

= The Beginning or the End =

The Beginning or the End (1947) is an American docudrama film about the development of the atomic bomb in World War II , directed by Norman Taurog , starring Brian Donlevy and Hume Cronyn , and released by Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer (MGM) . The film dramatizes the creation of the atomic bomb in the Manhattan Project and the bombing of Hiroshima .

The film originated in October 1945 as a project of actress Donna Reed and her high school science teacher , Edward R. Tompkins , who was a chemist at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory . Bob Considine wrote the treatment , which was sent to the MGM studio script writers . The title was supplied by President Harry S. Truman . At the time there was a legal requirement that permission be obtained to depict living well @-@ known public figures . Many refused , but others , such as J. Robert Oppenheimer , co @-@ operated . Major General Leslie R. Groves , Jr . , the director of the Manhattan Project , was hired as a consultant for \$ 10 @,@ 000 (equivalent to \$ 121 @,@ 000 in 2015) .

Although the filmmakers put considerable effort into historical accuracy , particularly in details , the film is known for some key distortions of history . An entirely fictional sequence was added in which Truman agonizes over whether to authorize the attack ; anti @-@ aircraft shells are shown bursting around the Enola Gay on its bombing run over Hiroshima ; and it is said that leaflets were dropped on Hiroshima for ten days in advance of the mission warning the citizens of the forthcoming raid . The film received mixed reviews , and did not earn its money back .

= = Plot = =

In 1945 , physicist and atomic scientist Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer (Hume Cronyn) praises the discovery of atomic energy , but also warns of its dangers . American scientists such as Matt Cochran (Tom Drake) , working under the guidance of Dr. Enrico Fermi (Joseph Calleia) and Dr. Marré (Victor Francen) , have split the atom , and essentially beaten the Germans in the race to create an atomic bomb . With the assistance of Albert Einstein (Ludwig Stössel) , they inform President Franklin D. Roosevelt (Godfrey Tearle) that a monumental discovery has been made .

In 1941 , with the United States at war , Roosevelt authorizes up to two billion dollars for the Manhattan Project to develop an atomic bomb . In December 1942 , at the University of Chicago , under the watchful eyes of observers such as Colonel Jeff Nixon (Robert Walker) and international experts , scientists create the first chain reaction , under a stadium at the campus .

Nixon is assigned to General Leslie Groves (Brian Donlevy) , who is placed in charge of the project . Groves has to bring together the scientific , industrial and defense communities to build the atomic bomb . In 1945 , following the death of Roosevelt , the new president , Harry S. Truman (Art Baker) , continues to support the atomic project , now moved to Los Alamos , New Mexico . When refined uranium @-@ 235 is obtained , the first atomic bomb is built and tested successfully in the New Mexico desert . Facing stiff resistance in the Pacific War , Truman orders the use of the atomic bomb against Japan in July 1945 .

Cochran and Nixon are assigned to accompany the crew transporting the bomb to Tinian . While assembling the bomb , the scientist comes into contact with radioactive material and dies . The following day , on August 6 , 1945 , the Enola Gay , a Boeing B @-@ 29 Superfortress bomber , drops an atomic bomb on Hiroshima . After the mission , Nixon returns home to break the news of her husband 's death to Cochran 's wife .

= = Cast = =

= = Production = =

The idea for The Beginning or the End originated in October 1945 with Donna Reed , a Hollywood actor , and her high school science teacher , Edward R. Tompkins , a chemist at the Oak Ridge

National Laboratory . According to The Hollywood Reporter issues of December 1945 and January 1946 , MGM , Paramount and 20th Century Fox were all interested in making a film about the Manhattan Project . Paramount 's Hal B. Wallis was already working on his own version , titled Top Secret , but agreed to merge his project with MGM 's and hand over his story and research , offering to serve as an adviser on the MGM treatment in return for a fixed fee and a percentage of the box office gross .

