

# **Remembering the Atomic Bombings: Saving Lives? Ending the War?**

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### **Abstract**

Recognizing that no hard documentary evidence exists to settle the question definitively, the author, nonetheless, argues that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki neither ended the war in the Pacific nor saved any lives, as has been asserted since 1945. While acknowledging a strong coincidental relationship between the bombings and the Japanese surrender, the author argues that no causal relationship can be discerned when the events are examined closely. This is the case because, in the first place, the claim that 500,000 to a million American lives were saved leads to literally incredible statistical anomalies. In the second place, the claim that the bombings "forced" Prime Minister Suzuki's government to surrender cannot be sustained once one examines the question as an essentially political issue from the Suzuki government's perspective in Tokyo. In the conclusion, the fact that the bomb did not end the Pacific war suggests strongly that it also lacks "deterrent" power, the power to prevent war, as has been claimed since the 1950's.

## Remembering the Atomic Bombings: Saving Lives? Ending the War?

Who shall control our memory of the atomic bombings? The victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki who suffered its unimaginable horrors? The veterans of World War II who experienced the unimaginable euphoria of the Japanese surrender? Or, the uncounted generations born after August 1945 who shall live their lives in the shadow of the mushroom cloud?

There is as yet no clear answer. Still, as those born after August 1945 strain to reconcile the ever-present reality of the mushroom cloud with the conflicting testimony of the victims and the veterans, certain fault lines are distinguishable. Both victims and veterans begin in the same way. Both tell of a world aching with exhaustion and fatigue over a war that had lasted far too long, of a sullen world, morose at the prospect that the bloodshed would continue on indefinitely. But, then, their stories diverge: The victims tell of the terror inside of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the veterans, of the euphoria outside. Victims like Shoda Shinoe remember, "The large skull/is the teacher's./Gathered around it,/smaller skulls"<sup>1</sup> (Nakano, ed. 1995: 74); while veterans like Paul Fussell (1981: 29) recall, "When the atomic bombs were dropped and news began to circulate... that we would not be obliged to run up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being mortared and shelled, for all the fake manliness of our facades we cried with relief and joy. We were going to live. We were going to grow up to adulthood after all."

Although divergent, the testimony of both veteran and victim must be accepted as not only true but unprecedented as well. The story from inside Hiroshima and Nagasaki is unprecedented on two counts: First, it is the story of a unique event in human history—the atomic bombings—second, despite being unique, it is strikingly similar to the stories told by other victims of the war, by the victims of the firebombings of Tokyo, Dresden, and Hamburg; or by the victims of the Nazi Holocaust, the Rape of Nanking, the Bataan Death March, or any of a thousand and one other atrocities that had occurred during the war. Likewise, the story from outside of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is also unprecedented on two counts: First, it is the story of a unique event—the unimaginable euphoria of the Japanese surrender being unlike anything else that occurred during the war—second, it transforms the atomic bomb from a monster into a savior, the bombs' unimaginable power ending the war and saving lives.

Monster or savior? Savior or Monster? Since both stories are not only true but, more important, beyond the experience of those born after August 1945, which of the two

conflicting testimonies are future generations to believe? If they accept the veterans' testimony, then their anxieties over the mushroom cloud are misplaced. Atomic bombs are saviors with the power to end wars and, perhaps, even to “deter” or prevent them. On the other hand, if they accept the victims' testimony, then their anxieties are well placed. Atomic bombs are monsters with the power to annihilate human kind. While sharp, the dilemma is not irresolvable. Two of its three elements are solid and incontestable, leaving only the third to be evaluated. First, the anxieties of those who live in the Atomic Age cannot be denied. Who would be so hearty to suggest that a nuclear Armageddon is not a very real possibility? Who would wish to guarantee that madmen will never again attain power, as the madmen who started World War II did, and, in their contempt for all, ignite a nuclear Apocalypse? Second, the testimony of the victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki cannot be denied. Undeniably, two atomic bombs were dropped, and hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children died horrible deaths, deaths which continue down to the present day. That leaves only the testimony of the veterans to be evaluated.

