

In Truman's Own Words



Harry S Truman served as vice-president from January 20, 1945 until Franklin Roosevelt's death on April 12th of the same year. The following comments are from two Truman diary entries before the bombings, and a speech and a letter after them.

6/17/45 "Apparently a very detailed plan (has been) worked out with the idea of invasion of Japan. I have to decide Japanese strategy – shall we invade Japan proper or shall we bomb and blockade? This is my hardest decision to date. But I'll make it when I have all the facts."

7/25/45 "We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world. ... We 'think' we have found the way to cause a disintegration of the atom. An experiment in the New Mexican desert was startling – to put it mildly. Thirteen pounds of the explosive caused the complete disintegration of a steel tower 60 feet high, created a crater 6 feet deep and 1,200 feet in diameter, knocked over a steel tower ½ mile away and knocked men down 10,000 yards away. The explosion was visible for more than 200 miles and audible for 40 miles and more.

The weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10th. I have told the Secretary of War, Mr. Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. ...

The target will be a purely military one and we will issue a warning statement (*called the Potsdam Proclamation*) asking Japs to surrender and save lives. I'm sure they will not do that, but we will have given them the chance. It is certainly a good thing for the world that Hitler's crowd or Stalin's (*dictator of the U.S.S.R.*) did not discover this atomic bomb. It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful."

8/9/45 "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. But that attack is only a warning of things to come. If Japan does not surrender, bombs will have to be dropped on her war industries, and unfortunately, thousands of civilian lives will be lost.

Having found the bomb, we have used it. We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans.

We shall continue to use it until we completely destroy Japan's power to make war. Only a Japanese surrender will stop us."

8/11/45 "Nobody is more disturbed over the use of the atomic bombs than I am, but I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and their murder of our prisoners of war. The only language they seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them.

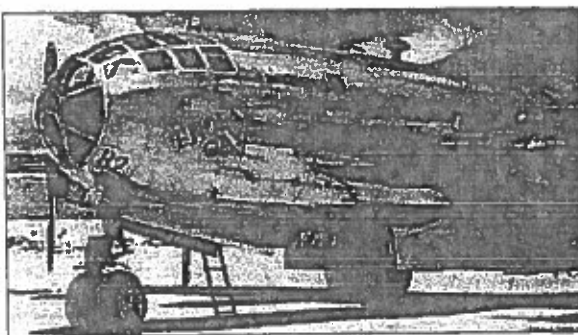
When you have to deal with a beast, you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true."

On Board the Enola Gay

Atomic bomb attacks brought Japan to its knees and prevented the planned murders of prisoners of war. The atomic bombs also ended Japan's brutality against Asians that involved germ warfare experiments and the deaths of an estimated 14 million Chinese and others. Veterans and most historians believe that the a-bombs prevented millions of casualties to soldiers from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as well as Japanese soldiers and civilians. The Enola Gay was the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb, "Little Boy," on the city of Hiroshima. General Paul Tibbets, then colonel, was the pilot of that plane.

This was his plane and these are his words:

"On August 6, 1945 as the Enola Gay approached the Japanese city of Hiroshima, I fervently hoped for success in the first use of a nuclear weapon. To me it meant putting an end to World War II. I viewed my mission as one to save lives."



The following comments are excerpts from a 2000 interview with General Tibbets by ALLMILITARY.com:

"Regardless of what people may think, I was nervous. I had to get the bomb over the target and detonate at a certain time. You don't try to think about emotions and what you are doing to the other side. Really, I don't think we knew what kind of damage (it would do). I was told the bomb was the equivalent of 20,000 tons of TNT in effect. When we saw, within moments after the bomb exploded, the damage it did took our breath away.

There was no special shielding (*on the plane*). The airplane experienced nothing but shock from the bombing. Later after the mission had been flown, the scientific data showed that the Enola Gay was 10.5 miles away when the bomb exploded. The plane got minor radiation but no serious radiation at all.

I had complete confidence. Everything they said was exactly what happened. I have no concern about it. I was perfectly happy to do it. I knew in my own heart that we would convince the Japanese of the futility (*pointlessness*) of continuing the fight. I was chosen by being told that was my job and I did it. I was 29 years old. ... I was not involved in the selection of the targets. The U.S. targeting group in Washington made the pick. I thought the selection of the targets were good by reason that they were all military targets.

I was not distraught. I did not lose a night's sleep over anything to do with the mission. If I were capable of it and it were needed to be done under the same circumstances, I would do it (*again*). ... We were all determined that was what we wanted to do for our country. ... Those that have approached me have always thanked me and told me I did the right thing.

"I get many thanks for the mission."



A Survivor's Story

My name is Sumi Komokura and I am a "hibakusha," or survivor of Hiroshima. Although I was only a small child at the time, I would like to tell you what I know. It started on the morning of August 6, 1945. That day began like most mornings at that point in the war. People started their days as usual, but many felt a nervousness. Although many cities in Japan had already been badly damaged by U.S. air attacks, Hiroshima had not yet been hit, so many people felt that it was only a matter of time. The streets were crowded as people began their days in offices, shops, schools, and hospitals. Some people on the street stopped to look at the clock on the domed building downtown. They did not know, or had forgotten, that the clock had stopped three days earlier at 8:15 a.m.

