Killing the Rising Sun Study Guide

Killing the Rising Sun by Bill O'Reilly

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Summary

Killing the Rising Sun by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard is not just the story of how the Empire of Japan was defeated at the end of World War II, but why it required the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to do it. Without glossing over the terror of the bombings themselves, the authors argue that the alternative to the A-bombs was an invasion of Japan that would have cost up to one million Americans their lives and possibly required a Soviet Russian presence in Japan. Instead, thanks to the bomb, the authors argue that America saved the lives of its own people, kept the communists out of Japan, and rebuilt its former enemy into an important ally.

O'Reilly and Dugard begin with the American and Japanese battles over territories the Japanese had occupied during their pre-war and wartime expansion. Though overmatched in numbers and arms, the Japanese nonetheless proved an extraordinarily difficult foe to overcome, willing as they were to fight to the death and commit unspeakable atrocities both military and civilian victims. In doing so, the authors establish both Japan's responsibility for the outcome of the war, but also the horrifying alternative that an invasion might have represented, had the entire population embraced this willingness to fight to the bitter end.

As the Japanese empire receded and the invasion loomed, the book focuses on Harry Truman's choices and the efforts of the mysterious J. Robert Oppenheimer, the scientist exerting his mind and body to develop the weapon that could end the war early. Despite setbacks and his own failing health, Oppenheimer successfully oversaw the testing of the first atomic weapon, which was then passed to the military in the Pacific for use. In the face of continued resistance by the Japanese the refusal of their government to surrender, the bombs were deployed on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the consequences too great for even a Japanese emperor who had convinced his people he was a god to ignore.

The book argues that the bombings, terrible as they may have been, ultimately saved many lives, including that of O'Reilly own father. It holds up Truman's willingness to end the war through controversial decisions as an example to follow, while criticizing those who would have launched the invasion of Japan to further their own careers. It ends with the United States victorious, Japan rebuilding, and millions of young Americans grateful to have survived the most devastating war the world has ever seen.

A Note to Readers/Introduction

Summary

Before launching into the narrative of American plans for victory and Japanese resistance in the Pacific theater, O'Reilly – whose name alone, not co-author Dugard's, is signed to the end of this note – begins with someone from the present: the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, the former pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, attended by President Barack Obama. The book begins by re-examining the words, spoken during a sermon five days after the September 11th terrorist attacks of 2001, in which Wright declared that America's "chickens [were] coming home to roost," citing the nuclear attacks on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which claimed more lives than 9/11 attacks (1). O'Reilly makes clear his mission in this note, stating that while most know of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a lack of knowledge about the details surrounding them means that "statements like the one Wright made sometimes go unchallenged" (2).

The book's introduction shifts to the events of the narrative, starting in the White House in October 1939. Told in present tense – as is the rest of the book until its epilogue – the introduction starts with President Franklin Roosevelt entertaining his guest Alexander Sachs, an adviser on the New Deal. FDR's health already shows signs of trouble, as the book makes clear that his workload and health habits – especially his chain smoking – have already diminished him. This takes place a month after the German army's invasion of Poland, plunging all of Europe into conflict.

Sachs attempts to convey a message from famed physicist Albert Einstein, warning that a "nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium" may result in "extremely powerful bombs of a new type" (4). Sachs visited the day before, where he attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of America's uranium supplies. Roosevelt had dismissed him, unmoved by the technicality of his report, so this time Sachs promptly reads aloud a letter from Einstein explaining not only the lethality of the bomb, but emphasizing that the Nazis have seized a uranium mine in Czechoslovakia and that their scientists have begun exploring a how to arm a weapon using this knowledge. This time Roosevelt responds decisively, calling up his personal secretary and calling for "action" (5).

Analysis

The August 1945 attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki using nuclear weapons remain controversial – Reverend Wright's statement at the beginning of the book makes this clear. In a twist, O'Reilly – he makes it clear that this is his voice, not Dugard's for reasons that will be clear by the end of the book – presents this information in past tense even though it takes place much closer to the present. Wright's message proved highly controversial in 2008, when their unearthing provided a major headache for Barack Obama – the most famous member of Wright's congregation – as Obama

sought the presidency. Though Wright ultimately suffered from this ordeal, with Obama ultimately cutting ties with his church and repudiating Wright's remarks, their inclusion this early in the book indicates that they either prompted the writing of this book, or nonetheless receive enough credence from the public that the authors cannot allow them to go “unchallenged.” Furthermore, he states that the evidence for the necessity, and justice, of the bombings, will be provided.

The book then switches to 1939 – well before much of this story will take place – as well as to the present tense. Authors of alternative history have played with the idea of Nazi Germany in possession of nuclear weapons in the past, and here the authors employ this possibility to argue why America need a nuclear program at this point in history: the Nazis in Germany are interested in establishing one. Sachs here has to strike a balance between conflicting impulses, feeling that he must explain in a credible way how the bomb can generate such power while at the same time impressing upon the president the urgency of a decision. When the scientific particulars of the bomb clearly make President Franklin Roosevelt uncomfortable, Sachs emphasizes the urgency instead, and does so successfully: the power of the weapon moves him to action so that the Nazis cannot leave the United States overmatched should they come into conflict later on.

This demonstrates foresight, as the United States is still more than two years away from entering this war, but also decisive action. The theme of decisiveness repeatedly recurs, not only in Roosevelt's decisions, but in those of his successor, who will need to demonstrate such judgment over the course of this book. This explains the use of present tense in a historical work: decisions made long ago and which now seem inevitable were once uncertain, requiring initiative and wisdom. The past tense would dull such a sentiment, even if only slightly.

Vocabulary

diatribe, atrocities, repudiated, carnage, catastrophic, pompous, financier, articulate

Chapters 1-5

Summary

Chapter 1 begins on Peleliu in the Caroline Islands in September 1944. By this time the United States is winning in the Pacific Theater, retaking territory the Japanese Empire conquered prior to and after their attack on America at Pearl Harbor. Peleliu has become by this time a heavily militarized, fortified piece of land as the Japanese, in retreat in the face of the American push, seek to either hold their territory and force their enemies to expend tremendous lives and resources to retake it. The invasion is told from the perspective of Marines during the invasion, who recall the Japanese blending both themselves and their munitions in with their surroundings, booby-trapping the entryway with mines and camouflaged machine-gun nests. The chapter also discusses Japanese wartime ideology, telling them that to fight until death rather than surrender and that Japanese racial superiority assures them of eventual victory. The chapter depicts Marine deaths during the invasion in horrific detail, as they are ripped apart by planted explosives and killed in fanatical suicide attacks by Japanese armed with grenades.

In Chapter 2 the famed, but controversial, General Douglas MacArthur enters from his vantage point of the Leyte, a Philippine island of the Visayas group. MacArthur's Army troops have recently arrived on the island, fulfilling MacArthur's famous "I shall return" pledge, after a Japanese assault drove him off the Philippines two years prior. MacArthur has an extensive family history in the military and is himself a top graduate of West Point. The book goes into great detail about his personal habits, wearing both fresh uniforms for military maneuvers, maintaining creases on his shirt sleeves, and carrying a loaded weapon at his side just in case it appears he will be captured during a mission gone wrong. It took a direct order from Roosevelt in 1942 to order MacArthur out of the Philippines, as the president had committed more resources to defeating Germany in Europe and refused MacArthur's call for reinforcements. Now the Japanese have, as they did on Peleliu, fiercely resisted but been overwhelmed in their absence of naval or air support. Upon arriving at Leyte's Red Beach, the publicity-minded general strides through the waters in his uniform and sunglasses, takes a microphone, and declares that he has returned before wading back to his boat.

Chapter 3 introduces Harry Truman in November 3, 1944, who has recently been appointed vice president by Roosevelt. Roosevelt was still enormously popular despite the horror of the war, yet the public knows little about Truman, despite of his own military and senate service, and Republican Party opponents parse his words for hints of weakness. Having accidentally endorsed a former Ku Klux Klan member for congress, an infuriated Truman remained stoic as Republicans exploit this slip-up in campaign ads. Yet Truman has also been defended by civil rights leaders, and now, with the election just four days away, he believed he can finally see victory and rest. This chapter, however, hints that Roosevelt's health is declining ever more rapidly by this point.

Chapter 4 places readers back on Peleliu near the end of November, where Japanese Colonel Kunio Nakagawa assists his superior officer, Major General Kenjiro Murai, in committing ritual suicide. The ritual is successful – and gruesome – as the general cuts open his own stomach, sending blood and organs gushing forth, leaving Nakagawa to hope he will have the same courage later. The Americans, meanwhile, continue to advance despite deaths, oppressive heat, and unsanitary conditions. Despite back and forth advances to take and hold territory, the Americans take the island and the cost of thousands of lives, and Nakagawa takes his own life. This, the chapter notes, becomes the blueprint for future Japanese defenses of territories it had claimed, leaving the Americans to wonder how vigorously they would defend Japan itself.

On the same day Nakagawa commits suicide, Chapter 5 depicts Japanese emperor Hirohito enjoying a meal in his imperial palace. Considered a living god directly descended from a goddess, Hirohito is actually an undersized, absent-minded man, but one also capable of great ruthlessness. In 1937 he approved of Japan's conquest of China's then-capital, Nanjing, in which his military slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Chinese. He also ultimately approved of the attack on Pearl Harbor that led to war with the United States. His country's expansions prior to the war had gradually earned them the disdain of the international community, especially given their merciless slaughter and rape of civilians during their aggression against China in the 1930s. As their expansion continued in Asia, the U.S. and Great Britain blocked sales of oil to Japan, prompting Tokyo to invade even more destinations in search of resources. Japan's aggression accelerated in October 1941, when the fanatical nationalist Hideki Tojo became prime minister, though he was ousted by the emperor in July 1944.