The first observation to make is that the veterans' testimony is ambiguous: On the one hand, their euphoria at the end of the war cannot be denied. When Paul Fussell (1981:27) and his comrades thought, "...of the lives which would have been lost in an invasion of Japan's home islands—a staggering number of Americans but millions more Japanese—and you thank God for the atomic bomb,"<sup>2</sup> both their joy and their relief were tangible. Even today, one can see it in the newspaper headlines and frenzied page-one photos of the day. On the other hand, this expression of euphoria does not produce a verifiable proposition. To say that the atomic bombings ended the war is merely to point out an interesting coincidence: During the early weeks of August 1945, Japan surrendered, and, coincidentally, several atomic bombs were also dropped. The coincidence is, of course, undeniable, just as it is undeniable that, during Christmas, Santa Clause appear in department stores. In order to move beyond undeniable coincidences to verifiable propositions, one must assert a causal relationship. One must assert that the atomic bombings not only "ended" the war but in point of fact actually "caused" or "forced" the Japanese to surrender.

The second observation to make is that no simple litmus test exists for deciding who or what "caused" the Japanese to surrender. No single document or collection of documents will ever be discovered that will "prove" beyond a shadow of a doubt that the atomic bombings either did or did not "force" Japan to surrender. The importance of this fact cannot be overstated. In light of their great historical and political importance, one would very much like to find hard documentary evidence one way or the other. For, without hard evidence,

how is one to calm the deeply felt emotions that the atomic bombings arouse? The depth of these emotions was demonstrated most dramatically during the bitter controversies that swirled around the planned Smithsonian exhibition of the Enola Gay in 1995, the Fiftieth Anniversary of the bombings.<sup>3</sup> More important, how are the generations born after 1945 to move past the emotions of both the victims and the veterans and on to a balanced evaluation of the atomic bombings? If hard, documentary "proof" existed, all would be easy. But no such documents exist, nor could they exist.

Instead, one must cast one's net wide investigating all of the complex circumstances and events before drawing the most likely conclusion. This lack of a simple documentary "proof" is, of course, the reason the United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) concluded in the words of Paul Nitze that, "Based upon a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945 [the planned date for Operation Olympic, the invasion of Kyushu], Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated" (USSBS 1946:13). While Paul Nitze's conclusion is undoubtedly true—Japan was indeed utterly defeated by the summer of 1945 and its leaders knew it—its very truth renders it unhelpful: Yes, the entire course of the American war in the Pacific—the cumulative effect of each battle, of each Japanese defeat, from Pearl Harbor to Okinawa—is surely the ultimate reason Japan surrendered, but to say that everything caused the surrender is to argue that nothing in particular caused it, which is an unproductive position to take. Something more is needed.

The third observation is that the claim that the atomic bombings ended the war and forced Japan to surrender raises an essentially political question. Prime Minister Suzuki and his colleagues in the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War were politicians struggling with fundamentally political issues. To understand why they surrendered when they did, one must, therefore, investigate the politics and policy choices that surrounded them in the early weeks of August 1945. To begin such an investigation, one must divide the claim that the atomic bombings ended the war and forced Japan to surrender into its two constituent parts: First, that atomic bombings "caused" or "forced" Japan to surrender and, second, that this saved lives. Taking the second claim first, one is immediately struck by its hypothetical character. The fact of the matter is that the Home Islands were not invaded. Moreover, as the USSBS and others have documented, there is considerable evidence that they never would have been invaded. But how is it possible to draw a solid conclusion from something that did

not happen? Had I been killed while driving home last evening, one could conclude definitively that I had died in an auto accident last evening. However, since I was not killed yesterday evening, it is not possible to conclude much of anything. Why my life was spared last evening will forever remain an unresolvable mystery. Moreover, because the claim that the atomic bombings saved lives is hypothetical, estimating the number of lives "saved" is extraordinarily difficult. Just how difficult is best illustrated by observing the exponential growth between 1945 and 1955 in the number of American lives "saved."

