffering I witnessed, and the scenes of incredible devastation taken by my camera caused me to question every belief I had previously held about my so-called enemies."

TOKYO — THE CITY

Over a thousand miles to the north, all the elements to create a monumental disaster unprecedented in human history were falling into place. Before the planes arrived, winds started gusting at over forty miles an hour. It was a cold, dry wind, typical of early spring in that region. As midnight approached, the coastal watchers were the first to hear the long hums of the B-29s. But because there was no formation, there was some confusion and the alarms were not sounded until 12:15, a full seven minutes after the bombs began to fall. It would not have mattered anyway. In their hubris, Japanese officials had never built adequate shelters for the civilian population. They did not believe the Americans were capable of bombing from these great distances.



Across Tokyo, residents looked up in amazement. They had never seen the "B-sans" so low, nor had they ever seen so many at once. But more than the numbers and the strange, long line of planes, it was the unusual flowers of light that fell from the night sky that mesmerized an entire population.

The fire falling from the sky reminded a German Catholic priest, Father Gustav Bitter, of the tinsel hung on a Christmas tree back home, “and where these silver streamers would touch the earth, red fires would spring up. Father Bitter also recorded, in an almost poetic fashion, the effect of the light and shadows on the planes above: “The red and yellow flames reflected from below on the silvery undersides [of the planes] so that they were like giant dragonflies with jeweled wings against the upper darkness.”

Then, in a sudden fury, everything changed as the incendiaries hit home. People ran in panic. Not just rooftops and houses caught on fire, but the clothes and hair of the people running were also ignited. People who ran to a nearby river for relief found that the water was boiling. The firebombing of Tokyo was horrific.



On the ground, the ground level of the firebombing of Tokyo, something extraordinary was happening. The incendiaries had created tornadoes of fire, sucking the oxygen from the entire area. A majority of the victims died of asphyxiation. Estimates put the number of people who died in Tokyo that night at 100,000, but the actual number can never be known. Over sixteen square miles of Tokyo—among the most densely populated sixteen square miles in the world—were destroyed. More than a million people were left homeless. Another two million people left Tokyo, not to return until after the war. The Air Force history of the war records that “the physical destruction and loss of life at Tokyo exceeded that at Rome . . . or that of any of the great conflagrations of the western world—London, 1666. . . Moscow, 1812. . . Chicago, 1871. . . San Francisco, 1906.

No other air attack of the war, either in Japan or Europe, was so destructive of life and property.”

The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey was more direct: “Probably more persons lost their lives by fire at Tokyo in 6 hours than at any [equivalent period of] time in the history of man.”

NOTE: GRAPHIC PICTURE OF WAR ON NEXT PAGE



The Japanese calculated that though they could no longer win the war, Americans might grow weary and allow the Japanese to exact better terms if the price of victory was costly enough. As historian Edward Drea aptly phrased it, "Undergirding all Japanese strategy was a dismissive view that Americans [were] products of liberalism and individualism and incapable of fighting a protracted war." The War Journal of the Japanese Imperial Headquarters backed this up in July 1944: "We can no longer direct the war with any hope of success. The only course left is for Japan's one hundred million people (the real count was closer to 72 million) to sacrifice their lives by charging the enemy to make them lose the will to fight."

What is astonishing is that, despite the incredible losses and the fact that there was virtually nothing Japan could do to stop the bombing, the country kept fighting. No matter how many square miles were destroyed, no matter how many civilians died, the military wanted to keep fighting.

The raid lasted slightly longer than three hours. "In the black Sumida River, countless bodies were floating, clothed bodies, naked bodies, all black as charcoal. It was unreal," recorded one doctor at the scene. Only 243 American airmen were considered acceptable losses.



The human carnage was so great that the blood-red mists and stench of burning flesh that wafted up sickened the bomber pilots, forcing them to grab oxygen masks to keep from vomiting.

Thus the firebombing of Tokyo was seen as necessary and a complete success.

Probably the most *cracked* aspect of this historical event was that families of victims later *sued the government of Japan in 2007* for failing to end the war earlier and failing to protect and care for them after the bombing! The suit was dismissed and the plaintiffs lost again on appeal.

COMMENTS/OPINIONS/THOUGHTS ABOUT THE FIRE-BOMBINGS

Comments are few because it was not publicized and overshadowed by the Atom Bombings 5 months later...

John Dower, a leading American historian of Japan at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology writes:

"In June of 1945, he was told that a military aide to General Douglas MacArthur described the American firebombing campaign as "one of the most ruthless and barbaric killings of non-combatants in all history."

He (Mr. Dower stated) "With the fire bombings, we crossed the line that we had said was clearly beyond the pale of civilization. The American reaction at the time was that they deserved it. There was almost a genocidal attitude on the part of the American military, and it extended to the American public."

The July/August 2002 issue of The Atlantic from an article written by Jonathan Rauch:

I believe the firebombing of Tokyo should be considered a war crime, a terror bombing. if those terms are to have any meaning at all.

It is true that the United States in 1945, in marked and important contrast with, say, al Qaeda in 2001, viewed the targeting of civilians as a last rather than a first resort; and it is true that throughout history even the virtuous have wound up fighting dirty if fighting clean failed; and sometimes the good must indeed do terrible things to destroy a great evil. But it is also true that if the good find themselves driven to barbarism, they own up afterward and search their souls.

Japanese Historian Masahiko Yamabe wrote: (Quote for Mar 10, 2015 Issue of Military Times) "There were plenty of small factories, but this area was chosen specifically because it was easy to burn," says historian Masahiko Yamabe, who was born just months after the war's end.

In his book entitled Statistics of Democide, Chapter 13 "Death By American Bombing and Other Democide," September 22, 2003, R.J. Rummel wrote:

Was the indiscriminate (meaning the target was the city, usually the city center, and not military installations) American bombing of urban areas democide (mass murder), that is, the intentional targeting of unarmed civilians with deadly weapons? I don't see how this can be denied. Bombs were dropped intentionally on unarmed civilians in their homes or at work.

These people died not because they lived near military targets or were caught in the crossfire of battle, but because of their nationality and the urban area in which they lived. It was democide. I think LeMay was correct. Not only would he, McNamara, and others on his planning staff, be charged with war crimes had the Japanese won, but they had committed war crimes.

BUT – WE SHOULD REMEMBER.....

The possibility of becoming a prisoner of war of the Japanese was greatly feared by all airmen. It was a very different threat from fighting the Germans. Although the conditions in various stalag prison camps throughout Germany were extremely rough, the prisoners were, for the most part, treated along the lines of the Geneva Convention. This cannot be said about Japan, which treated prisoners abominably from the very start of the war. Of the 140,000 Caucasian prisoners of war captured in Bataan, a third of them died in captivity. The rest were subjected to such barbarous treatment that, in many cases, death was preferable.

According to Richard B. Frank (status undetermined)

"The record Japan created in her treatment of prisoners of war and civilian internees still appalls. Prisoners were starved and brutalized systematically. They were murdered for deadly purposes or on a momentary whim. They were beaten to death, beheaded, buried alive, burned to death, crucified, marched to death, shot, stabbed, strangled, and simply abandoned to die.

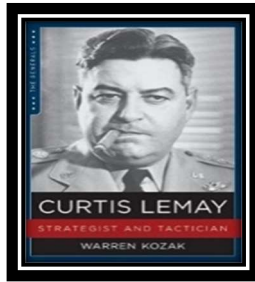
Among U.S. Army personnel alone, the Japanese captured 24,992 of whom 8,634 (35 percent) died in captivity. By contrast, only 833 of 93,653 Army personnel held by Germany died in captivity, a rate of 0.9 percent.

The Japanese saved their greatest venom for the B-29 crews that parachuted from stricken planes. "Captured B-29 Airmen were shot, bayoneted, decapitated, burned alive, or killed as boiling water was poured over them. Other aircrew members were beaten to death by civilians and shot with bows and arrows then decapitated."

Perhaps the most appalling episode, according to historian Richard Frank, took place when the Western Japan military command gave some medical professors at Kyushu Imperial University eight B-29 crewmen. The professor cut them up alive, in a dirty room with a tin table where students dissected corpses. They drained blood and replaced it with seawater. They cut out lungs, livers, and stomachs. They stopped blood flow in an artery near the heart, to see how long death took. They dug holes in a skull and stuck a knife into the living brains to see what would happen.

There was a real fear that the Japanese would execute all prisoners if it looked like they were going to be liberated. To a man, Allied POWs believed the Japanese would kill them if the Homeland was invaded, and surviving written documentation supports this belief.

THE MAN HIMSELF – CURTIS LEMAY



HERO OR VILLAIN?

The Firebombing of Tokyo - Strategic Air Command - John F. Kennedy - Dr. Strangelove & George Wallace. All of these have one man in common—General Curtis LeMay, who remains as unknowable and controversial as he was in life.

