

# The deaths of thousands of allied prisoners



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The Terror that Saved Millions The atomic bomb and its use over the two Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is still a source of heated debate even over fifty years later. Many people on both sides -Japan and The United States- hold the belief that Truman's decision to drop the bomb was a mistake and that under no circumstances should such drastic measures be taken in war.

What these people do not realize are the far more horrible alternatives than the destruction of just two cities: an invasion of mainland Japan where millions of more deaths would have occurred, Soviet aid resulting in the division of Japan into a communist nation and the destruction of their culture, the deaths of thousands of Allied prisoners of war held in Japan, and the threat of renewed hostilities from Japan not to mention the possibility of several more years of bloody conflict. Throughout the course of this paper all of these examples will be discussed, as well as why Truman's decision was the most humane and rational for all the nations involved, including Japan. Axis power in Europe was destroyed, Hitler and Mussolini were dead, their armies annihilated, their nation's in ruins, Japan however was not. Though weakened from a near four year long war with the Allies, the Japanese continued fighting, as was their code, to fight to the death, and never surrender. President Harry Truman in the interest of saving both American and Japanese lives from an invasion of mainland Japan, authorized the use atomic bombs against Japan. The first atomic bomb to be used on Japan was composed of uranium. It was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, on Aug. 6, 1945.

The explosion, which had the force of more than 15, 000 tons of TNT, instantly and completely devastated 10 square kilometers of the heart of this

city of 343, 000 inhabitants. Of this number, 66, 000 were killed immediately and 69, 000 were injured, more than 67 percent of the city's structures were destroyed or damaged. The next atomic bomb to be exploded was of the plutonium type, it was dropped on Nagasaki three days later, producing a blast equal to 21, 000 tons of TNT. The terrain and smaller size of Nagasaki reduced destruction of life and property, but nevertheless 39, 000 people were killed and 25, 000 injured, while 40 percent of the city's structures were destroyed or seriously damaged.

Preceding the bombing of Hiroshima the Americans had pledged that if the Japanese did not agree to an unconditional surrender and an immediate conclusion to all hostilities that they would bomb Japan with atomic weapons. The Japanese called the Americans on a bluff or simply dismissed the American's words as tough talk and nothing more, unfortunately for the Japanese, the Americans did have the weapons they claimed they did, and weren't afraid to use them. Hiroshima was destroyed, though a catastrophe for the Japanese, it still did not mean their surrender. The Japanese, urged by their military establishment to continue the pursuit of victory still did not respond to the American threat. It took the Japanese another lost city in Nagasaki three days later to commence peace negotiations. It was too late for over 100, 000 people by the time the treaty was signed aboard the American Battleship U.

S. Missouri on September. 2nd 1945.

Japan had in essence, been defeated months before the bomb was dropped, the problem no longer existed to defeat Japan, but to secure her surrender- a

far more difficult task. Quite simply, the Japanese did not believe in surrender. Their nation had never lost a war. In addition, Japan's fighting men held ingrained beliefs that to surrender was to disgrace one's self and one's nation. So deeply were these thoughts held that even after both bombs had been detonated and the entry of the Soviet Union into the war, the Japanese military still opposed surrender bitterly, and would prefer death than dishonorable capitulation.

With a foe with a mind set such as this, only two options could be considered by the United States government. One being the use of atomic weapons and the other being the invasion of mainland Japan. According to Truman's top military advisors, an invasion of mainland Japan would cost and an estimated 500, 000 American lives, not to mention over a million Japanese deaths.

Truman wrote years later, We estimated that if we should be forced to carry this invasion plan to its conclusion, the major fighting would not end until the latter part of 1946, at the earliest. I was informed that such operations might be expected to cost over a million casualties, in American forces alone. Such an operation would also require the use of European theater American troops departure from Europe to Japan, to an aid in the assault. With the largest invasion force ever assembled, comprising of approximately 2, 000, 000 troops. (Far larger than the Normandy invasion) According to Major General Masakazu Amanu, the chief of the Operations Section at Japanese Imperial Headquarters, We were absolutely sure of victory over an allied offensive.

It was the first and the only battle in which the main strength of the air, land and sea forces were to be joined. The geographical advantages of the homeland were to be utilized to the highest degree, the enemy was to be

crushed, and we were confident that the battle would prove to be the turning point in political maneuvering. To repel the invasion, Japan had almost two million troops under arms, while millions of civilians were being trained to kill invaders, with guns, explosive charges strapped to their bodies, and even bamboo spears. Thousands of planes and midget submarines were being produced by the Japanese for suicide missions. Fleet Admiral Nimitz once wrote in a memo to Admiral King regarding the possible invasion of Japan that, We must be prepared to accept heavy casualties whenever we invade Japan. Our previous successes against ill-fed and poorly supplied units, cut down by our overpowering naval and air action, should not be used as the sole basis of estimating the type of resistance we will meet in the Japanese homeland where the enemy lines of communication will be short and the enemy supplies more adequate.