On 9 August 1945, the day Nagasaki was bombed, President Harry S. Truman told the nation in a radio address that he had ordered the atomic bombs dropped "to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans" (*NY Times* 10 August 1945:12). Two years later, in a February 1947 article in *Harper's*, former Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson estimated that over a million American casualties would have been sustained in the invasion of Japan. In 1953, Winston Churchill estimated American casualties at a million American lives lost (6:638), while, in his 1955 *Memoirs* (417), Truman revised his 1945 estimate from "thousands" to 500,000 American lives lost.

What makes these escalating estimates suspect is not so much their deviation from Truman's original estimates but rather their unacceptable statistical consequences: During the Pacific War, the ratio of Americans killed to total American casualties was 1 to 5, while the ratio of American to Japanese dead was 1 to 22. As a result, on the high side, Churchill's figure of a million American dead implies five million American casualties or 31.25% of the entire American armed forces of 16 million and 22 million Japanese killed or 226.8% of the entire Japanese armed forces of 9.7 million (of which only 2.5 million were deployed in Japan itself). On the low side, Truman's figure of a half million American dead, 70% more than the 292,000 Americans actually killed in all of World War II, implies 2.5 million American casualties and 11 million Japanese deaths or 113.4% of the entire strength of the Japanese armed forces. Clearly, the post-1945 casualty estimates bear no relation to reality. In point of fact, we now know from declassified documents, that Truman's initial estimate of "thousands and thousands" of lives saved reflects the casualty estimates made by General MacArthur and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In 1945, General MacArthur's staff had estimated that the American losses for Operation Olympic, the invasion of Kyushu planned for 1 November 1945, were the same as those suffered on Luzon—31,000 casualties, 7,000-8,000 deaths. If the war continued after that, making an invasion of the Kanto plain necessary, the worst case estimate for the two operations was 20,000 American deaths, but most probably less than 15,000.<sup>4</sup>

But, even if the hypothetical character of the estimates of lives "saved" by the atomic bombings creates great difficulties, those difficulties do not speak to the heart of the matter. The point is that the Japanese surrendered. The war ended. Even if no lives were saved, forcing the end of the war alone would clearly and fully justify the dropping of the atomic bombs. More, if a causal connection could be established, it would demonstrate the transcendent power of the bomb, a "deterrent" power which could perhaps prevent future wars. The problem, however, is that no hard, documentary evidence exists to support the claim. In the absence of such hard evidence, what political circumstances or inferences do exist that would lead one to believe that the bombs possessed the transcendent power to "cause" the Japanese to surrender?

In order to answer this question, one must first answer another question: Who surrendered? President Truman and his advisors in Washington? Or, Primer Suzuki and his advisors in Tokyo? Once asked, the answer to this preliminary question seems obvious enough. However, almost without exception, it has been systematically ignored. Instead of focusing on the situation in Tokyo, most discussions focus on the situation in Washington, asking why Truman allowed the bombs to be dropped. As is well known, Truman allowed the atomic bombs to be dropped because he and his advisors could think of no reason not to drop them, "The question was whether we wanted to save our people and Japanese as well and win the war, or whether we wanted to take a chance on winning the war without killing all our young men [by dropping the atomic bombs]" (Giovannitti and Freed 1965:321). When faced with a Hobson's choice like this, the decision is a foregone conclusion. Yet, to say that the bombs were dropped because Truman and his advisors in Washington believed that they would end the war and save lives is not to say that Primer Suzuki and his advisors in Tokyo actually surrendered for those reasons. The irrelevance of what was thought or believed in Washington could not be more complete.