Warren Kozak traces the trajectory of America's most infamous general, from his troubled background and heroic service in Europe to his firebombing of Tokyo, guardianship of the U.S. nuclear arsenal in the Cold War, a frustrated career in government, and short-lived political run. Curtis LeMay's life spanned an epoch in American military history, from the small U.S. Army Air Corps of the interwar years to the nuclear age.

LeMay: *The Life and Wars of General Curtis LeMay* tell the whole story of the innovative pilot and navigator; the courageous general who led his bomber formations from the front, flying the lead bomber; the brilliant strategist; the unflagging patriot; and the founder of modern strategic bombing, who was famous and notorious in turns.

In LeMay: The Life and Wars of General Curtis LeMay, you'll learn:

How LeMay developed the strategy and techniques that transformed Allied bombing in World War II, radically improving results and saving lives ...

Why he developed the plan of fire-bombing Tokyo ...

Why he expected a war with Russia ...

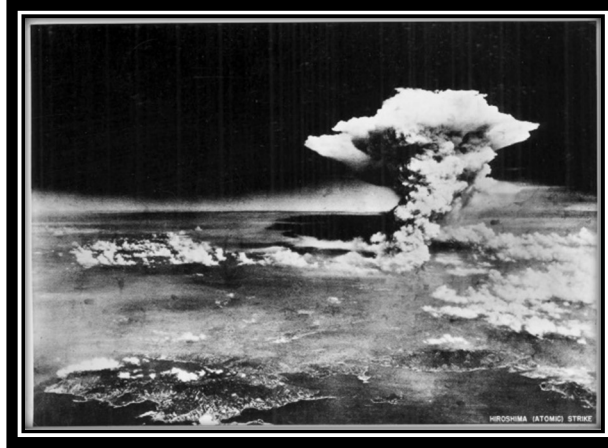
How he tried to prevent the Bay of Pigs disaster ...

Who came up with the idea of bombing the North Vietnamese back into "the Stone Age ...

Why he agreed to be George Wallace's running mate in the election of 1968—despite loathing Wallace and most of his policies

BONUS

FIVE MYTHS ABOUT THE ATOMIC BOMBS



The Hiroshima A-bomb blast was photographed by the U.S. military on August 6, 1945. The explosion was not the sole reason Japan surrendered, despite what American history textbooks say. (Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum/EPA)

The Author: Gregg Herken July 31, 2015 - Appeared in the Washington Post

Gregg Herken is an emeritus professor of U.S. diplomatic history at the University of California and the author of “The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War” and “Brotherhood of the Bomb: The Tangled Lives and Loyalties of Robert Oppenheimer, Ernest Lawrence, and Edward Teller.” As a Smithsonian curator in 1995, he participated in early planning for the National Air and Space Museum’s Enola Gay exhibit.

On Aug. 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Another bomb fell Aug. 9 on Nagasaki. Decades later, controversy and misinformation still surround the decision to use nuclear weapons during World War II. The 70th anniversary of the event presents an opportunity to set the record straight on five widely held myths about the bomb.

1. THE BOMB ENDED THE WAR

The notion that the atomic bombs caused the Japanese surrender on Aug. 15, 1945, has been, for many Americans and virtually all U.S. history textbooks, the default understanding of how and why the war ended. However, the minutes of the meetings of the Japanese government reveal a more complex story.

The latest and best scholarship on the surrender, based on Japanese records, concludes that the Soviet Union’s unexpected entry into the war against Japan on Aug. 8 was probably an even greater shock to Tokyo than the atomic bombing of Hiroshima two days earlier. Until then, the Japanese had been hoping that the Russians — who had previously signed a nonaggression pact with Japan — might be intermediaries in negotiating an end to the war. As historian Tsuyoshi Hasegawa writes in his book “Racing the Enemy,” “Indeed, the Soviet attack, not the Hiroshima bomb, convinced political leaders to end the war.” The two events together — plus the dropping of the second atomic bomb on Aug. 9 — were decisive in making the case for surrender.

2. THE BOMB SAVED HALF A MILLION AMERICAN LIVES

In his postwar memoirs, former president Harry Truman recalled how military leaders had told him that a half-million Americans might be killed in an invasion of Japan. This figure has become canonical among those seeking to justify the bombing. However, it is not supported by military estimates of the time. As Stanford historian Barton Bernstein has noted, the U.S. Joint War Plans Committee predicted in mid-June 1945 that the invasion of Japan, set to begin Nov. 1, **would result in 193,000 U.S. casualties, including 40,000 deaths.**

But, as Truman also observed after the war, if he had not used the atomic bomb when it was ready and GIs had died on the invasion beaches, he would have faced the righteous wrath of the American people.

