

# Brief Overview

During World War 2 most of the world's powers were gripped in a nail biting fight that lasted from 1939 to 1945 and left hundreds of millions of people dead. The powers that were involved in the fight include The United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom, China, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Norway, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Ethiopia, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Philippines and Cuba. The 3 main allied leaders being Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. The opposing powers, the Axis include Nazi Germany, Empire of Japan, Kingdom of Italy with many other countries being affiliated with them and or previously being part of the Axis powers.

## What Started it

World War 2 started on September 3rd 1939. It began when Germany unprovoked, attacked Poland. This kicked off the largest conflict in history. America was soon gripped in the conflict only after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7th 194 two years after WW2 began.

## What Ended it

The Great War ended on September 2nd 1945 after the axis power in Europe and the axis powers in Asia were defeated. The dropping of the atomic bombs in particular put the last nail in the coffin for Japan who was then crippled and utterly defeated. After the war the United Nations (UN) formed which included the allied superpowers such as America, Soviet Union and China. It also included the United Kingdom and France. This was to be a catalyst for cooperation between countries and to have security in numbers in case another large threat reared its head. After the war and the formation of the UN the Soviet Union and America saw each other as rival superpowers. This set the stage for the Cold War which would last for 44 years between 1947 to 1991.

## Why were the Bombs Dropped

After the defeat of the axis powers in Europe three of the allied superpowers; America, the Soviet Union and Great Britain met. The relations with America and the Soviet Union had taken a turn for the worse. So less than 5 days after the meeting America had dropped the Little Boy bomb from the B29 superfortress bomber named the Angola Gay. The Little boy bomb was

an atomic bomb with the destructive power equivalent to 15 kT of TNT. the bomb devastated Nagasaki. A 4 square mile chunk of the city had been leveled in seconds and killed 80,000 people almost instantly. Thousands more would go onto perish from radiation poisoning after. Only a few days later a second bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. This time it was a nuclear bomb called Fat Man. Fat man was a 21 kT nuclear weapon that leveled Hiroshima and killed 40,000 people. The weapons shocked the world and caused the nearly immediate surrender of Japan.

The bombs were dropped for two apparent reasons that most agree on. President Harry S. Truman felt that another manned attack on Japan would cause massive casualties greater than what would happen if the nuclear bombs were used, and would drag the war out longer than what is necessary. He also thought that along with the swift end of the war with the use of the atomic bombs that it would send a clear message to the Soviet Union of things to come if America was to be attacked. The act worked, ending the war in Asia but it also kicked off a nuclear arms race between America and the Soviets called the Cold War.

## Was it Necessary

The use of the atomic bombs on Japan was and still is an extremely controversial topic. Each side either is or isn't against the use of the bombs and all have strong reasoning for their views but often times many details are left out or brushed over. For example, in the wake of the war Japanese Field Marshal Hisaichi Terauchi ordered that all 100,000 Allied prisoners of war were to be executed if America invaded. It is also worthy of noting that Prime Minister Hideki Tojo called for "100 million Gyokusai". In other words, he declared that the entire Japanese population be prepared to die as an alternative to surrendering. This is part of a long standing tradition in some parts of Japan with gyokusai meaning "Shattering of the Jewel". It means to commit suicide as an honorable alternative to surrender. What this meant was that Japan would be willing to literally fight to the death, even if it was apparent that they would lose the war, rather than surrender. The result of an invasion would lead to hundreds of thousands if not millions of deaths of not only soldiers but civilians for both sides.

There were a couple invasions planned, one was Operation Downfall. The American military did anticipate the resistance and Japanese forces that would be felt by an invasion and concluded that the death toll on the American side would range between 49,000 in the first 30 days of an invasion to over 1,000,000 deaths in the entire battle. This was supported by the fact that there aren't many good landing sites for the invasion of the Japanese mainland. Many deaths from Kamikaze on the way to Japan, and the willingness of the Japanese civilians themselves to fight the U.S. forces and the inclusion of Asian forces being repatriated from Asia for a homeland defence. All the predictions were based on the current state of the war and the tactics that were being used. Examples of this would be full on banzai charges into American lines which in one battle resulted in over 2,500 Japanese deaths compared to only 80 American deaths. A more drastic example of this would be at the battle on Saipan in July 1944 when the

Japanese tried a final banzai attack which included a frontal charge with all units including wounded. Accounts at this said that even wounded soldiers in crutches charged and that the Americans had no choice but to mow them down. At this same time at the Northern end of the island the civilians were committing mass suicide by throwing themselves off of cliffs after being granted an honorable afterlife by the Emperor Hirohito himself and the threat of death by the hand of the Japanese army.