Then, all of a sudden, there was a blinding flash of bright yellow light. It was at 8:15 that morning of August 6th that almost every clock in Hiroshima stopped. The bomb exploded 700 yards above the ground and the people below were vaporized. Nothing was left of the people in the area but white shadows on the burned, black sidewalks.

After the fireball an enormous shock wave thundered across the city, crushing buildings and burying people in the ruins. There were relatively few survivors in the four square miles in the center of the city. Those that did live did so because of luck or the few concrete buildings that stood at the time. I understand that the bomb was targeted to explode over the T-Bridge at the fork in the rivers in the center of the city, but it missed its mark and exploded instead over Dr. Shima's hospital, which is considered to be "ground zero" or the hypocenter of the bomb. 88% of the people within 1500 feet of the hypocenter were killed instantly or died the first day. Most others died within months. ALL of the people who survived the "pikadon," the bombing, would eventually come to learn their exact distance from ground zero at 8:15 that morning.

After the explosion, the air was filled with thick, gray dust. There were burned and blackened bodies everywhere. Survivors headed for the rivers that offered the only refuge from the fire that burned throughout the city filled with burning bodies and debris. Many people were burned so badly you could not tell men from women. The hair of many was frizzled and stood on end. People's eyebrows were burned off. Most were naked or their clothes hung in shreds from their bodies. On some their clothing burned and left patterns on their skin of undershirts, suspenders, or the flowers from their kimonos. Many were vomiting. Some had skin hanging from them. Most were bloody and many were blinded.

Many people walked supporting others, though they themselves were injured. Most walked with their heads bowed with no expression. There were cries from all around of "Mizu! – Water!" I heard of a father cradling his infant, trying to give it water, not realizing the baby was already dead. Children screamed for their mothers. Some people did stop to help others along the way, but most did not. The destruction was too great and the people were numb. Most had to fend for themselves and their own families. Later, many people blamed themselves for showing no kindness to less fortunate ones.

As people reached the rivers, they saw more death and horror. A friend described to me, "From upstream a great many black and burned corpses came floating down the river. I pushed them away and drank the water." Survival was the most important thing.

As the day wore on aid stations were set up in different parts of the city. It was in one of these that my father, Akira Komokura, was involved. He was a doctor at Communications Hospital and was there, ¾ miles from Dr. Shima's hospital, when the bomb exploded. My

mother, a nurse, was with me at her parental house, nearly 3½ miles from the hypocenter. She went to help my father as soon as she realized the city had been hit. She has many times described to me her feelings as she headed toward the hospital with her bicycle loaded with food for the injured. She also felt the shame for not helping those she saw along the way, but she knew she would be needed at the hospital, so she did not stop.

The scene at the hospital was one of mass confusion. Broken glass, plaster, and bodies were all over. As the day went on, doctors well enough to work tried to dress the wounds of the injured that streamed into the hospital, but they could not help fast enough. Many people died before they could receive any treatment. Everywhere there were screams for help and for water. Some doctors only treated those patients they believed could be saved. As the day went on, most of the patients were nauseated and vomiting. Within two to three days others began coming in with sore gums, purple spots on their bodies, and spitting blood. The doctors could not understand what kind of weapon could cause such symptoms.

In the first days people outside began cremating their loved ones. Fires from mass cremations could be seen throughout the city. People began putting signs in the ashes asking if anyone had seen their family members. My father tried to find his own parents in this way, but he never did. Since there was little left to eat, city officials organized stations around the city to hand out kanpan, or dried bread, and rice balls.

On August 9th at 11:02 the Americans bombed Nagasaki. It was several days before the people of Hiroshima heard, though, since the Japanese government was showing great caution in discussing the new weapon. After about a week, rumors reached the people that the cities had been destroyed by energy from atoms being split in two. By the fourth week the symptoms of the ill were diagnosed as "radiation sickness" caused by the splitting of the atoms. By this time some people who had survived the bomb seemingly uninjured were running high fevers and losing their hair. Then they would die.

On September 2nd, our government surrendered. Emperor Hirohito told the people in a radio address that Japan would have to "bear the unbearable," but many were angry. Some thought he should not have surrendered, and others that he had surrendered too late. After the war a city government was set up under Allied direction, and slowly the city began to rebuild.

Today Hiroshima is a beautiful modern city. There is a 100-yard wide Peace Boulevard that leads to Peace Park with a museum that displays artifacts of the bombing. But even though the city is rebuilt, the lives of many hibakusha are not. To this day they are scarred. Some have physical scars: disfigured faces, fingers fused together, or they have pink, rubbery scar tissue over their burns. Even those that are not scarred live with painful memories, and many have become sick with cancer and other ailments. Both of my own parents have died from cancer. Hibakusha are considered to be undesirable employees since they are absent more often. There is also a greater risk of birth defects among hibakusha, so understandably many people do not want to marry them.

And yet, the people who have lived through one of the most horrible experiences in history do not blame the Americans for their suffering. They believe that it was war, and anything can happen in a war. Our city once sent a message to the United States signed by 75,000 citizens which read, "The people of Hiroshima ask nothing of the world, except we be allowed to offer ourselves as an exhibit for peace." I can tell you that this is truly the wish of most hibakusha, and that is why I must tell my story.