In addition, to the Japanese strategic advantages, the Americans knew better than to underestimate the courage, skill, and tenacity of Japan's military. Fighting in defense of their homeland, they would be truly formidable and show no mercy towards their foes. It would have been the bloodiest and most bitterly fought battle of any war in history.

And even if the Americans should emerge victorious after an inevitably fierce and bloody campaign which would prolong the war an estimated year and a half, total casualties and sheer destructiveness would have far exceeded those of the two atomic bombs. The Japanese had developed a new fighting code for the invasion they expected from the Americans. They were instructed to deny aid to injured comrades, restrict retreat by making it punishable by death and converting all units including medical and logistical

units into fighting units. It also called for injured soldiers and patients to participate in the battle, without any attention to one's self. Propaganda was sent all over Japan preaching these rules and calling for every member of society to die for their native soil.

One Senior Military Officer advocated involuntary sacrifices: Due to the nationwide food shortage and the imminent invasion of the home islands, it will be necessary to kill all the infirm old people, the very young, and the sick. We cannot allow Japan to perish because of them. According to the slogans that spread through Japan, every man, woman and child was expected to fight to the death.

People were told to sing a song entitled The Honorable Death of A Hundred Million. It was even proposed that with the invasion, the invaders may use Japanese civilians as cover, the Japanese fighters were given strict instructions to kill the enemy, with hostages or not, and plow down their own if it meant enemy casualties. The Japanese had even began to mass produce manned torpedoes and submarines, including 6, 000 kamikaze planes.

Pilots as young as thirteen were being trained to kill themselves in the name of the emperor. How could the invasion of such a fanatical Japan, have been successful without the loss of countless lives? Upon the conclusion of the Second World War, much of the former enemies to the allies were divided into sections, one section controlled by the Soviets the other by the United States. Should the Soviets have been involved in the final defeat of Japan - which would have been necessary if the bombs hadn't been dropped- then the Soviets would have demanded a Soviet Zone in Japan, just as they did in

Germany, Korea and several other Asian nations. With the Soviets in control of a good portion of Japan, Japanese culture would have been compromised indefinitely. It would have surely delayed Japan's recovery, with the Soviets policy of massive reparations, and the possibility of a resurgent Japan may have arisen. Without the United States extensive aid after the War, future may have repeated herself as she did with Germany after the first world war.

The atomic bombs allowed the Americans to end the war by themselves, without any Soviet intervention, and because of that Japanese culture as well as the security of Japan's former foes was protected. There are those in Japan that felt no resentment towards the United States for their usage of the atomic bomb on Japan. A fighting man's view of the atomic bomb came from Captain Mitsuo Fuchida, who had led the air attack on Pearl Harbor and who had been one of those investigating Hiroshima the day after the disaster. In his opinion, once a nation embarked upon war, it was obligated to go all out.

To possess a weapon that could ensure victory and not use it would be to break faith with a nation's people as well as to disgrace the memory of lost comrades and make their sacrifices meaningless. What must be remembered is that during the Second World War, both Nazi Germany and expansionist Japan tried to perfect the atomic weapon, it would be absolutely ludicrous to suggest that Japan and Germany wouldn't have used it if they got it first. Americans were still dying, a solution arose that would end the loss of all American lives and end the war quickly. They seized it. Captain Fuchida also added that given the culture of his nation, Japan would inevitably have used the atomic bomb over the United States if it meant

their assured surrender. At the time the bomb was dropped, hope was expressed that the bomb's very horror might frighten mankind into recognizing that war was no longer a viable alternative.

In his postwar surrender address General MacArthur warned, Even the lesson of victory itself brings with it profound concern, both for our future security, and the survival of civilization . . .

The utter destructiveness of war now blots out this alternative. We have had our last chance. MacArthur's hopes that after such a war, with a climax as harsh as the destruction of a city full of women and children, that nations will come to realize that war is no longer a sane option. The use of the bomb made this idea realistic, when people could see what this technological terror was really capable of creating. No longer did its use or creation seem as appealing, it became more of a referee in a sports match, controlling sides and making sure the rules are followed. American Civil War General Robert E. Lee once said It is well that war is so terrible, or we should get too fond of it. The use of the atomic bomb opened the world's eyes to its horror.