Analysis

In explaining the necessity for bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the authors considered the dawn of the U.S. nuclear program essential; the U.S. could not allow the Nazis to acquire the bomb first. However, they evidently consider little between 1939 and 1944 necessary for their story, as these chapters compress the Empire of Japan's attack on the U.S., its savagery in territorial acquisition process, and declining fortunes in the war into a few paragraphs so that they can bring us to the present tense quickly. The authors likely choose this evidence because they intend for this book to serve as a history of the decision-making surrounding the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, not of World War II. And they intend for readers to come away from these early chapters aware of the brutal conditions as the war drew to close, and the factors that needed considering in order to end the conflict sooner and more favorably for the U.S. and its allies.

So, how can one justify the attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? The authors indicate there are multiple reasons to consider. For one, the authors invite us to consider the Japanese determination to resist: the invasion of Peleliu is told in such detail – with so many deaths of both Americans and Japanese recounted – to demonstrate their mindset of not surrendering despite being thoroughly overmatched in numbers and weapons. Instructed that fighting until death is honorable and that the eventual victory of

their race is assured, the Japanese attack Americans on Peleliu and the Philippines in ways that suggest they do not value their own lives. Despite their overall successes in the war by 1944, Chapters 1 and 4 depict not only the deaths but the extreme hardships endured by the American forces as they worked to retake territory the Japanese had conquered. The book makes it clear that this determination extends up the Japanese leadership ladder; generals and commanders commit "honorable" suicide rather than give themselves up willingly, and an emperor regarded as a living god encourages such sacrifices.

The emperor also encourages the savagery of the Japanese, and the authors indicate that this justifies the bombings as well. Chapter 5 devotes much time to their war crimes in places they conquered, especially in China, where Japanese troops gang-raped untold numbers of women before murdering them with bayonets. This chapter is clear that the leadership of the empire not only tolerated such methods, but even, as in the case of the Nanjing massacre, approved of them.

These chapters also introduce readers to two American leaders of the time that the authors hold up as opposites. Harry Truman has entered the scene as the vice president to Roosevelt. Truman is described as an earnest yet little-known figure who makes mistakes but, as his stoic response to Republican mudslinging shows, cannot be easily rattled. This quality is introduced in a subtle way, but is one the authors will repeatedly emphasize as Truman's decision-making grows more important; events progress quickly in the Pacific as the Americans advance on Japanese imperial territory, and Roosevelt's well-being continues to decline.

The authors introduce MacArthur as Truman's opposite, though this readers may not see this clearly at this stage of the book. While the public knows little of Truman at this stage, MacArthur already cuts a towering figure, one only the president can order away from his Philippine stronghold and one accustomed to publicity, which he habitually seeks. This publicity-seeking nature not only contrasts sharply with Truman's, but gradually pushes them into conflict as the story continues. Though well-known for his intelligence, the readers' early encounters with the general make clear that he values his own honor and reputation, given his unwillingness to leave the Philippines ahead of an order from the president, and his striding ashore the island of Leyte for maximum drama. With a costly invasion ahead, the book is already establishing that MacArthur is willing to take enormous risks to enhance his own reputation.

Vocabulary

churn, incendiary, fastidiously, influx, garnered, berth, patrician, diminutive, elicit, stoicism, innuendo, abated, aromatic, inexorable, tenuous, strafe, litany, audacious, brusque, jingoistic, ministrations, balmy, apprising, catalysts

Chapters 6-10

Summary

Taking place in February 1945, well after the presidential election, Chapter 6 depicts Truman in a very different setting: playing piano for a group of American servicemen at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. Truman's performance is spiced up considerably by the presence of 20-year-old actress Lauren Bacall, who poses atop his piano and gazes at the new vice president lustily, prompting hoots and cheers from the audience.

Meanwhile, at the Yalta Conference in Crimea, President Roosevelt meets with Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Roosevelt is months from death at this point and showing it in his shaking hands and discolored face. Stalin exploits this, along with the convenient location and his army's position in Europe, to ensure control over Eastern Europe after the Nazis surrender. At this conference Roosevelt also asks Stalin to enter the war against Japan, satisfying the communist dictator's ambitions to invade Manchuria. Meanwhile, American scientists work to finish their new atomic bomb, and begin considering targets in Japan.

Chapter 7 details the aftermath of MacArthur's return to the Philippines. Much of the country lies ravaged by the munitions exchanged during the conflict, and as of February 1945 the Americans still must suppress the last pockets of Japanese resistance. The streets have been mined, and rogue Japanese elements remain in Manilla attacking Americans before they are killed themselves. The Japanese also murder the "inferior" Filipinos in appalling ways, gathering groups of adults in buildings and beheading them, as well as bludgeoning children to death. In addition to determined resistance on land, the Japanese also begin kamikaze attacks on American ships. The Battle of Iwo Jima also begins, with the Japanese losing virtually all their forces, yet the remainder refuse to give up.

Chapter 8 shifts focus to Tokyo in March 10, 1945, when the bombing of Japan with conventional weapons begins. Ordered by General Curtis LeMay to shorten the war, as well as for revenge over Pearl Harbor, American B-29s drop 2,000 tons of M-69 napalm firebombs on the capital, incinerating one-fourth of the city over a three-hour period. The raid catches citizens of the imperial capital, thus far untouched by the war, unprepared and leaves them to suffer agonizing deaths or gruesome injuries. Emperor Hirohito surveys the damage on March 18, but shows little response to the tragedy around him. Bombings continue and Japan orders its schoolchildren to begin work producing food or weapons – and in some cases, how to operate those weapons.

Chapter 9 takes readers back to Washington on April 12, 1945 where Harry Truman enters the Capitol building to meet Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn. Preparing to give a speech on Thomas Jefferson Day (April 13), Truman suddenly receives instructions to take an urgent call from the White House press secretary, who tells him

he is required at the White House immediately. Dashing to the president's residence, he arrives to be informed by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt of her husband's passing. Within hours, he takes the oath of office from the chief justice of the Supreme Court. A little less than two weeks later, Truman is informed that "a most terrible weapon" (90) will soon be in America's possession, capable of ending the war, but at the cost hundreds of thousands of lives – and maybe more.

In Chapter 10 readers are introduced to J. Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist heading the Los Alamos Laboratory, who will one day be known as the "father of the atomic bomb" for his role in developing the weapon. Oppenheimer is not an obvious choice for the role: he had previously dated a woman who had been a member of the Communist Party, possesses no management experience or Nobel Prize, but does have a history of depression. His selection owes much to do with the personal favor of Brigadier General Leslie Groves, overseer of the Manhattan Project, who considers Oppenheimer "a genius" (94). Oppenheimer had, after all, graduated from Harvard in just three years, finished a Ph.D in physics by age 23, and is known for natural leadership. He demonstrates his dedication to the project through his long work hours; so long that his six-foot frame wastes to 115 pounds due to long periods without food. His wife breaks down under the strain, leaving the facility for her parents' home and leaving Oppenheimer to engage in extra-marital affairs for solace. He also turns to his belief in Eastern philosophy, hence his infamous quote, from the Bhagavad Gita, following the first atomic bomb test: "Now I am become death, destroyer of worlds."

Analysis

Here the authors double-down on the argument that Japan would not be reasoned into surrendering, even in the face of overwhelming odds. This is demonstrated by their continued belligerence – even after their official retreat – on the Philippines, and by the Japanese leadership's seeming indifference to the suffering of the civilians of Tokyo after the napalm bombings. The emperor, as the one who will make the final call on whether and when Japan surrenders, appears an especially distant figure, demonstrating little remorse, empathy, or even doubt while surveying the damage that has been done in bombing raids on Tokyo. The order for children to leave school and begin helping production for the war effort seems an especially inhumane reaction to the suffering.

The authors also, however, demonstrate that inhumanity goes hand-in-hand with war, even on the "good side." Historians and anti-war activists have been prone to citing the conventional bombings of Japan, especially Tokyo, as among the most horrible events of the war, on par with the use of nuclear weapons. The authors do not spare details of these raids, noting the damage they do to civilians and their homes. This illustrates war as unpleasant business, but the reaction of the Japanese emperor to the carnage deflects the blame to him, as will be the case later with Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The beginning of Chapter 6 firmly establishes another point: the suddenness with which Harry Truman has to consider his options for ending the war. In February 1945 he is

vice president, relegated to entertaining the troops while President Roosevelt haggled with an aggressive, ambitious Stalin over the Soviet Union's plans once the conflict in Europe came to an end. In March, Truman is suddenly thrust into the role of president, who would now have to deal with Stalin, with a potential invasion of an unyielding Japan, and with the news of a terrible new weapon. How Truman will handle this decision will be a study in character; Truman's resolute reaction to Roosevelt's death – correcting the Supreme Court's chief justice for getting his middle name wrong during the oath of office, and ordering to prepare an invasion of the Japanese mainland not long after assuming the presidency – demonstrate the kind of character he will need to demonstrate as the war winds down.

The readers are also introduced to Oppenheimer, whose brilliance goes hand-in-hand with his eccentricity, and whose dedication to his work is coupled with a number of personal vices, from tobacco to poor nutrition to women other than his wife. The authors establish that Oppenheimer viewed his wife as a confidant and missed her greatly after her departure from Los Alamos; they depict his lapses into extramarital affairs as a by-product of his stress, much as his skeletal appearance and chain smoking. Such is the dedication that such work evidently requires; with the Soviet Union looming as an obstacle for the U.S. in not only Europe but also Asia, and with the Japanese utterly defeated in the Philippines but refusing to relent, the race to complete the bomb remains an urgent one even though the Allies appear well-positioned to win the war. Even if such work is necessary it is morbid; Oppenheimer entertains the residents of the facility-turned-community by appearing in a local play in the role of a literal corpse; meanwhile the Bhagavad Gita quote demonstrates his knowledge that he has now has command over power that can literally destroy the world.