Turning, therefore, to the situation in Tokyo, one is immediately discouraged. The documents and evidence are incomplete, ambiguous, and contradictory. Nonetheless, two common sense political considerations offer, if not proof, at least some understanding of what did and did not motivate Primer Suzuki and his government to surrender when they did. The first common sense consideration is built upon the fact that, if the atomic bombs did "cause" the Japanese to surrender, then one should be able to identify a chain of causation that would link the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima at 8:15 am 6 August to the initial Japanese surrender offer on 11 August.

The first news of the Hiroshima bombing reached Tokyo about noon on the sixth but would not have caused any great interest until much later since it was not unusual for Japanese cities to be devastated by American bombings. Sixty-four had already gone up in smoke. Therefore, it was not until the next day, 7 August, after more complete reports had been received from Hiroshima and after President Truman's announcement of the atomic bombing had been received and translated, that officials in Tokyo became aware that something unusual had happened. Enemy propaganda, however, is not to be relied upon. The Americans said it was an atomic bomb, but was it really? The Cabinet did not think so, as Chief Cabinet Secretary Sakomizu has said, "President Truman [in his statement] mentioned that it was an atomic bomb but we didn't believe what he said" (Giovannitti and Freed 1965:266). And, indeed, it was not until 5:00pm on 8 August that Dr Taro Takemi finally confirmed officially that the bomb was an atomic bomb (Takemi 1983:618).

While some Japanese officials learned of these results that night, most would not have heard of them until the next morning, 9 August. August 9th, however, was an unusually portentous day. Not only did it begin with the bombing of Nagasaki at 10:58am but it was also the day the Suzuki government began the process that led to surrender. From 10:00 in the morning until 8:00 that evening, the Cabinet spent all of 9 August discussing—not the atomic bombings—but the Potsdam Ultimatum for unconditional surrender in light of the Soviet entry into the Pacific War the day before.

It was during these protracted and fruitless discussions that the news of the Nagasaki bombing reached the Cabinet at shortly after noon. But ten hours of discussion resolved nothing. The same Cabinet ministers repeated yet again the very same arguments that they had been using for over six months. At 8:00pm, the Cabinet adjourned in deadlock. At this time, the inner cabinet, the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War, went to the Imperial Palace where, at 11:30, the fateful Imperial Conference took place at which the Emperor stated his personal preference for surrender.

While the final surrender was not accepted by Secretary of State James Byrnes for another four days, midnight 9-10 August was the moment when the logjam was broken and Japan's surrender became only a formality. Consequently, if one were to argue that the atomic bombings forced Japan to surrender, then one would be obliged to demonstrate that the bombs exerted their influence during the four-day period from 6 August to the early morning hours of 10 August. But more realistically, one would have to demonstrate that they exerted their influence during the twenty hour period which began when the decision makers received confirmation from their own scientists that the Hiroshima bomb was indeed an



atomic bomb on the morning of the 9th and 3 or 4 o'clock on the morning of the 10th after the Imperial Conference, when the Cabinet took its decision to surrender.

Such an argument would have to demonstrate that during this twenty hour period the two-dozen or so old men who ruled Japan could have put aside all their preoccupations with running the war and deciding the fate of their country and come to grips with the horrible reality that is an atomic bomb. The argument would have to demonstrate that during this crucial twenty hour period these old men could comprehend the physical properties of an uncontrolled nuclear chain reaction, that they could comprehend the *then unknown* biological and environmental effects of radiation, that they could understand how the atomic fires vaporize steel and bone and brick, and that they could come to this understanding without having seen an atomic explosion, without having seen movies of an atomic explosion, without having seen pictures of the victims of an atomic explosion, in short, without any of the information that is available to us now. Consequently, when one examines the events of 6 to 10 August in detail, it becomes extremely difficult to identify any causal chain that would link the suffering of the victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the decision-makers in Tokyo. Indeed, the fact that these devices are almost unimaginable in their power and devastation forces one to conclude that the two-dozen old men who made the decision to surrender could not have imagined their catastrophic consequences.

The second common sense consideration is built upon the fact that the primary concern of every politician is either how to get into power or how to stay in power once he has gotten in. Premier Suzuki and his colleagues were politicians. Not only were they politicians but they were politicians who had just gotten into power, having formed a new government in May, following the collapse of Premier Koiso's government in the week after the American landings on Okinawa in April. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to conclude that what worried this group of politicians most in August 1945 was the fear of losing power, the fear of their government collapsing. Perhaps, they gave some thought to the unimaginable devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They may even have sympathized with the anxieties felt by Paul Fussell and millions of American soldiers that, unless the war ended soon, large numbers of Americans were going to die running up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being mortared and shelled. But, these would have been fleeting concerns. Like all politicians, their primary concern would have been the fear of losing power, the fear of their government collapsing.

In light of this entirely political fear, one is better able to evaluate the first two possible "causes" of the Japanese surrender listed by Paul Nitze and the USSBS—the atomic

bombings and the Russian entry into the Pacific War. The atomic bombings in no way undermined or threatened the Suzuki government's hold on power; the Russian entry did. This is the case because the Suzuki government had a policy to deal with the atomic bombings, but no policy to deal with the Russian entry into the war. The Suzuki government of course had no policy concerning atomic bombings, in particular, the existence of which it was totally ignorant until Hiroshima. But it did have a policy concerning the destruction of whole cities, which was the practical effect of the atomic bombings. It was not a particularly good policy, but it worked. Indeed, it was the same policy that Churchill had developed during the Battle of Britain and that Hitler had followed in Germany when the Allies bombed 61 of the 62 cities in Germany with a population of 100,000 or more. Namely, to bury the dead, care for the injured, clear the rubble out of the streets, and ignore the devastation as much as possible. Just as this policy had worked well in Britain and Germany, so it had sufficed in Japan, having survived the devastation of 64 Japanese cities since March, the Suzuki government was in no danger of falling. After the first 64, who can imagine that the devastation of only two more cities truly threatened Suzuki's hold on power?

In stark contrast though, the Suzuki government had no policy to deal with the Soviet entry into the Pacific War, which occurred on 8 August 1945. To understand why, one must return to May 1945 when, after long and bitter negotiations in the wake of the fall of the Koiso government, Prime Minister Suzuki's colleagues finally agreed upon a two track policy for forming a new government and prosecuting the war: The military track was to complete preparations to repulse the American invasion of the Home Islands. The diplomatic track was to pursue negotiations with Moscow aimed at a renewal of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, which was due to expire in April 1946. Then, if the negotiations were successful, the Suzuki government would ask the Soviets to use their good offices with the Americans to negotiate, first, a conditional surrender and, then, a peace treaty.

That this policy was doomed to failure given Stalin's promise at Yalta to enter the Pacific War three months after the defeat of Nazi Germany is of course not the point. The point is that as long as the Suzuki government had a policy, any policy, it could and would remain in power. However, on 8 August 1945, the worst possible catastrophe happened. The Soviet Union declared war against Japan. As a result, the Suzuki government's *only* policy was in shambles. It was going to fall for lack of a policy, any policy.

Not only was the government's *only* policy a dead letter, but an American invasion was no longer hypothetical. It was certain. Supported by the Red Army in Manchuria, the Americans could land in Japan with complete confidence of success. Even the most

punishing blow that the Imperial Army could deliver to the landing forces would be of no avail since there was now no way to follow up such a military success diplomatically, the road to Moscow having been closed. More ominous still, total chaos, complete anarchy, was about to break out. Japan had suffered through three changes of government in the last year; could she survive another? It was unlikely. Who would lead the new government? What would its policies be? A fight to the death? Can a government be formed based upon a policy of national suicide? Consequently, after the Suzuki government fell, as it must, there would be a prolonged period of internal political crisis in the middle of which would come the American invasion. An invasion and no government to meet it. What could possibly be worse?

In sum, the Suzuki government had a policy to deal with the rapid destruction of two cities, a policy tested and proved in 64 other Japanese cities, 61 German cities, and several British cities. However, crucially, the Suzuki government had no policy to meet the Soviet declaration of war; it did not even the hope of a policy. It was going to fall, and Japan was going to descend into anarchy. Thus, from the point of view of the Premier Suzuki and his advisers in Tokyo, the final straw was the Soviet declaration of war on 8 August 1945. It created a situation in which there were no policy alternatives.

To say this however is not to say that the Suzuki government did not find the atomic bombings very useful. As Cabinet Secretary Sakomizu has said, the atomic bombs "provided an excuse" that was very useful as a face-saving device for the military (Giovannitti and Freed 1965:315): Of course the Imperial Army could have defeated the American landings, but it could not defeat this new, inhuman device, and so on and so forth in like vein. While useful to soften the blow after the decision to surrender had been made, the atomic bombings never threatened the Suzuki government's hold on power. Consequently, it is extremely difficult not to concur with Lieutenant General Seizo Arisue, G-2 of the Army General Staff, "The two things happened at almost the same time. It was a bigger blow for me that Russia joined the war than the atomic bomb. However, when it comes to shock the atomic bomb created such a disastrous scene" (Giovannitti and Freed 1965:333). General Arisue's opinion is particularly revealing because he headed the official party that was sent to Hiroshima on 7 August 1945 to investigate the "new weapon." While not among the decision-makers, he was nonetheless the highest-ranking Japanese official to actually have seen the effects of the atomic bombings. But if he, who had actually seen Hiroshima, felt that the Soviet entry into the war was the "bigger blow," then what must his superiors who had not see Hiroshima have thought?

In the end then, an evaluation of the testimony of the veterans forces one to observe that their euphoria at not being "obliged to run up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being mortared and shelled" was overwhelming, real, and sincere. However, the reality and sincerity of their euphoria does not support an additional claim that the atomic bombings actually "caused" or "forced" the Suzuki government to surrender. Quite the contrary. The relationship between the atomic bombings and the end of the war is one of pure coincidence, and not of cause. Is any other conclusion really possible?

This conclusion, however, forces one to ask again why President Truman allowed the atomic bombs to be dropped. There are, I believe, two reasons. The first reason is made up of one part hope and one part bureaucratic imperative. The hopeful part arose out of a sincere belief that no alternative existed. I have already President Truman's words above; here, let me cite the words of his Secretary of State, James Byrnes: "Any weapon that would bring an end to the war and save a million casualties among American boys was justified and we are talking about dealing with the people who hadn't hesitated at Pearl Harbor to make a sneak attack destroying not only American ships [7 destroyed] but the lives of many American sailors [2,300 military and 60 civilians]. It was our duty to bring the war to an end at the earliest possible moment" (Giovannitti and Freed 1965:321).

That Byrnes, Truman, and many others in Washington hoped and sincerely believed that the atomic bombings would or did "end the war and save lives" is not to be denied. That this hope, this sincere belief rendered them incapable of thinking of any reason not to drop the atomic bombs is also utterly true. Yet, crucially, what was hoped for and believed in Washington could not and did not affect what was decided in Tokyo. To move this sincere belief from the realm of coincidence to cause, one must discover a causal link that connects the horrors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with the decision-makers in Tokyo, a task that cannot be done. The hope, the belief, and the coincidence most certainly existed; the causal connection did not.

The bureaucratic part provides the operational mechanism for sustaining the hope by minimizing any reflection on whether to use or not use the atomic bombs. This mechanical, bureaucratic imperative was articulated best by General Leslie R. Groves, Commanding Officer of the Manhattan Engineer District, the code name for the atomic-bomb project, who observed: "There was never any question in my mind but that we would use the bomb when it was ready.... the best way I can think of to have delayed the project would have been to start discussing throughout the project: 'Shall we use the bomb or not when we get it?'" (Giovannitti and Freed 1965:320. See also Rhodes 1986:688.) Based upon this premise,

Groves constructed a self-actuating system. The bombs would be dropped unless someone spoke up and stopped it, as he said: “As far as I [Groves] was concerned, his [Truman's] decision was one of noninterference—basically a decision not to upset the existing plans” (Giovannitti and Freed 1965:246).