The Beginning or the End had a number of working titles , including Atom Bomb , The Manhattan Project and Top Secret . Bob Considine was hired to produce a treatment , which he sent to the studio script writers . The script underwent a number of revisions , with Ayn Rand being one of the writers . Her contributions include the montage of Hitler 's conquests , a sequence in which a dying informant sends a message to Albert Einstein , and the sequence in which President Franklin Roosevelt authorizes the Manhattan Project . Other writers involved with the script were Robert Smith , Frank " Spig " Wead , Norman Krasna , David Hawkins , John Lee Mahin and Glenn Tryon . Producer Samuel Marx wrote the opening narration . Marx and Donna Reed 's husband Tony Owen met with President Harry S. Truman to secure his approval . At their meeting , Truman is reported to have said : " Gentlemen , make a motion picture . Tell the people of this nation that for them it is the beginning or the end , " thereby supplying the movie with its title .

H. T. Wensel from the National Bureau of Standards , Tompkins , and W. Bradford Shank from the Los Alamos National Laboratory acted as technical advisers . Relations between MGM and the scientists soon became strained , as the scientists began asking for multiple script changes , and Tompkins eventually resigned . Oppenheimer sent David Hawkins , a philosophy professor from the University of California to act as a mediator between Marx and the scientists . Although the original intention was that a substantial sum of money would be donated to scientists ' associations like the Federation of Atomic Scientists , in the end , no scientific organizations accepted any money . Tompkins received \$ 100 (equivalent to \$ 1 @, @ 000 in 2015) . At the time there was a legal requirement that permission be obtained to depict living well @-@ known public figures . Lise Meitner , Niels Bohr and Sir James Chadwick all refused to allow their names to be used in the The Beginning or the End , which Marx regarded as unfortunate , as it made the film 's Manhattan Project scenes look like an all @-@ American affair .

The loss of Bohr caused important sequences to be deleted . The script originally had Bohr , rescued from the Germans in Copenhagen , bring a shocked Oppenheimer news that the German nuclear weapon project was supplying expertise to its Japanese counterpart . A German U @-@ boat carrying a fictional scientist travels to Japan where he joins the Japanese project in Hiroshima . Vannevar Bush objected to the way the script depicted him as having doubts about whether the atomic bomb could be built in time or could fit into an aircraft . Bush insisted that he never had any doubts . The script was changed to soften this . In the film , when Bush tells Roosevelt that he has a top secret matter to discuss , the President 's dog Fala leaves the room .

Oppenheimer raised no objection to the sequence in the film in which he told Brigadier General Thomas Farrell that the odds of a runaway explosion destroying the planet were less than one in a million , although he let MGM know it never happened . The cultured Oppenheimer 's main concern was that the script was poor , with characters that were " stilted , lifeless , and without purpose or insight . "

Military technical advisers for The Beginning or the End included Colonel William A. Considine , Groves 's assistant in charge of in charge of Security and Public Relations , Major Glen W. Landreth , Major Paul Van Sloun and Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Sweeney , the pilot of Bockscar , the bomber that dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki . Scientists were alarmed by reports that the dashing actor Clark Gable was being considered for the role of Groves , but were relieved when Brian Donlevy was cast in the role , as he normally played a villain . Indeed , most of the cast were best known for film noir : Hume Cronyn for The Postman Always Rings Twice ; Joseph Calleia , for Gilda and Deadline at Dawn ; and Ludwig Stössel for Fritz Lang 's Cloak and Dagger . Groves 's cooperation was secured by hiring him as a primary consultant , for \$ 10 @, @ 000 (equivalent to \$ 121 @, @ 000 in 2015) . The portly Groves apparently had no objection to his portrayal by the slim and handsome Donlevy , except for the way in which he was shown bossing industrialists around .

He had a scene in which he warned Roosevelt that the invasion of Japan would be opposed by Japanese nuclear weapons deleted .

