



9,700 pounds

Weight of "Little Boy," the first of two nuclear bombs used on Japan

ATOMIC HERITAGE FOUNDATION



A **Little Boy** bomb like the one dropped on Hiroshima, on display at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, in Dayton, Ohio

Should the U.S. Have Dropped the Atom Bomb?

Seventy years ago, the U.S. became the first and only nation to use a nuclear weapon in war

At least nine countries now have nuclear weapons, but the United States remains the only country that actually used an atomic bomb against an enemy. On Aug. 6, 1945, the U.S. dropped an atom bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima; three days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Six days later, on August 15, Japan announced it would surrender, effectively ending World War II. But the decision to use this devastating weapon remains controversial. (For more on the development and impact of the atomic bomb, see *Times Past*, p. 18.)

Analyze the arguments.

Cast your vote and see instant results.

YES Dropping the atomic bomb was necessary to end the war with Japan at the earliest possible moment. By the early summer of 1945, Japanese leaders knew they couldn't win. But they fought on in hopes of securing better surrender terms.

President Harry S. Truman recognized that he had several options to convince Japan to end the war: 1) intensifying the already-heavy bombing of Japanese cities; 2) waiting for the Soviet Union, an ally in defeating Germany, to join the war against Japan; 3) telling Japan that the U.S. would allow Emperor Hirohito to remain on his throne after the war; and 4) invading Japan with ground troops.

But there was no guarantee that any of these options, or a combination of them, would force the Japanese to surrender quickly, and each one posed serious military, political, and diplomatic risks. Invading Japan may have been the least uncertain militarily, but it carried the highest price: More than 100,000 Americans had already

An invasion of Japan could have cost thousands of American lives.

died fighting the Japanese in the Pacific, and an invasion was certain to be very costly in American lives. And for Truman, any number of American lives that could be saved by using the bomb would be well worth it.

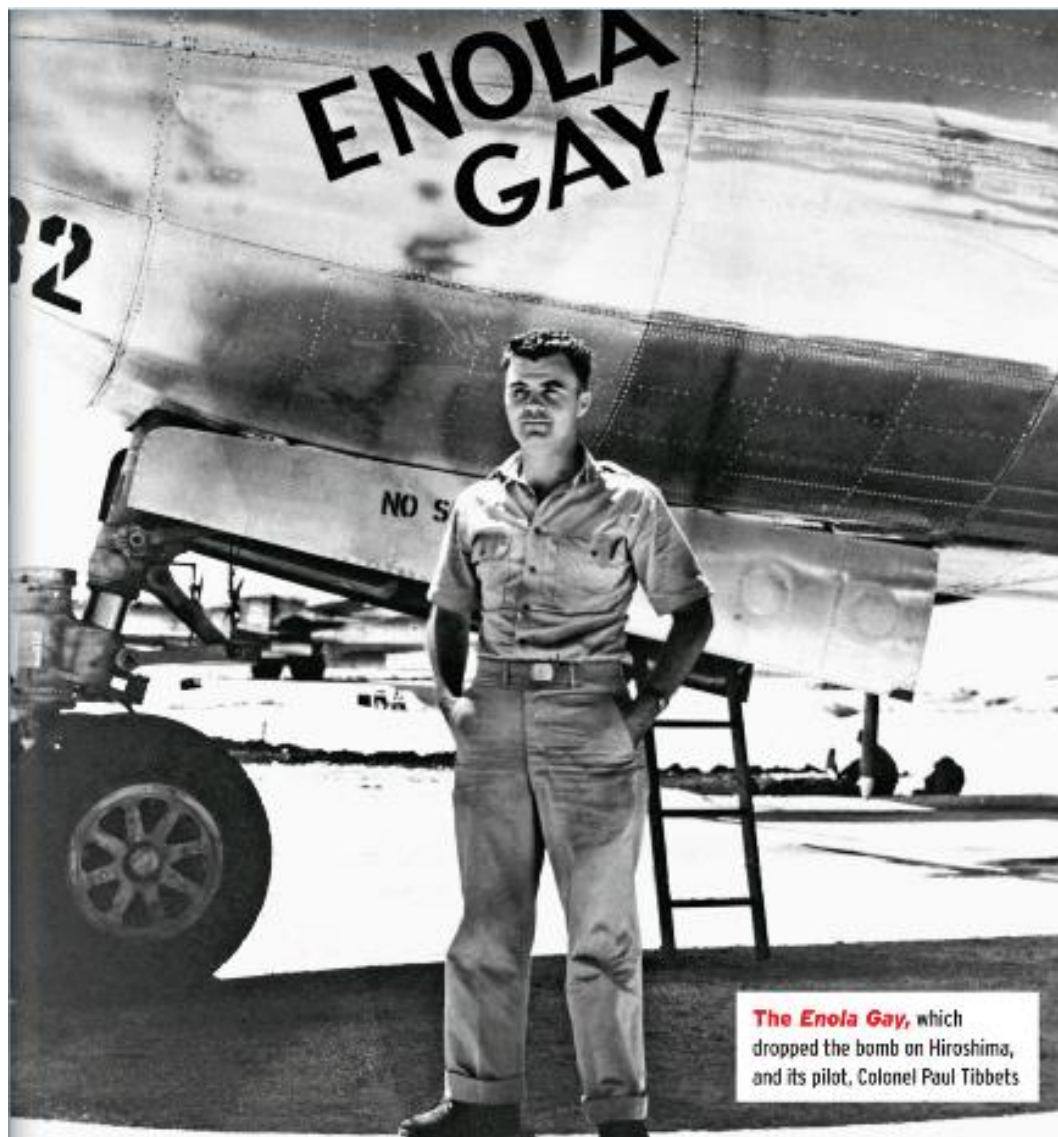
When the atomic bomb became available in July 1945, it was the most promising way to end the war as soon as possible and without the drawbacks of the other options. The attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki persuaded Emperor Hirohito, who had **wavered** for weeks, that the war must end immediately. Combined with the Soviet Union's entry into the conflict after Hiroshima, the atom bombs brought about Japan's surrender within a few days.