Vocabulary

lupine, elicit, bemused, haberdasher, vainglorious, arduous, consigned, unfettered, communal, fusillade, lavish, ordnance, asphyxiated, cadaverous, liaison

Chapters 11-15

Summary

Chapter 11 takes place on Okinawa in May 1945. At this point the Germans have surrendered and Adolf Hitler has committed suicide, never fulfilling the nuclear ambitions Roosevelt was warned of in 1939. On the other side of the world, the American military forces have nearly brought their island-hopping strategy to fruition, arriving at the Okinawa islands. As bloody and costly as previous Allied victories had been in territories once occupied by the Japanese, Okinawa represents a new level of brutality, as the Japanese fight to “total extinction” (101), knowing that the fall of the islands would put the Allies only a few hundred miles from the mainland.

Elsewhere, MacArthur begins his plot to invade Japan, certain that an invasion of unprecedented size would convince Japan to surrender. However, at that moment, Hirohito oversees the construction of new army divisions and supplies. In parallel with MacArthur, Hirohito convinces himself that his cause can be vindicated, and that victory is possible if Japan simply holds out long enough.

Chapter 12 reveals the other option the Japanese pursue aside from building military enforcements. Near the end of June, former Prime Minister Koki Hirota meets the Soviet ambassador, Yakov Malik, at a location 50 miles southwest of Tokyo and attempts to negotiate a peace with the USSR that would involve fewer concessions than the Americans, who want unconditional surrender, will demand. Japan wants to hold the territories it has accumulated and avoid invasion or occupation by the Allies, knowing that such a fate would be a death sentence for many of its leaders. Malik listens to Hirota’s suggestions, but offers no response.

Chapter 13 takes place in New Mexico in the very early morning of July 16, 1945, as Oppenheimer waits for a storm to pass so that the first A-bomb test – which the eccentric scientist dubs “Trinity” after the Hindu triumvirate of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva – could proceed. In Potsdam, Germany, Truman is meeting with Stalin and Churchill, and a successful test will be immediately relayed to Truman so than he can cheer his British allies and send a subtle warning to the Soviets. Oppenheimer and General Groves agree to delay the test one hour; by chance the Potsdam meeting is also delayed by Stalin’s tardiness. Truman and Churchill chat while, unbeknownst to them, British voters choose to vote Churchill’s Conservative Party out of power despite the prime minister’s high approval ratings.

At 5:30 a.m. in New Mexico, at the same time Truman visits American troops occupying Berlin, the bomb detonates, awing those present with its shockwave and brilliant light and immediately lifting the spirits of the stressed Oppenheimer. Meanwhile, in San Francisco, the crew of the USS Indianapolis prepares to transport top secret cargo to Tinian in the middle of the Pacific. Their orders are to immediately jettison the cargo if attacked and prevent its capture by the Japanese.

Chapter 14 takes place on July 16, as the Japanese submarine I-58 departs its port near Hiroshima. The sub's commanding officer, Mochitsura Hashimoto, feels fortunate to depart, having evaded bombardment by the Americans and getting out before Japan began mining the harbor. American bombardment has recently claimed eight ferries carrying coal, costing many lives and leaving Japan with no way of transporting coal from the island of Hokkaido – a devastating blow to Japan's ability to produce weapons. The populace, increasingly destitute and homeless, receives orders that it will fight to the death nonetheless. The commander of the I-58, silently prays that, for the sake of his honor, he may find an American ship to sink.

Chapter 15 returns to Potsdam on July 25, where Truman contemplates the news of the Trinity test. Calling it the "most terrible formula in the history of the world" (137), Truman nonetheless begins planning to use the weapon on approximately August 10, ruling out the Japanese capital Tokyo. This decision condemns Hiroshima, which has not been firebombed – making it an ideal target to measure the full destructive force of the bomb – and which serves as one of the country's largest military depots.

Later, after a day of torturous negotiations with Stalin in which the American president continually resists the Soviet leader's demands for expansion, Truman lets Stalin know America has acquired a weapon "of unusual destructive force" (140). Stalin's low-key reaction – expressing satisfaction and hopes that it would be used against Japan – stuns the Americans and British in attendance. What they do not know is that Stalin has spies in the Los Alamos facility, making him aware of the production process. Nonetheless, the announcement of the successful test nonetheless "panicked" (140) him – despite how successfully he hides this emotion – prompting him to contact his own scientists and order them to speed up work on their own bomb.

Analysis

Could the Allies have found an alternative, not only to dropping the bomb on Hiroshima, but to invasion? These chapters suggest that such a solution could have been reached, but this would have involved striking a deal with the Japanese that would have helped them avoid suffering consequences for their imperialism and atrocities. Not only were the Japanese open to such a conclusion, the authors note that they sought such a deal from the Soviets. Under it, Japan would have renewed its previous alliance with Moscow – which the Soviets had only recently allowed to lapse, maintained its claim to its former territories in Asia, and avoided prosecution.

Based on the atrocities already documented in this book by the Japanese military, many readers may find such an outcome unacceptable. Given their detailed cataloguing, not only in this section but in those to come, of Japanese war crimes it is safe to say the authors wish to present this outcome as unjustifiable. Furthermore, in recent decades Japan has continually asserted its claims to islands also claimed by China, Korea, and Russia; even though it, by this time, no longer occupied much of its pre-war and early-war conquests, this agreement would probably have left the Japanese asserting a rightful claim to territories in China, the Philippines, Vietnam and elsewhere.

While readers may appreciate the fact that the Soviets rejected such overtures, the Russian ambassador's silence in the face of the Japanese offer dovetails with another theme: that of Stalin's ambitions. The authors assert that Stalin did not merely seek increased influence, but revenge against Japan, which humiliated Russia in 1905 at the end of the Russo-Japanese War, making Russia the first "white" nation defeated in war by an East Asian country. Stalin is planning an invasion of Manchuria at this point, has scientists working on a bomb of their own, and generally seeks to increase the Soviet Union's power wherever possible. The authors are not interested merely in having readers contemplate Japan's state had no bomb been dropped, but Stalin's position in the post-war climate without America's nuclear arsenal to keep the Soviets in check.

Readers can, therefore, understand Oppenheimer and Groves' anxiety over the first bomb in this context – both the outcome of the war and the global balance thereafter hang in the balance. Therefore, when the weather does not cooperate and rain threatens to prevent the proper circulation of electricity needed to detonate the bomb, they must delay the test, but refuse to do so by more than one hour. Upon its successful detonation, Oppenheimer instantly becomes convinced that he has saved the lives of untold numbers of American servicemen.

However, the bomb has to be delivered to a location where it can then be flown to Japan. With the scenes involving the USS Indianapolis and the I-58, the authors seek to raise tension about the bomb's arrival. Though no mystery remains as to whether the bomb reached its target, this reinforces the idea that what is now part of history was not preordained; the bombing of Hiroshima depended not just on the judgment of those involved, but circumstance.

Vocabulary

detritus, vantage, retrofitted, famished, stanches, escarpment, deft, brusque, feinting, intercede, hunkered, communique, slathering, barrage, behemoth, ornate, uncowed

Chapters 16-20

Summary

Chapter 16 opens in the Philippines, where MacArthur continues to prepare for an invasion of Japan to cap his already storied career. However, on July 30 he receives a troubling report: the Japanese, still in control of territory in China and Korea, can use that territory to launch kamikaze attacks against an American fleet. They also have constructed “suicide boats” to ram invading ships, and have begun drafting civilians to build defenses on the Japanese beaches, making them even more dangerous than Normandy had been. A career Army man, MacArthur refuses to consider an option for ending the war, such as aerial bombardment or blockade, that would have allowed the Navy or Air Force to steal the glory. Fearful that his “Operation Olympic” has been jeopardized, he begins to openly criticize the plans of the Navy and the commander of its Pacific fleet, Admiral Chester Nimitz.

Elsewhere, the I-58 closed in on the USS Indianapolis. Having delivered the components of the bomb that will one day be known as Little Boy on Tintian Island on July 26, the Indianapolis then sets off for Leyte, where it would receive training before departing for Okinawa and preparing to take part in Operation Olympic. However, unequipped with the technology to hear sounds that would alert it to underwater dangers, the Indianapolis accidentally alerted the Japanese I-58 to its presence, which proceeds to hit the Indianapolis with two torpedoes. Out of the 1,196 crew members, 300 sink with the ship, while others eventually die from a lack of nutrition, exposure, shark attacks, and other causes. Only 317 survive in the end.

Two days after the Indianapolis’ sinking, MacArthur receives word of the impending bombing of Japan using the special new weapon. The news formally alerts the general that Operation Olympic will never take place, dashing his dreams of immortality.

Chapter 17 takes readers to Hiroshima on August 3 as American planes arrive. In the days ahead of this, American planes had obliterated the city of Toyama, a major site of industrial production, leaving less than one percent of the city standing. Between March and early August, one million Japanese are killed by the bombings ordered by LeMay on 66 cities, and ten million made homeless. But on August 3, the B-29s drops leaflets, warning civilians of a new type of attack, urging the people to overthrow their government, and warning that Japanese authorities cannot protect them. This comes a week after the Potsdam Declaration, where Truman warned of destruction if Japan did not surrender.

On Tinian, the American military begins plans to deliver Little Boy, now active, to its target. Thirty-year-old Colonel Paul W. Tibbets is selected to fly the plane. Meanwhile, Hirohito and his inner circle reject any plans to surrender, dismissing Truman’s Potsdam statement as nothing new.

Chapter 18 returns to Tibbets on Tinian. On August 4 the young colonel briefed B-29 crews about the impending mission in Hiroshima, revealing that it, Kokura, and Nagasaki had been identified as targets. He is joined by Captain William “Deak” Parsons, a munitions expert who believes that the bomb will prevent more men from suffering the fate of his younger half-brother Bob, a serviceman left permanently disfigured during the invasion of Iwo Jima. Parsons informs the stunned crews at the meeting that the bomb is the most powerful weapon ever constructed, will wipe out everything within three miles, and potentially be more powerful than the Trinity test. The date of the mission, they announce, will be August 6.

Chapter 19 is brief, spending only a few pages introducing the reader to residents of Hiroshima on the night of August 5. This includes firefighter Yosaku Mikami, teenager Akira Onogi – who decides to skip work constructing munitions the following day in protest of the government not allowing him to attend school, and bank employee Akiko Takakura, who prepares to arrive at work early the next day.

Chapter 20 is also short, as Tibbets, in the very early morning hours of August 6, prepares for takeoff. In preparation for the 12-hour mission, he stocks his plane with several kinds of tobacco, as well as a handgun and cyanide capsules to prevent being taken alive should he be shot down. Only hours before the mission Tibbets chooses a name for his aircraft: the Enola Gay. The plane that will carry him to his target is named for Tibbets’ mother, who encouraged the young colonel to start a career as a pilot years earlier despite his father’s protests. After a number of tests to ensure that the bomb would be released as planned, Tibbets departs at 2 p.m.

Analysis

Confirming the risks that the delivery of the bomb faced, the USS Indianapolis and most of her crew do not survive their very next mission. Having delivered key munitions to the island of Tinian, the ship is sunk by the I-58’s torpedoes after departing. While the authors do not by any means gloss over the deaths of the servicemen – they go into particularly terrifying detail about shark attacks – the emphasis remains on the uncertainty of the mission.

This uncertainty extends to other facets of the bomb’s deliver. Before his departure Tibbets undergoes a lengthy, meticulous process in which he must rehearse the bombing procedure repeatedly before takeoff, stock the aircraft with supplies to keep him occupied during the 12 hours he will be airborne, and make plans to prevent capture should the mission go awry. With MacArthur still dreaming of an invasion, readers are invited to speculate what would have happened had the materials never arrived, or Tibbets failed to arrive at his destination.

The authors also give readers a chance to contemplate life on the ground at Hiroshima before the bombings. The people of Hiroshima were given warning to escape, and the authors make it clear that many did leave. Not all, however, did escape, and one can debate whether the Japanese authorities should have taken Truman’s Potsdam warning

more seriously, or whether the wording was vague (of course, they would also have to contemplate whether the president could provide more detail about an upcoming military operation). Chapter 19 places readers on the plane of the regular citizenry who remained in Hiroshima ahead of the bombing and who would have their lives changed by it – including those who survived it. Readers may also contemplate what responsibility the civilians on the ground had, not only to escape, but to adapt the U.S. leaflets' suggestion and actively oppose their government.

Vocabulary

retrofitted, laden, antagonistic, broadside, volition, disparaged, buoyancy, cryptically, incendiary, oblivion, mandate, fuselage, accede, incongruously, pensive, cowling

Chapters 21-25

Summary

Chapter 21 takes place in Hiroshima as the Enola Gay approaches. By this point the citizens of Japan have become complacent, the book asserts, thinking that it was too late in the conflict for their city to be targeted. The arrival of a single B-29 sets off air raid sirens, but does not trigger any unusual reactions. The scene returns to Yosaku Mikami as his shift ends, Akira Onagi reading on his parents' floor in protest, and Akiko Takakura arriving at her workplace just in time to notice the clock striking 8:15 am.

At that moment, from an altitude of 30,700 feet, the Enola Gay releases Little Boy, after which Tibbets hurries to move his plane away from the coming shockwaves. Forty-three seconds after release the bomb explodes, slamming the plane but not knocking it from the sky, and the radiation causing the fillings in Tibbets' mouth to tingle. On the ground, thousands are incinerated or vaporized immediately by the extreme heat. Those caught looking in the direction of the blast were blinded, and the heat permanently disfigured thousands located within miles of the blast. Fires and hurricane-strength winds spread throughout the city, killing many in their homes. Badly burned people attempt to jump into cisterns, only to be killed by the boiling water. Others jump into rivers and are swept away by a current of water and dead bodies.

Yosaku Mikami is spared because he passed by a tunnel in his streetcar just as the explosion struck. Returning to duty despite his 24-hour shift, he attempts to treat victims whose skin peels off as they are carried away. Shockwaves knock Akika Onagi unconscious but he survives, then attempts to help neighbors. He remains haunted for years to come by a mother, who dies trapped inside her home under a beam of wood that he and others cannot remove before flames consume the house. Akiko Takakura survives despite her bank being located just 300 yards from the blast, thanks to its heavily insulated walls. Knocked out by the blast, she wakes up with more than 100 cuts on her back and serious burns. Yet she survives in the midst of a neighborhood where all residents outside have been burnt to death.

Eleven hours after the bombing, word finally reaches Hirohito in Tokyo. Living in a city devastated by the conventional bombing of the Americans, his palace largely destroyed by fires originating from the bombings of buildings nearby, and his official business conducted in an underground bunker, he finally begins to consider surrender. However, he offers no response when Truman again demands that they give up.

Chapter 22 continues its focus on August 6, but shifts to Truman's reaction to the news of the successful use of the bomb in Hiroshima. First alerted to the detonation while aboard the USS Augusta on the Atlantic Ocean, Truman tells the military men surrounding him first, then takes to the radio to announce publicly the coming of the era of atomic weapons. Truman reiterates the need for Japan's unconditional surrender, knowing a second bombing had already been authorized. In Manilla, MacArthur hears

news of the bombing, realizing that he had not been informed that the bombing's date and time because Truman does not trust him. MacArthur will become a lifelong critic of the bombing, but the American public at the time overwhelmingly approve of its use. However, newspaper editorials warn of a new destructive age, and the Japanese public sees no change in its war preparations. Meanwhile, the atomic bomb known as Fat Man is prepared for use.

In Chapter 23, the Japanese emperor hears, three days after Hiroshima, that the Soviets have invaded Manchuria, one of the last of Japan's imperial acquisitions to fall. Hirohito knows at the time that Japan cannot defeat an invasion from both the Americans and Soviets, but also remembers a military coup in Tokyo in 1936 that nearly succeeded, and fears a repeat if he attempts to surrender. MacArthur, for his part, welcomes the Soviet invasion, stating that a "great pincers movement" will doom Japan as it had Germany, indicating that he still holds out hope for invasion. In Hiroshima, overwhelmed public services struggle to keep up with the populace's needs, with those who die after seeking medical care stacked in air raid shelters and caves, and amputated limbs piled outside of medical facilities.

Chapter 24 discusses the second bombing. On Tinian, Tibbets chooses to pass the job of delivering the second nuclear bomb on to his friend, Major Chuck Sweeney. It was, in fact, Sweeney's first combat mission, despite his past service as a squadron commander. Flying his plane, the Bockscar, to the intended target of Kokura, Sweeney's plans change dramatically due to a lack of a clear aerial view of the city; ironically, this was at least partially due to smoke following the conventional bombardment of the nearby city of Yawata the previous day. The mission's troubles continue when the crew accidentally sets the bomb to blow prematurely, frantically seeking to turn it off while still in the air, and nearly colliding with The Great Artiste, the B-29 bomber sent to observe the bombing. Finally, the pilot chooses to pursue Nagasaki as a target, dropping the bomb and making it back out to sea, with the crew fearful that it would run out of fuel. The crew barely makes it to Okinawa before the engines shut off.

The bomb on Nagasaki lands about two miles away from its target, the Mitsubishi torpedo plant, but Fat Man's explosive power greatly exceeds that of Little Boy's. Because Nagasaki's bomb shelters were built into hillsides, shelter-seekers were killed by the extreme heat inside the facilities they thought would save them. As with Hiroshima, tens of thousands are killed on the day of the bombing, with more than 100,000 and possibly more than 200,000 dying due to the bomb's effects in the day, weeks, and months that followed.

In Chapter 25, readers learn of Truman's reaction to the second bombing. Having heard no reaction from the Japanese leadership, Truman begins contemplating bombing Tokyo next. He writes to a confidant Georgia Senator Richard Russell that such a move was not what he hoped for, but that the "pigheadedness" (230) of Japan's leaders could ultimately compel it. Truman faces criticism from the Federal Council of Churches of Christ for this move, but responds by saying that the move has been necessitated by the attack on Pearl Harbor and Japan's brutal treatment of American prisoners of war.

“When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast,” Truman writes (231).

On that same day Hirohito faces his Supreme Council for the Direction of the War, including numerous officials subject to prosecution for war crimes. The chapter shifts into past tense to review examples of their crimes, including forced prostitution in territories the Japanese had conquered, which compelled women from the Philippines, Korea, China, and elsewhere to serve dozens of Japanese soldiers per day at “comfort stations.” Such women would be killed if they became pregnant and offered no treatment when they became infected with venereal disease.

Other examples include the more than 12,000 POWs from the U.S., Britain, and the Netherlands, plus 150,000 non-combatants, who died during the construction of the “Death Railway” designed to connect Burma and Siam (present-day Myanmar and Thailand). Hideki Tojo even stated that POWs could be killed, and more than a third of the more than 27,000 American POWs held in the Pacific would die. By contrast, nearly 94,000 Americans were captured by the Nazis and nearly 93,000 survived the war. Hirohito also approved Unit 731, a research facility the Japanese established in China that subjected victims to experiments including surgery without anesthesia and injecting people with bubonic plague and cholera.

Shifting back into present tense, Hirohito uses this meeting to announce plans to surrender, despite the possibility that he may face war crimes prosecution, saying he cannot endure the suffering of the people. A telegram reaches Truman on August 10, stating that Japan is ready to accept the Potsdam Declaration, but including the caveat that the declaration “does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a Sovereign Ruler” (239). With his cabinet divided on the need for Japan’s surrender with no conditions and those who want the emperor to stay on the throne for stability’s sake, Truman sends a reply: Hirohito will remain emperor but not be immune from prosecution.

No answer comes.

Analysis

As this book is written from a perspective supportive of using the atomic bombs against Japan, one might be surprised at the level of detail they spend on the bomb’s effects. Seeing as how the chapters ahead of the bombing of Hiroshima also introduce the survivors in their ordinary lives – as firefighters, students, bank tellers – the story places readers in their positions and invites them to consider the effects such a bombing would have on them. The authors do not treat them as mere statistics, erased from sight like those vaporized near ground zero of an atomic bombing. It also appears the authors would not dispute that the bombing was a tragedy, and the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are victims.

However, the authors follow up on the stories of the bombings with a detailed evaluation of the atrocities committed by the Japanese military. As stated previously this, along with the Japanese military's continued belligerence in the face of overwhelming odds, is used to justify the bombings of Hiroshima. Not only these factors, but also the indecisiveness of the Japanese emperor in the face of overwhelming American force receives additional consideration. In doing so, the authors portray the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as victims, but victims of an imperial Japanese government that made the bombings necessary both through what it did and did not do.

However, the authors also explain the Japanese emperor and government's hesitance to accept the uncompromising terms set by the Americans and their allies. The time when the Japanese council on war planning meets to plot its next move falls between May, when Nazi Germany surrendered, and November, when the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg would open to decide the fate of Germany's war criminals. Surrender to Allied terms meant death for many of those involved in making that decision; furthermore, based on recent history there is a greater-than-zero threat of a military coup to prevent national disgrace, and in that case Hirohito's gesture of sacrificing pride for the sake of easing national suffering could be a waste.

Ultimately, Hirohito yields to the pressure to surrender, but makes one final gesture at maintaining control by inserting language asserting his authority as emperor. The scene then shifts to Truman, where the authors introduce not only the president's internal debate, but the difference of opinion found in his cabinet. Some emphasize unconditional surrender, while others want the Japanese emperor to remain as a fixture of stability. As established in previous chapters, Japan pursued an alternative to unconditional surrender that would have involved avoiding punishment for war crimes; but why would some be insistent on Japan, such a fierce enemy and perpetrator of wartime atrocities, maintaining stability after the war? It is not made clear in this chapter, possibly due to lengthy considerations, but Japan is already being eyed as an engine of economic growth for a global economy ravaged by the war, and as a stronghold for democracy and capitalism as the Soviets expand their influence.

Finally, the authors continue the themes already established by the sinking of the Indianapolis, by describing the difficulties of the Bockscar's mission on August 9. The traditional telling of the bombing of Nagasaki, just three days after Hiroshima, may make it sound as simple as checking the next on a list: the United States bombed Hiroshima, then bombed Nagasaki three days later when Japan did not surrender. In fact, Nagasaki was chosen as a backup plan on the day of the bombing when the original target, Kokura, was obscured by smoke. And given the confusion ahead of the bombing, with the Bockscar nearly running out of fuel and crashing into another plane, it was possible that no city would have been bombed on August 9. This uncertainty may make one wonder whether the war's end would have been delayed had the mission failed completely, but may also give readers a sense that the fates of Nagasaki's citizens is even more tragic.

Vocabulary

cavernous, bulbous, lithe, hypocenter, cordite, carbonized, facades, trepidation, morose, dither, lacquered, chortled, staccato

Chapters 26-postscript

Summary

Chapter 26 opens in Mutanchiang, China, where the Soviet army bears down on the Japanese military on August 13. Outnumbered almost five-to-one, and with their men near starvation and nearly out of weapons, the Japanese military are all but helpless to stop the Soviet advance. The Russians, who earned a reputation for aggression and barbarity in the areas of Europe they conquered as the Nazis retreated, also “[left] behind scenes of gross violence” in Manchuria, the book states.

In Washington, Truman continues to wait for an answer from the Japanese. On August 13 he finally authorizes additional B-29 bombing raids, and begins discussions both for a potential invasion and for MacArthur to take charge of Japan’s reconstruction after the war. All the while, Truman’s outward demeanor betrays little of his inward deliberations, with reporters using words like “cool” and “matter-of-factness” (247) to describe him.

On August 14 American B-29 bombers strike Tokyo – largely hitting targets already destroyed – and Major Kenji Hatanaka and Lieutenant Colonel Jiro Shiizaki launch a coup, killing one lieutenant general and searching the palace for the emperor, trying to prevent a recording of the emperor accepting the Allied terms of surrender from reaching the outside world. In the early morning hours of August 15 forces loyal to the emperor arrive, driving the treasonous officers from the compound. They commit suicide later that day, Japan’s surrender reached Truman in Washington, and the emperor’s message is transmitted to the Japanese public. It is the first time the public has heard his voice, and its message sets off a wave of suicides, executions of POWs, and the destruction of records among the military.

Chapter 27 jumps ahead to August 30, where MacArthur is set to arrive at Honshu, Japan, in a scene echoing his arrival in the Philippines the previous fall. Though some show concerns over assassination attempts upon MacArthur’s arrival, the general himself demonstrates little concern, striding into public view and posing with his aviator sunglasses and corncob pipe. On September 2, MacArthur watches as the Japanese sign the terms of surrender aboard the USS Missouri.

Chapter 28 opens on September 11, where Hideki Tojo hides in the outskirts of Tokyo for American military personnel to arrive. He plans a dramatic suicide once they arrived, but first the Americans carry out an extensive effort to round up documents providing evidence of atrocities. Despite Japanese efforts to destroy them, the U.S. recovers hundreds of thousands of files, as well as photographic evidence. Surprisingly, two reporters with the Associated Press find Tojo before the military does, granting him one final chance to explain himself. When the reporters return on September 11, accompanied by five soldiers, Tojo shoots himself with .32-caliber Colt, using a black mark on his chest to guide his aim toward his heart. He misses nonetheless and is taken alive.

On September 27 a nervous Hirohito meets MacArthur, unsure of his fate. Here MacArthur assures the emperor that he views Hirohito as essential for rebuilding Japan as a vital ally of the U.S. At the end of the meeting a photo of the two men is taken, with the six-foot American general beside the awkward, five-foot-five emperor. The photo is distributed to newspapers across the country, introducing Japan to the general that will rule the country during the post-war reconstruction period, his towering presence next to the emperor sending an unmistakable message.

On January 1, 1946, Hirohito publicly acknowledges that he is not a god. On May 3 the International Military Tribunal for the Far East issues indictments for war crimes, including Hideki Tojo's.

Chapter 29 moves to 1948, where Colonel Paul Tibbets, his military career over, meets President Truman along with General Carl Spaatz, General Jimmy Doolittle, and Colonel Dave Shillen. They are there to be commended for their military exploits during the war, and in Spaatz's case, to be appointed first chief of the air force. Asked "What do you think?" by the president, Tibbets responded, "I think I did what I was told" (278).

On December 22, 1948, Japan's seven "Class A" war criminals are hanged. Hideki Tojo's last words are an apology for his military's atrocities and a plea for the Americans to show mercy to his country.

Chapter 30 takes readers to September 10, 1949 where an ensign from Brooklyn holds his new baby. This baby is Bill O'Reilly, whose father, William James O'Reilly, avoided being sent to Japan as part of MacArthur's proposed invasion. The voice of this chapter is once again that of O'Reilly, who tells of how his father believed he would have died had Operation Olympic been carried out. Shifting between present and past tense, the author explains how his father took part in the reconstruction of Japan, growing to respect the Japanese people for their disciplined response to the reconstruction effort, then in 1948 married his wife, Angela, who gave birth to their son the following year. William James O'Reilly Sr., his son says, lived out his life as a financial analyst, grateful for his regular paycheck and – he believes because of the A-bomb – his life.

The postscript for the book discusses the fates of the books central individuals. It explains that Hirohito surrendered all powers under MacArthur, but remained emperor as a symbol for the Japanese people. Oppenheimer was unjustly stripped of security clearances because of allegations of communist sympathies, though evidence vindicated him after his death in 1967. Tibbets lived to be 92 and Sweeney 84, and both would eventually be promoted to the rank of general. Douglas MacArthur and Truman feuded over the handling of the Korean War, with the president firing the general in 1951. Truman's decision was criticized, and overall discontent with the Korean War led to very low approval ratings and his not seeking re-election in 1952. MacArthur died in 1964 at age 84; Truman, who has been rated much more highly by historians than by voters of his time, died in 1972 at age 88.

Analysis

Hirohito appears to have been right to be wary of surrendering, because despite all that Japan had lost in military and other terms, and with the Soviets closing in through Manchuria, high-ranking members of the military do attempt a coup to prevent him from surrendering. This shows how strong the nationalist pull remains for the Japanese elites, who have invested so much in the idea of a divine emperor presiding over an invincible race that they are willing to contradict that emperor to uphold it. Those willing to listen to the emperor, or maybe just listen to reason, suppress the coup, but one can only imagine whether suppression would have worked at an earlier date, or if a coup would have attracted too much support. This fanaticism remains very much in evidence in the actions of Tojo, who insists on taking his life rather than being taken alive by the Americans. However, he insists on doing do in full view of the Americans, and pays a price for his theatricality, missing his target and being taken alive despite his best efforts.

Yet, this myth proves unsustainable. The authors show in this section that much of the reason why Hirohito remained venerated by his people as a living god was because of what they could not see and could not hear. When they hear his quiet, unimposing voice for the first time over the radio, the message of defeat it carries causes many of them to give up on living. And while Hirohito had occasionally been seen in public, the photo of him standing next to MacArthur when the provisional American government is set up is surely the first time any of them see him in an unflattering contrast.

Other individuals focused on in this book do not undergo similarly sharp changes in outlook. The Soviets under Stalin, as demonstrated by their conduct in Manchuria, remain voracious in their appetite for dominance and ruthless in their acquisition of it. Truman remains resolute in the final days of the war despite impatience with Japanese tactics. This will bring him into conflict with MacArthur, who as the photo-op demonstrates, remains a publicity seeker to the very end. Denied his chance at glory on the beaches of Japan he rules the provisional government of the now-defeated enemy as a sovereign entity; in 1950 he will get his opportunity for a glorious beach landing in Incheon, Korea, saving U.S. forces and their South Korean allies from North Korea.