Eleanor Roosevelt objected to the casting of Lionel Barrymore as her late husband , due to political remarks that Barrymore had made about the president in 1944 . Marx delayed Barrymore 's scenes while she had a chance to read and respond to a letter Barrymore sent her explaining that his remarks had been misinterpreted , but she was not placated , and Barrymore was replaced in the role by Godfrey Tearle . The War Department and the White House reviewed the script , and both asked for changes . The Army had a scene where an Army major made a pass at a girl deleted , as it felt that this was poor conduct for an officer .

The casual way that Truman and Groves were shown to decide to use the bomb , with Truman stating that " I think more of our American boys than I do of all our enemies " , while accurate , troubled Walter Lippmann , who felt that it could lead to foreigners being fearful of atomic weapons being in American hands . An entirely fictional sequence was therefore added in which Truman agonizes over whether to authorize the attack or not . In it Truman asserts that dropping the bomb will shorten the war , and a " year less of war will mean life for ... from 300 @,@ 000 to half a million of America 's finest youth " .

The motion picture censors asked for further cuts . Derogatory references to Mexicans were removed , as was an off @-@ color joke about the effects of exposure to radioactive substances (" Is it true if you fool around with that stuff you don 't like girls anymore ? " " Not that I 've noticed ") , and one about politics (" I got it confidential ? we 're makin ' the front ends of horses . We ship ' em to Washington to hook on to the other end . ")

Principal photography for *The Beginning or the End* began on April 29 , 1946 , and continued until July 25 with retakes beginning on August 9 , 1946 . The production premiered in Washington , D.C. on February 19 , 1947 , with the national release of the film following on March 7 , 1947 .

= = Historical accuracy = =

The filmmakers put considerable effort into historical accuracy , particularly in details such as military uniforms and the details of the *Enola Gay* and its crew . Nine of the actors who portrayed the *Enola Gay* crew were actual veterans of World War II . The technical details of atomic processes and the bomb 's design are wildly inaccurate by intention . In 1947 , these details were highly classified . One inaccuracy , independent of necessary military secrecy , is the portrayal of anti @-@ aircraft shells bursting around the aircraft on the bombing run , as the attack on Hiroshima was not opposed .

The film twice refers to specific leaflet drops on the target for ten days in advance of the mission warning the citizens of the forthcoming raid . " We 've been dropping warning leaflets on them for ten days now " , one crew member remarks , " That 's ten days more warning than they gave us before Pearl Harbor . " There was no leaflet specifically warning of an atomic attack . In his review in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* , physicist Harrison Brown called this " the most horrible falsification of history " . Historians have debated whether any leaflets were dropped at all .

= = Reception = =

Although *The Beginning or the End* was the first film to depict the story of the atomic bomb , both critics and the public were confused by the attempt to merge real events in a docudrama form . Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* commented , " ... despite its generally able reenactments , this film is so laced with sentiment of the silliest and most theatrical nature that much of its impressiveness is marred . " *Variety* described the film as a " portentous tale in broad strokes of masterful scripting and production " , and a " sum credit of everybody concerned that the documentary values are sufficiently there without becoming static " . In his *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* review , Harrison Brown considered the movie " poor " , with a romantic angle " insipid in the extreme " , but was most troubled by way scientific equipment was " over @-@ glamorized " in the film , which he felt gave " a completely false impression of how scientists work . " The review in

Time was less positive , noting that , " even as entertainment ... the picture seldom rises above cheery imbecility . "

According to MGM records , The Beginning or the End was made on a budget of \$ 2 @, @ 632 @, @ 000 (equivalent to \$ 31 @, @ 939 @, @ 000 in 2015) , but earned \$ 1 @, @ 221 @, @ 000 (equivalent to \$ 14 @, @ 817 @, @ 000 in 2015) in the United States and Canada and \$ 721 @, @ 000 (equivalent to \$ 8 @, @ 749 @, @ 000 in 2015) elsewhere , resulting in a loss to the studio of \$ 1 @, @ 596 @, @ 000 (equivalent to \$ 19 @, @ 367 @, @ 000 in 2015) .