Its initial use over fifty years ago prevented what could have been a nuclear war against the Soviets years later. Both the Soviets and Americans had seen its awesome power, both were far too scared to use it. And for one of the first times in hundreds of years, we've had fifty or so years without any major conflicts or World Wars. During one night of American B-29 raids over Tokyo 100, 000 Japanese lives were lost. 41, 000 more lives were lost in Tokyo that night than they were in Hiroshima, but we simply dismiss these as casualties of war, expected numbers from an expected air assault. The



city of Tokyo was devastated, estimates of the damage rank near the damage caused in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Lives are lives, no matter how you look at it, people that are dead from atomic weapons or air assaults, or an invasion of mainland Japan, are just as dead. Though the radioactive nature of the atomic bombs does cause some long term difficulties, what with increased cases of cancer and birth defects, the number of lives lost still remains far less.

More lives, regardless of how they were to be taken would be lost if the bombs were not dropped. Its not as though Hiroshima and Nagasaki were random targets either, they were not selected for the sole purpose of killing civilians, both were active working parts of the Japanese war effort, one an army center, the other naval and industrial. When people argue that the use of the atomic bomb on Japan is ranked up with humanities greatest crimes of the century such as the Holocaust, they don't realize that the number of lives lost is far less then countless other acts of war which were committed on both sides. Hundreds of thousands of more lives maybe even millions would have been lost if the B-29 raids would have continued, as they could claim 100, 000 people in one night, they would have inevitably preceded a land invasion with thousands of lives lost through bombing everyday. The atomic bomb is far more powerful as an idea rather than as a weapon. atomic weapons have the power to kill tens of thousands of people within a few seconds, they have the power to wipe out all signs of buildings or life and most important of all they have the power to stop a war where millions have died.

The atomic bomb was not dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to kill the most people it possibly could, it was dropped for the reason to stop the war. If American intentions were to kill the most people they could have bombed Tokyo and killed thousands upon thousands more. The terrain of both cities was that the bombs full potential would not be used. The atomic bomb is a fear weapon, its main purpose is the threat of its use, not its actual use.

After the two bombs had been dropped, the Japanese finally realized that courage, skill and fearless combat cannot help against weapons with power such as this. It opened their eyes and helped them realize that living with surrender is better than dying in vain. Another factor comes into play when justifying Truman's decision, 100, 000 allied prisoners of war on Japanese soil at the time of the bombing.

And a promise by the Japanese that each and everyone of them would be killed using, mass bombing, or poisons, drowning, decapitation, or whatever the situation dictates, this according to a Japanese directive received by the heads of the P. O. W. camps when the prospect of an invasion arose. The directive continued to state that, In any case it is the aim not to allow the escape of a single one, prisoner to annihilate them all, and not leave any traces. Those 100, 000 allied prisoners of war were saved when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed.

An American prisoner named Lester I. Tenney later wrote, As a prisoner in Japan, I saw the mushroom cloud over Nagasaki. The atomic bomb surely saved my life and the lives of hundreds of my buddies, and it ended a long, terrible war. These lives were up in the air, at any moment before the war

was over, these soldiers lives were in Jeopardy, a slogan meant for convincing skeptics of the use of atomic weapons said simply, Whose son will die in the last minute of the war? Minutes count! It was the Americans duty to save American lives, though a tragedy for the enemy, they were warned. In times of war your defending the lives of your own citizens, if you've got the power to defend them, then you do so with whatever means in your power. One of the most controversial issues of our century; Should Truman have authorized the dropping of the atomic bomb? When one looks into the alternatives to such an act, the picture that is painted is one far more grisly than the deaths that occurred at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Millions of more lives hung in the air, Truman had the power to reach out to these millions of lives, however in order to do so he had to destroy a fraction of them in the process.

The Japanese speak of how they were fighting for the preservation of their culture. How could the systematic invasion and destruction of Japan preserve their culture? The United States had to open up their eyes, the Japanese did not get the message until atomic weapons were used. They may have realized this after an invasion, or they may not have, it was far too big of risk to take, and far too many lives would be lost. We take no pleasure in remembering those approximately 100, 000 people that died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The death of so many is without a doubt a horror, however how many more lives would have been lost if the bomb had not have been used? The evidence is crystal clear. The use of nuclear weapons to end World War II quickly and effectively averted the death or injury of hundreds of thousands of American soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen.

It also saved the lives of some 100, 000 Allied prisoners of war and civilians in Japanese hands, all of whom were to be executed in the event of an American invasion of Japan. Above all, it saved untold hundreds of thousands more Japanese -perhaps millions- from becoming casualties of pre-invasion B-29 bombing and shelling, followed by an invasion and Allied occupation. It prevented the annihilation of Japanese culture and their possible assimilation into the Soviet Union's communist sphere of influence and it told the world the horrors of war. The atomic bomb's use on Hiroshima and Nagasaki saved lives and ended a World War that had raged for many long terrible years and was responsible for the death's of over 35, 000, 000 people.