However, MacArthur's bravado will be exploited by China, whose invasion will catch an overconfident MacArthur off-guard, forcing him to retreat. At this point Truman will relieve him of duty, his impatience with the general’s glory-seeking finally out-weighing his regard for MacArthur’s fame. The authors note that Truman left office unpopular, but that history came to regard him more favorably; this helps to affirm their position that Truman acted appropriately in using the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

And in the last chapter before the prologue readers finally find out why O’Reilly insisted on writing the forward of the book in his own voice: he believes his father would have died in Japan had Operation Olympic been carried out, and he would never have been born. As with the beginning of the book, where the time between FDR’s launching of the nuclear program and the start of the Allies’ island-hopping strategy was compressed

and told in past tense, the elder O’Reilly’s post-war years after the beach invasion that never happened are squeezed into a short narrative, with the author’s arrival told in present tense. Like the other historical events of this book, this birth was far from inevitable before it took place.

Vocabulary

gallant, rectitude, capitulation, profaned, sheaf, jaundice, culpability, sanctum, idyllic, burgeoning, fiefdom, contravention, feted

Important People

Harry Truman

The authors quote reporters who describe Truman, the thirty-third president of the United States, as “cool” and “matter-of-fact” in Chapter 26 because this fits their overall image of him. Truman is portrayed as a resolute leader unruffled by his circumstances, even if he is angered by Japan’s delayed replies to his surrender demands, and even if he is forced into marathon haggling sessions with Joseph Stalin, a communist tyrant he clearly distrusts and dislikes. This decisive, collected nature explains Truman’s willingness to drop the new atomic weapons on Japan, thus saving, in the authors’ view, up to 1 million American lives and securing a reformed, reconstructed Japanese ally to help fight communism later.

This nature is especially interesting considering how new Truman was to the job when the decision to bomb Japan had to be made. In 1944 Truman was chosen to join the popular President Roosevelt’s ticket, where he quickly fell under scrutiny because, essentially, it was all Roosevelt’s opponents could attack FDR with. Though the book makes clear that Truman made mistakes during that campaign, and though he was used to entertain troops in the early days of 1945 while Roosevelt made the hard war-related decisions, Truman quickly rose to the occasion once in office, immediately preparing for the end of the war and soon feeling comfortable in the presence of the respected, and far more experienced, Winston Churchill by that summer. This is the type of character a leader should possess, the authors would argue, and this explains why he made a decision they feel needed making. And though troubled by the bomb’s potential, Truman chooses to use it because he is more disturbed by the alternatives: additional American lives lost and further Soviet control in East Asia. Also, he considers it unacceptable for Japan, which attacked America at Pearl Harbor and has committed horrific war crimes, to not surrender unconditionally and for its leaders to not pay a price for such acts.

Truman left office unpopular, but the authors believe history has vindicated him, and not just because one of them feels he would never have been born otherwise.

Douglas MacArthur

The famed general Douglas MacArthur serves as Truman’s opposite in this story, but not because of a lack of resolve. MacArthur is determined to fight, even against overwhelming odds in the Philippines and enormous dangers in Japan. However, MacArthur’s decisions are based on his own pursuit of glory, not his concern over what would be best for the country or for the people he oversees. As a result, he has to ordered to flee the Philippines and cut out of the loop in the decision to bomb Hiroshima, as he has a reputation for petty criticisms of rivals and might not be above revealing such plans to serve his own interests.

This self-centeredness extends to small decisions, as MacArthur is depicted as overly concerned with his appearance and potential photo ops, including his post-war photograph with Hirohito designed to cast him as the larger, more powerful figure. It also includes MacArthur's views of more important decisions, including his contentment with the Soviet presence in East Asia if it means he gets to carry out his grand arrival on the island. The book, therefore, argues that if MacArthur had gotten his way he would be even more legendary today, but many, many more would be dead and America would have been in a weaker position.

Emperor Hirohito

The emperor of Japan, the book's authors repeatedly remind readers, was seen as a god by the Japanese. This view was essential to the Japanese view of superiority over its neighbors – and even the rest of the world – because they, unlike other nations, were led by a living deity descended back millennia to the nation's mythical founding. As a result, Hirohito was actually a short, slightly built man rarely seen and never heard from in public during the war, so as to maintain his mythical stature.

The authors depict Hirohito in a distinctly ungodlike fashion: he fails to make appropriate decisions while his country is battered, he clings to false hopes of that the country can be saved if it simply holds on long enough, and he cowers in his bunker, afraid of American munitions and coups. Not only does he lack decisive leadership, but also moral leadership, as he knows full well what is being done to the subjects and the prisoners of his imperial war machine, and he approves. In defeat he is preserved in his figurehead role, reduced from his deified stature but maintained to hold on to continuity so that Japan can rebuild itself. However, we are left to question whether that was an appropriate decision, and not just because the self-serving MacArthur wanted it.

J. Robert Oppenheimer

The eccentric physicist Oppenheimer embodies the effort to construct the first atomic weapon in time to end the war early: it required unusual thinking, extraordinary work habits, and a willingness to embrace death. Oppenheimer, with his odd habits and vices, willingness to sacrifice family and health, plus his skeletal appearance and penchant for quoting ominous religious texts about death and destruction, becomes a fitting representative of this effort both literally and symbolically.

His eccentricities and background made some wary of him both before and after his work on the bomb – hence the suspicions of communist sympathies that followed him to his death. However, those allegations were eventually disproven, and the authors believe that he, like Truman, has been judged favorably by history.

Paul Tibbets and Chuck Sweeney

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are well-known for their connection to the atomic bomb, as are the names of Fat Man and Little Boy. Even the plane that delivered the bomb to Hiroshima, the Enola Gay, is a familiar one. The names of Tibbets and Sweeney are much less so, however, even though they were entrusted as pilots to make sure the bombs reached their targets. The qualities that made both men suitable for the job are complementary to the qualities that made Truman a great leader: their diligence was needed to bring his decisiveness to fruition.

Tibbets passes the task of carrying out the second bombing to Sweeney explicitly because he knows Sweeney will do as he is told (though, as the chapter concerning the bombing shows, show quick decision-making was required when plan A fell through). Tibbets himself explains his rationale to Truman in person, in Chapter 29, three years after the war: “I think I did what I was told” (278). This resolute diligence, in the authors’ view, overrides any other concerns, such as Tibbets youth and Sweeney’s inexperience.

Hideki Tojo

The wartime prime minister of Japan is portrayed as a monster. Given his overseeing of the wartime effort, and certain of his commands (including declaring POWs expendable and encouraging the Japanese military to kill them) certainly support that portrayal. Tojo is even compared to Hitler, and declared “psychopathic” over the course of the book.

Unlike Hitler during World War II, however, Tojo took orders. The emperor, who exercised supreme (if little-used) authority over Japan, relieved Tojo of duty near the end of the war, and the prime minister’s depiction near the end of the war is more pitiful than inspiring of anger. Failing even at killing himself, Tojo is subject to rigorous questioning at the war crimes tribunal, and ultimately meets his execution meekly, asking for forgiveness for himself and his country.

Joseph Stalin

The Soviet premier is not technically an enemy of the United States during this story, as it takes place during World War II when the Soviet Union was part of the Allied Powers. Stalin’s threat, however, is foreshadowed throughout the story, as he has spies in the facility producing America’s first nuclear weapons, has an unstoppable (and barbarous) military occupying Eastern Europe and invading Manchuria, and desires to use these things to acquire more global dominance. When he appears in the book he frequently hides his ambitions behind mere rudeness – insisting that an ill Roosevelt meet him in Crimea, communicating with simple grunts, barely reacting to news of the first bomb test – but the authors clearly portray him as a threat the U.S. will have to face later, making the development of the first nuclear weapons important not just for dealing with Japan.

The People of Hiroshima

Despite the heinous acts of their leaders, the residents of Hiroshima – Nagasaki's residents receive much less in-depth depictions – are shown as common people with regular jobs and interests, and some of whom are not even supporters of their government's wartime decisions (namely closing schools so the young can build weapons). The survivors depicted in the book largely survive through happenstance, namely surroundings that protected them from the full effect of the blast, and they bear emotional scarring from what they saw after the explosion for the rest of their lives.

Even some who did not survive are depicted, and also as regular people: divorcées, young mothers, young soldiers doing calisthenics in a field. Even the mayor of the town dies not at the office conducting official business, but at home eating with his family. The book makes clear that, even if it was necessary, the bombing was a horrible occurrence, and one the Japanese government ultimately bears responsibility for due to its war crimes, aggression, and poor decision-making as the war neared its end.

Franklin Roosevelt

The thirty-second president of the United States plays a smaller role than his predecessor due to the timeframe of this book and Roosevelt's death months before Hiroshima and Nagasaki. FDR, however, is a giant in American history, as the first president to serve more than two terms – he was elected four times overall – and the leader who saw the country through the Great Depression and all but the last year of World War II. Even though his time in the book is short, it is important: Roosevelt authorizes the development of a nuclear weapons program to ensure that America's enemies do not acquire the weapon first, and continues to represent America in negotiations with its allies, including the aggressive Stalin. Despite his own reputation for leadership, the book suggests that Roosevelt was too trusting of his Soviet counterpart, and that his Stalin took advantage of FDR's declining health to secure more territory for himself.

The USS Indianapolis

The ship that carried key parts of Little Boy to the island of Tinian represents the precariousness of the mission. Given the parts under strict secrecy, given no details except that the components must never fall into the hands of the Japanese, the crew of the Indianapolis succeeds in delivering them, only to be struck by Japanese torpedoes in its very next voyage. Most of the crew die tragically, from drowning, from the health effects of being stuck on the open water for long periods of time, and from shark attacks. Had they been intercepted by a Japanese submarine ahead of their arrival at Tinian, one can only guess how the end of the war would have proceeded.

Objects/Places

Washington, D.C.