In the battle for Okinawa the Americans had gained the upper hand and Japanese forces began to get pushed further and further back. When the battle was coming to a close the people in the area were told that the Americans would go on a rampage, killing and raping as they swept through the land. This led to the Japanese defenders including civilians perhaps most notably, women with spears and citizens committing suicide to avoid capture. Examples of these events go on and on throughout the war. These events had a significant impact on Truman in his decision to use the bombs.

The use of the bombs had other alternatives however. In one plan, America was to demonstrate a nuclear weapon to the Japanese people to show what may come if they didn't surrender. This never happened but remained a valid choice because if Japan didn't surrender America could retain morality by saying that they at least tried to go the less painful route. It was also predicted that when the Soviet Union declared war against Japan, Japan may have begun to see that resistance was futile and surrendered. This idea was backed by military strategists and research done by the war department. It was further supported by Japanese leaders stating that they didn't want Russia to enter the war because it would spell disaster and that at the earliest moment Japan should try to look favorable to Russia and try to win an ally.

The choice on the bombs was possible also affected by the way other battles had gone. The moral line of bombing citizens had been long since thrown out the door, even before Truman entered the Presidential office and had left military's all around the world with the option to kill all involved in the war. Even citizens. So in April, 1942 President Roosevelt ordered the firebombing of Tokyo resulting in the death of around 125,000 civilians and it displaced around 1,000,000. The torrent of fire was said to have rained down on Tokyo causing a firestorm with hurricane like winds. The aircrews flying over the 16 square miles of charred city said that the air smelled like burning flesh. Attacks much like this had taken place in other Japanese cities such as Nagoya, Kobe and Osaka. When the bombers began to run low on targets they went back to Tokyo and killed 80,000 more civilians. This type of warfare had disgustingly become the social norms and bomb supporters say that for a new president to make such a hasty decision to not use the nuclear bombs and to repeal social norms was simply too much to ask. At the time the nuclear bombs were also seen as just another weapon at the military's disposal for these attacks and to ensure victory and end the war.

According to a Memorandum from Vannevar Bush and James B. Who worked closely with the Manhattan project stated that the use of nuclear weapons would possibly set off a

nuclear arms race that could result in large arsenals of more powerful weapons like hydrogen bombs that could be used in wars.

### Argument 1 (Against):

One argument against the use of the atomic bombs says that the weapons were to be used only for defense. The reason that the bombs were constructed was out of fear of Nazi Germany constructing their own. Albert Einstein working with Leo Szilard wrote letters to President Truman telling him that America needed to do research into nuclear weapons to prevent Germany from possibly having a monopoly on nuclear weapons which would be devastating to an who opposed them. This eventually led to the formation of the Manhattan Project which was intended to deter Germany from using such weapons against the United States.

Supporting evidence for this is that the weapon was used only as a deterrent. This can be confusing because they were used on Japan but it is argued that that was also primarily due to America trying to show its might to the Soviet Union who was showing signs of resentment towards the US. During the Cold War there were other wars such as the Korean war with Truman still in office, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. During all of these nuclear weapons were not used. This basically said that they should have never have been used in the offensive in the first place.

### Argument 1 (Against):

It has been argued that Truman was not fit for being the president. This was evident in the fact that he delegated too much power to others in his term and had been influenced by James Byrnes in such a way that he was not fit to serve. It was argued that President Truman was too inexperienced and therefore when making a decision was unable to make his own opinions.

Critics say that 3 days was not enough time for Japan to assess the situation and make a decision. Many people did not believe that Truman fully understood the power of the nuclear weapons and the devastation they would cause because Truman instructed that the weapons not be used against civilians but rather the military base at Hiroshima. The bomb however was dropped in the middle of the city and killed not only military but thousands of civilians. After the bombing of Nagasaki Truman addressed this in a radio broadcast stating, "The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians" The statement was surprising to many considering where the bomb dropped and furthered the idea that President Truman didn't understand the weapon fully and was incompetent in making his decision.