3 THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO THE BOMB WAS AN INVASION OF JAPAN

The decision to use nuclear weapons is usually presented as either/or: either drop the bomb or land on the beaches. But beyond simply continuing the conventional bombing and naval blockade of Japan, there were two other options recognized at the time.

The first was a demonstration of the atomic bomb before or instead of its military use: exploding the bomb on an uninhabited island or in the desert, in front of invited observers from Japan and other countries; or using it to blow the top off Mount Fuji, outside Tokyo. The demonstration option was rejected for practical reasons. *There were only two bombs available in August 1945, and the demonstration bomb might turn out to be a dud.*

The second alternative was accepting a conditional surrender by Japan. The United States knew from intercepted communications that the Japanese were most concerned that Emperor Hirohito not be treated as a war criminal. The “emperor clause” was the final obstacle to Japan’s capitulation. (President Franklin Roosevelt had insisted upon unconditional surrender, and Truman reiterated that demand after Roosevelt died in mid-April 1945.)

Although the United States ultimately got Japan’s unconditional surrender, the emperor clause was, in effect, granted after the fact. “I have no desire whatever to debase [Hirohito] in the eyes of his people,” Gen. Douglas MacArthur, supreme commander of the Allied powers in Japan after the war, assured Tokyo’s diplomats following the surrender.

4. THE JAPANESE WERE WARNED BEFORE THE BOMB

The United States had dropped leaflets over many Japanese cities, urging civilians to flee, before hitting them with conventional bombs. After the Potsdam Declaration of July 26, 1945, which called on the Japanese to surrender, leaflets warned of “prompt and utter destruction” unless Japan heeded that order. In a radio address, Truman also told of a coming “rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this Earth.” These actions have led many to believe that civilians were meaningfully warned of the pending nuclear attack. Indeed, a common refrain in letters to the editor and debates about the bomb is: “The Japanese were warned.”

But there was never any specific warning to the cities that had been chosen as targets for the atomic bomb before the weapon’s first use. The omission was deliberate: The United States feared that the Japanese, being forewarned, would shoot down the planes carrying the bombs. And since Japanese cities were already being destroyed by incendiary and high-explosive bombs regularly – nearly 100,000 people were killed the previous March in the firebombing of Tokyo – there was no reason to believe that either the Potsdam Declaration or Truman’s speech would receive special notice. *If they had been warned - what could they do? There were no shelters and the people were so poor- where would they go?*

5. THE BOMB WAS TIMED TO GAIN A DIPLOMATIC ADVANTAGE OVER RUSSIA AND PROVED A “MASTER CARD” IN EARLY COLD WAR POLITICS

This claim has been a staple of revisionist historiography, which argues that U.S. policymakers hoped the bomb might end the war against Japan before the Soviet entry into the conflict gave the Russians a significant role in a postwar peace settlement. Using the bomb would also impress the Russians with the power of the new weapon, which the United States had alone.

In reality, military planning, not diplomatic advantage, dictated the timing of the atomic attacks. The bombs were ordered to be dropped “as soon as made ready.”

Postwar political considerations did affect the choice of targets for the atomic bombs. Secretary of War Henry Stimson ordered that the historically and culturally significant city of Kyoto be stricken from the target list. (Stimson was personally familiar with Kyoto; he and his wife had spent part of their honeymoon there.)

Truman agreed, according to Stimson, because “the bitterness which would be caused by such a wanton act might make it impossible during the long postwar period to reconcile the Japanese to us in that area rather than to the Russians.”

Like Stimson, Truman’s secretary of state, James Byrnes, hoped that the bomb might prove to be a “master card” in subsequent diplomatic dealings with the Soviet Union – but both were disappointed. In September 1945, Byrnes returned from the first postwar meeting of foreign ministers, in London, lamenting that the Russians were “stubborn, obstinate, and they don’t scare.”

DISCLAIMER

PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT EVEN THOUGH THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN TAKEN
FROM WEBSITES & OTHER SOURCES THAT APPEAR TO BE AUTHENTIC, I CAN NOT ENSURE THAT ALL THE
DATA IN THIS ARTICLE IS ACCURATE AND CORRECT.