The bomb was necessary to accomplish Truman's primary objectives of forcing a prompt Japanese surrender and saving American lives, perhaps many thousands of them. •

—J. SAMUEL WALKER

Author, *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs Against Japan*

U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO



The Enola Gay, which dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, and its pilot, Colonel Paul Tibbets

BY THE NUMBERS

150,000-246,000

Estimated number of people killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, including those killed instantly and those who died of radiation sickness soon after

111,606

Number of U.S. troops killed or missing in the Pacific theater of World War II

137,582

Number of people killed in the 65 conventional bombing raids on Tokyo between Dec. 1944 and Aug. 1945

SOURCES: RADIATION EFFECTS RESEARCH FOUNDATION; ASIA PACIFIC JOURNAL; JAPAN FOCUS; PACIFIC WAR ONLINE ENCYCLOPEDIA

NO When General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then the Supreme Allied Commander, was informed by the U.S. Secretary of War that the atomic bomb was going to be used, he later recalled saying it was unnecessary because Japan was already largely defeated. Eisenhower said the bomb was “no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives.” After the war, as president of the United States (1953-61), he even stated publicly: “It wasn’t necessary to hit them with that awful thing.”

Before the bomb was used, American intelligence officials believed the war would likely end when two things happened: When the U.S. let Japan know the emperor could remain as a figurehead, and when the Soviet army attacked. The U.S. did tell Japan the emperor could remain on his throne as part of a surrender, and the Soviets declared war, as agreed, on August 8.

But American officials chose not to test whether this intelligence was correct. For logistical reasons, an invasion of Japan couldn’t begin for another three months, so the

U.S. could have waited to see if Japan would surrender before dropping the atomic bombs. Instead, Hiroshima was bombed on August 6, and Nagasaki on August 9.

Hiroshima was of only marginal value as a military target, which is why it hadn’t already been a target of **conventional** bombings, and it was full of women, children, and old people, since most of the men had left to fight in the war.

Many top World War II military leaders are on record agreeing with Eisenhower that using the atomic bomb was unnecessary.

Some felt it was deeply immoral. Even Admiral William Leahy, President Truman’s chief of staff, later called the bomb a “barbarous weapon” that should not have been used. Leahy wrote, “The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender. . . . In being the first to use it, we . . . adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages.”

—GAR ALPEROVITZ

Author, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*

‘It wasn’t necessary to hit them with that awful thing.’

—DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER