

AIM: Why did the United States drop the Atomic Bomb on Japan?

Some Allied officials believed that an invasion of Japan would cost a million casualties or more. In bloody battles on the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the Japanese had shown that they would rather fight to the death than surrender. Some Japanese pilots chose to become **kamikaze** pilots who undertook suicide missions, crashing their explosive-laden aircraft into US warships. They hoped that this would stop the Allies and save their country from defeat.

While Allied military leaders prepared for an invasion, US scientist offered another way to end the war. Since the early 1900s, scientists had been working on splitting the atom. If successful, this allowed them to create an explosive far more powerful than anything known to man. In July 1945, the first successful test of an **atom bomb** took place in Alamogordo, New Mexico. News of this success was brought to new president Harry S. Truman, who had taken over after the unexpected death of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Allies issued a warning to Japan to surrender or face "utter and complete destruction...a rain of ruin from the air the likes of which has never been seen on this Earth." When the Japanese ignored the deadline, the US took action. On August 6, 1945, an American plane dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. The bomb instantly killed 70,000 people. Japan again refused to surrender and another atomic bomb was dropped on August 9, 1945 on the city of Nagasaki, killing 40,000 people. Still, the Japanese refused to surrender. Finally, Emperor Hirohito stepped in and forced the government to surrender. On September 2, 1945, the formal peace treaty was signed and World War II was over.

DOCUMENT #1:

An Allied demand for an immediate and unconditional surrender was rejected by the Japanese military so the US government felt it was necessary to drop the atomic bomb on Japan to bring about the end of World War II.

...The most striking result of the atomic bombs was the great number of casualties. The exact number of dead and injured will never be known because of the confusion after the explosions. Persons unaccounted for might have been burned beyond recognition, crushed beyond recognition in the falling buildings, disposed of in one the mass cremations of the first week of recovery, or driven out of the city to die or recover without any record remaining...The survey believes the dead at Hiroshima to have been between 70,000 and 80,000, with an equal number injured; at Nagasaki over 35,000 dead and somewhat more than that injured...

...The flash of the explosion, which was extremely brief, emitted radiant heat traveling at the speed of light. Flash burns thus followed the explosion instantaneously...

...Survivors in the two cities stated that people who were in the open directly under the explosion of the bomb were so severely burned that the skin was charred dark brown or black and that they died within a few minutes or hours...

1. Describe the effects of dropping the bombs. _____

2. Compare the scale of destruction in Hiroshima with that in Nagasaki. _____

DOCUMENT #2:

In February, 1947, former Secretary of war Henry Stimson wrote an article for Harper's Magazine justifying the reason for dropping the atomic bomb on Japan.

... The possible atomic weapon was considered to be a new and tremendously powerful explosive, as legitimate as any other of the deadly explosive weapons of modern war. The entire purpose was the production of a military weapon; on no other ground could the wartime expenditure of so much time and money have been justified. ...

3. What was one of Secretary of War Stimson's justifications for dropping the atomic bomb?

DOCUMENT #3:

An eye witness account of the Hiroshima atomic bomb.

I lay there buried alive under our house when the bomb hit our city. The bomb started great fires. The fires came nearer and nearer to us as workers tried to reach us. "Hurry!" they cried to one another as the flames came nearer. At last the workers reached us and pulled me and my mother out from under everything, before the flames reached us.

Now later, as I thought of the pilot of the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on our city, I cried, "I hate him. I hate him." The people with marked faces from the effects of the bomb made me cry, "I hate him." I saw people suffering a terrible, slow death. Again and again I cried, as I saw these people, "I hate that pilot, I hate him!"

I HATED HIM

Now some time later I was in the USA and that pilot appeared in a meeting I attended. As I looked at him, I hated him with a bitter hatred.

But then I listened to what he told us of his experience the day when he dropped the bomb on our city. I heard him say, "When I flew over the city after we dropped the bomb, I cried, 'O God, what have I done!'" I realized he found it difficult to speak of that day. He could hardly speak for tears.

As this happened I suddenly realized my hatred of him was wrong. It only made me unhappy also. As I did this, it was as if a heavy load fell off my shoulders.

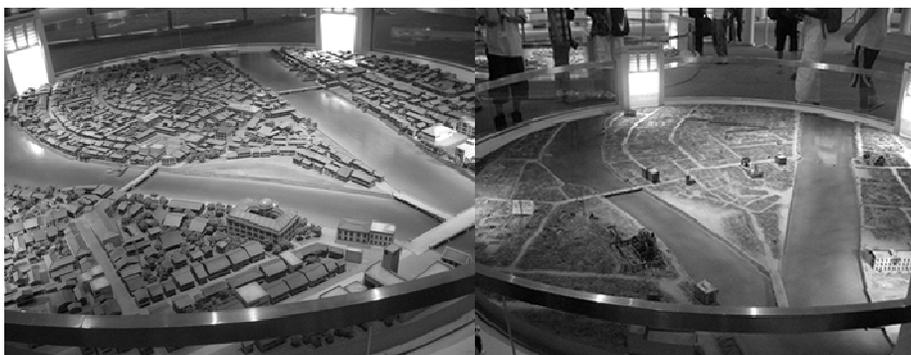
- 4. What were the conditions like in Hiroshima right after the atomic bomb was dropped? _____

- 5. How did the Japanese feel about the people who bombed them? _____

DOCUMENT #3:

Here is an image of models of the city of Hiroshima before and after the dropping of the atomic bomb.

Before...After



- 6. What was the effect of the dropping of the atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima? _____

- 7. Judging by the amount of damage to Hiroshima, do you think the casualty numbers of 70,000 to 80,000 dead are correct? Why? _____