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will be the results of the decisions made in this book, but the American capital is where such decisions have to be made. The narrative begins here in 1939, with Roosevelt's decision to support the building of a nuclear weapon, and years later will be the scene where Harry Truman takes office, and decides how to carry out the war. From here he authorizes the use of the weapons that will one day haunt the world during the Cold War, and dictates how Japan will be allowed to surrender. Douglas MacArthur is based elsewhere throughout the book, and occasionally attempts to act as though he is above Washington's decision-making, but Washington, through Truman, eventually asserts authority by choosing the bombings over MacArthur's invasion. This repeats itself in the post-script, as Washington (Truman) removes MacArthur from his position as head of the U.S. forces in the Korean War.

Tokyo

Tokyo is the capital of the Empire of Japanese, but like the empire itself it gradually diminishes, as American bombing raids destroy much of it, including the imperial residence (though this is accidental, as the American bombs had struck buildings near it, only to have their fires spread to the emperor's home). As Tokyo declines in size the emperor's government declines in power; at the beginning of the book they remain defiant despite heavy losses, but as much of the city is burnt away the emperor becomes paralyzed, at first unable to cope with defeat, then concerned that he will be unable to even carry out a surrender because high-ranking officials may value national ideals of invincibility more than they value the emperor or the well-being of the Japanese public. Only Hirohito's final acceptance of reality and assertion of authority saves Japan from further misery, and saves Tokyo itself from an atomic bombing – something Truman considered before their unconditional surrender reached him.

Los Alamos

The scene of the first nuclear test, Los Alamos, New Mexico starts as a research facility and gradually becomes a community as scientists, military personnel, and their families are based there to bring the Manhattan Project to fruition. The scene is largely told from the perspective of Oppenheimer, the brilliant yet eccentric and morbid scientist determined to make the bomb functional and end the war sooner than through invasion of Japan. The scene is a stressful one, as Oppenheimer virtually rots away while still alive because he is so consumed with success. Even on the day of the first successful test the elements do not cooperate, keeping the haggard scientist waiting just a bit longer for confirmation. Eventually, it will be revealed that the facility is even less

trustworthy than thought, as spies for the communist are at work, plotting the acquisition of the Soviet Union's first bomb.

Hiroshima

Hiroshima's position as an army headquarters made the city important to the Japanese war effort. However, it received none of the fire-bombings that destroyed so much of so many other cities, Tokyo included. These two factors, however, ultimately doomed them to feel Little Boy's power, as their military facilities and untouched condition made them an ideal location to test the bomb. Warned of an unprecedented strike ahead, many do flee the city, but many also remain, including its bank tellers, its firefighters, its teenagers, its homemakers. These people are the victims of an attack they do not even have a name for, and the survivors of the attack feel its psychological effects well after the physical trauma passes. More than 20,000 were killed instantly, and between 70,000 and 146,000 eventually died of the bomb's effects.

Nagasaki

Nagasaki, unlike Hiroshima, was not untouched by conventional bombings from the U.S. It was, however, a center for the heavy industry the Japanese war effort needed, making it a suitable target when the bombing of Hiroshima failed to end the war. Nagasaki, however, was even less fortunate than the first A-bomb target, as the bombing of August 9 was originally set to hit Kokura, only to have the plan change when conditions hindered visibility. The less-than-perfect conditions – the bombing was only carried out due to a break in cloud coverage – and hasty nature of the pilot's decision meant that the bomb did not fall precisely on target, but its damage was still catastrophic, thanks to Fat Man's larger payload than Little Boy's: anywhere from 39,000 to 80,000 died the day of the blast, and anywhere from 129,000 to 246,000 ultimately died from its effects.

Manila

As the capital of the Philippines, Manila has an important role for several reasons. In 1942, it is a sign of the Japanese military's early success, overwhelming the American presence there and driving MacArthur out against his will. By 1945, it symbolizes their decline, as MacArthur arrives to retake the city ahead of the assaults on Japan's mainland. Even then, it is the scene of Japanese belligerence and savagery, as factions of their military refuse to retreat or surrender, but continue to strike at Americans even if it means their own deaths. Before they are defeated, they also commit horrible crimes against the Filipino population, including mass slaughter and rape.

After retaking the city, Manila again becomes MacArthur's base of operations, where he makes plans for how to end the war, without consulting with Washington-based politicians. These plans are in direct conflict with Truman's in Washington, however, and do not come to fruition. This foreshadows how, years later, MacArthur would anoint

himself “sovereign” over post-war Tokyo, and make plans for the Korean War that Truman could not accept.

The Pacific Theater

In 1944 the book opens with the Allies’ island-hopping strategy, as they gradually retake territories from the Caroline Islands to Leyte to Okinawa. Though they are successful, the costs are enormous due to Japanese resistance. Each territory the Allies reclaim from the Japanese comes at great costs due to traps the Japanese have set, due to their refusal to surrender, and their willingness to die while inflicting maximum casualties on the approaching enemy. the lengths that the Japanese were willing to go to serves as a warning to the Americans of what awaits them if they invade the mainland, and informs the readers that despite the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, something worse awaited had America chosen otherwise.

Potsdam

Potsdam, Germany, is the namesake of the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945, in which the Allies spelled out their demands for Japan’s unconditional surrender. These demands included the abandonment of imperial territories, the removal from power of officials who “deceived and misled the people of Japan into embarking on world conquest,” and the occupation of the country by the Allies. It warned that the alternative would be “prompt and utter destruction.” The book also describes the Potsdam Conference as a turning point for Truman, who though in office only a few months feels he has risen to the level of Britain’s famed Prime Minister Churchill, and who can stand up to and resist the ambitions of Stalin.

The Enola Gay and the Bockscar

The vehicles used to transport Little Boy and Fat Man to their targets are scenes of enormous pressure. Thorough preparations are required to make the Enola Gay – named for its pilot’s mother – ready for its mission, which will bring enormous destruction to Hiroshima but also an early end to the war. These include measures to keep the pilot awake, to prevent the pilot from being captured, and instructions to keep the crew from being knocked from the sky or blinded by the bomb blast. Three days later the Bockscar’s mission nearly ends disastrously, with equipment malfunctioning, the target obscured, fuel low, and a near fatal collision with another plane. The end result, in both cases, is a successful delivery, but the circumstances both planes endured showed that such an outcome was not guaranteed.

Tinian

The island of Tinian, located 1,500 miles from the Japanese mainland, was retaken from the Empire of Japan in August 1944 and served as the departure point for American

bombing raids, first those that used napalm to incinerate whole city blocks, then as the departure points for both the Enola Gay and Bockscar's fateful missions. Tinian was also the final destination of the USS Indianapolis before its sinking by Japanese torpedoes, the worst single incident of loss of life in the U.S. Navy's history.

Manchuria

Manchuria, located in northeast China, is where the Japanese established the puppet state of Manchukuo during World War II. As the war wound down it was among the last of Japan's territorial conquests to be stripped from them, and was taken in particularly ominous form. Asked to intervene on the side of the Allies against Japan by Roosevelt, the Soviets invade on August 9 – the same day as the Nagasaki bombing – quickly overrunning the Japanese. This illustrates the threat the Soviets presented, especially if they had been permitted to invade mainland Japan.

Themes

Truman and MacArthur

Harry Truman and Douglas MacArthur have both passed into the lore of wartime American history, with both seen as having played a critical role in winning World War II and contributed to fight against communism. However, this book casts the two as opposites, with Truman as a man of dignity, modesty, and good judgment, and MacArthur a self-aggrandizing glory hound who, if he had gotten his way, would have cost more lives than the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would have claimed. Throughout the book Truman's unassuming yet unflappable personality is demonstrated, as is MacArthur's relentless search for glory.

MacArthur today maintains a reputation as a brilliant wartime commander, particularly for conservative Cold Warriors, who fulfilled his promise to return to the Philippines. Many Americans sided with him when he was relieved of duty by MacArthur during the Korean War, believing he alone would have delivered victory over the communist invasion. However, from the beginning, this book describes MacArthur as concerned above all else with his appearance, his reputation, and how much respect he receives. This extends from MacArthur’s wardrobe, which he maintains specifically in case of a photo opportunity, to his plans for conducting the war in such a way that will bring him a lasting reputation.

MacArthur has been criticized before; historian of the Korean War Bruce Cumings and journalist David Halberstam, author of The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War, both have criticized his choices in Korea. Cumings, however, is a leftist critical of many other decisions America has made in Korea, and Halberstam criticizes Republican attitudes during the war while defending Truman. O’Reilly, unlike the two of them, is a right-of-center pundit for Fox News. What explains his criticism of MacArthur and defense of a Democratic president, especially one who left with historically low popularity ratings, other than the fact that his father was not sent on an invasion of Japan?

In the years since he left office, Harry Truman’s reputation has seen a stark shift into more favorable territory, including among conservative anti-communists who admire his defense of Korea. Like O’Reilly, they also admire Truman’s decision to bomb Japan, demonstrating American power, forcing Japan’s surrender with less loss of life – especially American life – and sending a stark warning to the Soviets. By the time of his death in the early 1970s America was struggling with the stalemate in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal; Truman’s decisiveness, hard work, and personal integrity were more favorably evaluated. All of these qualities can be seen in this book, as Truman rises from in short order from an unknown senator to president of the U.S. in wartime in just a few months, yet he rises to the occasion through determination and good judgment. This starkly contrasts him with MacArthur, whose choices are clouded by self-regard, with unfortunate consequences for his career.

While O'Reilly's disapproval of MacArthur may set him apart from other conservatives, it is consistent with his respect for Truman's decisions. Truman, in his and Dugard's view, made decisions based on what was best for the country, while MacArthur was concerned with what was best for MacArthur.

Japanese Determination

The authors describe how the Japanese emperor encouraged a way of thinking for the Japanese army that created a sense of determination stronger than the natural sense of self-preservation, creating an unprecedented dangerous threat. The authors make clear that they see this Japanese determination as a combination of ingrained, bloodthirsty chauvinism and an emperor removed from the consequences of his decisions, and that this justifies using the atomic bomb against them.