### Argument 2 (Against):

Perhaps the most critical point to not using the nuclear bombs was that they were not humane. The use of the weapons was inhumane in the sense that the civilians had no democratic right to question the choices of the Japanese militaristic government. This included

women, men, children and the elderly who would face the United States as an enemy of the Japan and not the people.

As J. R. Oppenheimer said, The effects of the bombs would also affect not only the current generation and the psyche of the people but would leave generations down the line with possible birth defects, cancers and other illnesses.

### Argument 1 (For):

It has been argued that the Atomic bombs ironically saved Japanese lives. The death toll from the between 119,000 people to 226,000 people for the Japanese alone. The number of deaths due to an invasion were estimated to be between 5 and 10 million Japanese fatalities. Support for the bombing was supported by even some Japanese oddly enough. One account was of a Japanese professor who stated that towards the end of the war food rationing had made him with less than 90 lbs and that he could barely climb a set of stair. He said, "I couldn't have survived another month.", "If the military had its way we would have fought until all 80 million Japanese were dead. Only the atomic bomb saved me. Not me alone, but many Japanese, ironically speaking, were saved by the atomic bomb". This however does not project the opinions of all Japanese, in fact he is a minority but he does bring up valid points that should be taken into consideration.

### Argument 2 (For):

Another argument says that the bombs shortened the war. The day after the dropping of the bombs Japan requested a halting and on August 14th Japan surrendered. The pacific commanders wanted to end the war no longer than 1 year after Nazi Germany was defeated. It was stated that only so much can be asked of a nation's voting public and citizen soldiers. Army Chief of Staff George Marshall said, "a democracy cannot fight a Seven Years war". This was also supported by the fact that by 1945 American forces were exhausted and for Operation Downfall to happen many of the Pacific troops would make another landing in Japan. It would mean that the men who sacrificed themselves to put an end to the Nazi Third Reich would be sent to the Pacific to fight again. The sacrifice would mean more death for both sides and an ongoing war that would last many more years. Either way that the war would go most of the people asked about the use of the bombs or invasion felt that either one was inhumane to the defenders and the attackers.

In the end the decision to use the bombs was made and 2 bombs ended the war in 3 days on September 2, 1945 but the costs were monumental and would be felt for generations to come. The use of the nuclear weapons was not moral but neither was an invasion.

Some important people at the time were quoted as saying; "The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold." -President Truman, "The use of the atomic bomb, with its indiscriminate killing of women and children, revolts my soul. -Herbert Hoover", "The German physicists knew at least so much about the manufacture and

construction of atomic bombs that it was clear to them that the manufacture of bombs in Germany could not succeed during the war. For this reason, they were spared the moral decision whether they should make an atomic bomb, and they had only worked on the uranium engine.” -Werner Heisenberg and “The only use for an atomic bomb is to keep somebody else from using one.” -George Wald.

I believe that the people that said these things had the same opinion on the use of the atomic bombs which was generally against it, with the exception of President Truman. Truman’s quote can be taken several ways. On one hand he thinks that the Japanese have been repaid for Pearl Harbor in full many times over. Maybe even too much. On the other hand it can be said that he believes they got what was coming to them for starting the war. I think that his opinion was that the U.S. went overboard but that it was a necessary course of action to swiftly end the war.

Yoshito Matsushige was a Japanese photographer that worked for a newspaper in Nagasaki during World War 2. He was just a little over a mile away from ground zero of the atomic bomb blast. He captured photos of the destruction moments after the blast and published them to show the world. He was recorded as saying that when the bomb exploded he was stunned because the world went white and he went blind shortly. The nearby school was evacuated beforehand thinking it was a normal air raid. It wasn’t so and the schoolers outside got serious burns from the blast. Matsushige took a picture of them but almost didn’t because of the horror of the scene. He saw a car closeby with a dozen burnt corpses in it. He was amazed by the destruction of the event and sought to tell the world before he died. His accounts speak to the power of these weapons and gives direct insight into the events. I believe that he would like to see the rest of the world think more about producing and using nuclear weapons.

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