In fine, Truman never actually ordered the atomic bombs to be dropped; he simple remained silent; he did not interfere in the bureaucratic machine set in motion by President Franklin Roosevelt five years beforehand. The Manhattan Engineer District has been authorized to make atomic bombs; it had made the bombs as authorized; therefore, it used the bombs as planned. Who would be so foolhardy to sand in the way and stop this well-oiled bureaucratic machine?

This brings us to the second reason. If the bureaucratic imperative itself was not enough reason to drop the atomic bombs, then the clear political consequences of failing to do so were. As General Groves stated with casual brutality: “I said they could not fail to use this bomb because if they didn't use it they would immediately cast a lot of reflection on Mr. Roosevelt and on the basis of that why did you spend all this money [over \$2billion] and all this effort and then when you got it, why didn't you use it? Also it would have come out sooner or later in a Congressional hearing if nowhere else just when we could have dropped the bomb if we didn't use it. And then knowing American politics, you know as well as I do that there would have been elections fought on the basis that every mother whose son was killed after such and such a date—the blood was on the head of the President. (Giovannitti and Freed 1965:322).

Thus, for both the Japanese and the American governments, the myth that the atomic bombs “ended the war and saved lives” was useful. For the Japanese, it was useful to save face for the Imperial Army and Navy in their moment of utter defeat; for the Americans, it was useful to explain and excuse the horrors of the atomic bombings and, later, after the Cold War grew hot, to justify the continued building of nuclear bombs because they had “ended” one war and would surely “deter” or prevent another, a hope that the Korean and Vietnam Wars soon dispelled. Moreover, both governments were able to sustain this convenient myth because both the Japanese and the American people were too war-weary to care, too overjoyed with the end of the war to care how it had really ended. With peace at hand, with the slaughter ended, who cared what the cause was?

But, still, the uncounted generations born after August 1945 will care. They, who will ultimately control our memory of the atomic bombings—the grand children and great-grand children of both the veterans and victims—will inevitably find the testimony of the victims

more relevant and compelling than that of the veterans. For, the lived reality of future generations will not be one of euphoria at the ending of a world war long forgotten, but rather a continuing fear and anxiety over life lived in the ominously abiding shadow of the mushroom cloud. This reality resonates with the terror of the victims, not the euphoria of the veterans. The bomb is, therefore, a monster, and not a savior.

More sobering though, precisely because this monster lacked the power to end the Pacific War, no reason exists to suspect that it ever has or ever will possess the power to “deter” or prevent war. Why, then, the generations to come will ask, do we need these things that neither end nor prevent war, these things that only generate fear and anxiety?

### Notes

1. [Japanese text for Shoda tanka]
2. Fussell is here citing an unattributed passage from William Manchester's *Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War*. A slightly different version of Fussell's essay can be found at Fussell, Paul. 1988. *Thank God for the Atomic Bomb and Other Essays*. New York: Summit.
3. For more on the Enola Gay controversies see: Bernstein, Barton J. 1995. "Misconceived patriotism," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* May/June; Goldberg, Stanley. 1995. "Smithsonian suffers Legionnaires' disease," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* May/June, 28-33; Nobile, Philip. 1995. *Judgement at Smithsonian*. New York: Marlow.
4. For more details on the number of lives "saved" and the estimates of casualties see Bernstein, Barton J. 1986. "A Postwar Myth: 500,000 U.S. Lives Saved," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist* 42:6 and Miles, Jr., Rufus E. 1985. "Hiroshima: The Strange Myth of Half a Million American Lives Saved," *International Security* 10:2.

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