With the defeat of its military and rapid declines in its territorial holdings, the Empire of Japan is barely holding on by the time the story picks up in late 1944. However, Japan's leadership is never seen considering surrender under Allied terms prior to the use of nuclear weapons in 1945, and its soldiers continue to fight after their weapons are gone and they stand hopelessly outnumbered. This can be explained through the indoctrination of the Japanese public, convinced of the superiority of their race and the inevitability of their success, as well as the heroes’ afterlife that awaited those who died in the service of the living god, their emperor.

This belief makes the Japanese dangerous on every step of the Allies’ island-hopping strategy, and threatens to turn an invasion of the mainland into an unprecedented bloodbath. Even as the emperor abandons this belief, the August 14-15 coup demonstrates that some could not, and the post-script shows that some cling to belief in the emperor’s divinity to this day.

The other reason for Japanese stubbornness, through much of the book, appears to be Hirohito’s distance from the battlefield. As his men are falling across territories the empire once held in the Pacific, the emperor is shown in his royal residence displaying no sense of urgency or empathy with their condition. Even when he begins considering that an invasion is ahead, he believes holding out can still save his rule, and that a new pact with the Soviets can prevent such an invasion entirely. It takes the power of the bomb to change his belief in his own authority, although a coup attempt and a rash of suicides after his announcement of surrender indicates that men in the military are unable to accept defeat as he has been.

For these reasons the bomb was necessary, the authors argue, because an invasion of Japan would have resulted in a dragged-out conflict between a large, well-armed American military and a Japanese populace consisting of both military and civilians willing to fight to death on a house-by-house basis. And this does not factor in the kamikaze attacks and “suicide boats” slamming the Allied invasion before its arrival. This is the reason for the belief, held by Truman, Oppenheimer, and the authors that for all the lives the bombs took, they saved many more, including Japanese lives.

Japanese Atrocities

Though overshadowed by the crimes against humanity committed by their allies in Nazi Germany, Japan also carried out many serious violations of human rights during World War II, and because of the atomic bombings they were unable to escape the consequences of those misdeeds.

The actions carried out by the Japanese in the lead-up to the war, and during it, are indeed disturbing; starting with the Rape of Nanjing in 1937, the Japanese belief in their racial superiority over their neighbors leads them to gruesomely violate the populations of their conquered territories, committing mass executions including beheadings and incidents in which victims are forced to dig their own graves. Women suffered extraordinary indignities under their rule, with the female residences of Nanjing from children to grandmothers raped and murdered.

The “comfort station” system the book references was actually a response to this event, designed to supply Japanese servicemen with an outlet for their sexual urges that would not result in their rampaging out of control among the general populace and stirring up resentment. However, the tens of thousands of women – from Korea, China, the Philippines, other Asian and even a few Western countries – forced into these roles would be raped often dozens of times per day, developing venereal diseases, infertility, and psychological trauma. Many were killed, including those who had become pregnant, and the survivors continue to fight for recognition and compensation from the Japanese government to this day.

Other atrocities carried out by Japan include the Bataan Death March, in which 60,000 to 80,000 American and Filipino prisoners of war were forced to march 60 to 70 miles, starting on April 9, 1942. Estimates vary, but anywhere from 5,000 to 18,000 Filipino deaths and 500 to 650 American deaths resulted from exhaustion, heat, and starvation, but also random killings, torture, and cruel punishments by Japanese officers. Though Japan’s war crimes – the human experimentation at Unit 731 and massacres of locals before their defeat in Manila are other examples – are typically overshadowed by that of the Holocaust, events such as these resulted in the executions of Japanese military officials for crimes against humanity after Japan’s defeat.

The book makes clear that the Japanese, through their back-channel negotiations with the Soviets and the emperor's last-ditch effort to claim sovereignty while surrendering, sought to avoid punishment for these misdeeds.

Do these actions in and of themselves justify the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Truman seemed to believe they did. Did making sure members of the upper ranks of the military were prosecuted justify the bombings? And does Americans' effort to make sure that the emperor avoided the blame for these crimes weaken their argument? Historians wrestle with the question still.

Nuclear Terror

The beach invasion of the Japanese mainland may have been a nightmare the Allies avoided, but they released a different kind of nightmare onto the world through the atomic bombings on August 6 and August 9, one which threatened humanity's very survival.

Chapter 21 describes the effects of the bombings in step-by-step detail: those within a half-mile of the blast were erased from existence instantly by the extraordinary heat. Those caught looking in the direction of the blast were blinded immediately, and with some so badly burnt that “it [was] impossible to distinguish the back of their heads from the front” (194). Designs from clothing were etched into bodies as the cloth was burnt away. Fires then broke out among the buildings within two miles of ground zero, with raging winds reaching hurricane force. Radioactive dust would infect residents, often fatally, for years to come.

Chapter twenty-four describes the effects of the bomb on Nagasaki, though in less detail than chapter twenty-one. It notes that thousands died, crushed as their homes and offices were reduced to rubble, and bomb shelters dug into mountains became superheated by the blast, cooking hundreds of people alive inside them. Again, thousands would die of the effects in the days after the blast, enduring symptoms such as nausea and bloody diarrhea.

As stated, the effects of these blasts are interspersed with stories of Hirohito’s indecisiveness and preceded by stories of Japanese cruelty during the war. The victims of these incidents – and they are portrayed as victims, even if they were on the “wrong” side of the war – are therefore meant to be seen as victims of the Japanese governments misdeeds. Also, the book's prologue and later chapters concerning the Soviets suggest that, had the U.S. not made the effort, it may have been the Nazis or Stalin who got the bomb first.

But none of that changes the fact that the bomb was terrifying, and not just because of what could be done to a city: the Allies, as shown in the fire bombings of Japan (and of Dresden, Germany in February 1945) already had the ability to inflict enormous damage, essentially wiping out whole cities. With atomic bombs, however, a single bomb carried by one plane now had such power. Many figures of the day expressed dismay that such a weapon had been used, as well as a fear that such weapons could be mass produced, thus threatening all of humanity. Furthermore, thanks to the coming of thermonuclear weapons, weapons far exceeding the effects of Fat Man and Little Boy are now in humanity’s possession.

The Dawn of the Cold War

The development of the atomic bomb was not just about ending the conflict with Japan with as few casualties as possible, but shaping the global order that came after Japan surrendered.

Prior to his death President Roosevelt trusted Joseph Stalin closely enough to work with him, and even invited his invasion of Manchuria, even though he knew he was likely being monitored during the conference at Yalta in February 1945. His confidence was shared, it is later revealed, by MacArthur, who viewed Soviet intervention in East Asia as essential for drawing the conflict to a close (and showed the depths of what MacArthur was willing to agree to so that his dream of a beach invasion could take place).

Truman, however, was aware of Soviet conduct in the USSR itself and in Eastern Europe and distrusted Stalin as soon as he took office. Seeking to curtail Soviet ambitions, he celebrated the successful testing of the A-bomb in Los Alamos, revealing the result to Stalin at the end of heated negotiations. Thanks to the bomb, America could take sole control of the Japanese reconstruction effort, claim the southern half of Korea for democracy, and leave Manchuria to the Soviets.

However, what Truman did not know was that Stalin had spies in Los Alamos, and had scientists of his own working toward nuclear capability. Already in control of Eastern Europe and East Germany, by 1949 the USSR would conduct its first nuclear test, and communist allies would come to power in China. The Soviets and Red Chinese would then support a North Korean invasion of South Korea, kicking off the Korean War that ended MacArthur’s career and Truman’s presidency.

Though the Soviets and the Americans never attacked each other directly, they did engage in proxy wars over the next several decades, with massive quantities of weapons as powerful as Fat Man and Little Boy – and much more so – holding the world hostage. For generations the stories out of Hiroshima and Nagasaki served as warnings of what could happen in the event of a miscalculation or escalation between the two sides of the Cold War. With tensions heating up between the U.S. and both China and Russia today, they remain stark reminders of the stakes at hand.

And the conclusion of World War II, namely how the Allies jockeyed for positioning and race for atomic weaponry, was a dress rehearsal for all of this.

Styles

Structure

The structure of the book is to move chronologically; once the beginning note to readers has passed, events proceed in a forward fashion beginning with the start of World War II. After Roosevelt okays the launch of America's nuclear program in 1939, the book then proceeds to 1944, with the decline of the Empire of Japan. Chapters 6-28 take place in 1945, with Chapters 12-28 concerning the events of that summer, as the Americans sought to finish the bomb and finish the war with Japan.

Perspective

The book is told from two perspectives, primarily; that of those fighting on the battlefield or flying aerial missions, and that of the leaders of America and Japan as they made decisions on how to bring the war to a close. The effect of these perspectives is to give readers the context surrounding important decisions – Why did Hirohito not surrender sooner? Why were Nagasaki and Hiroshima targeted? – and the how those decisions affected people on the ground, be it soldiers in Leyte, or civilians near the site where Little Boy detonated.

Tone

The tone of the story is generally graphic, describing everything from the diarrhea and unwashed undergarments of American soldiers fighting in the Pacific to the bodies of enemy soldiers the Japanese mutilated and emasculated to send warnings to the living. The victims of Japan's institutionalized rape are allowed to tell their own stories, without skimping on details, but so are those on the ground in Hiroshima who saw skin melt away on people not yet dead and who had to beg forgiveness of those they had to leave behind in rubble. The tone is also foreboding, as the scenes of island battles between the Americans and Japanese hint at an even worse event had the Americans invaded Japan, had the Soviets gotten to Japan before it surrendered, and had any hostile power acquired nuclear weapons before America did.

Quotes

We bombed Hiroshima. We bombed Nagasaki. And we nuked far more than the thousands in New York and the Pentagon [on September 11th] … America's chickens are coming home to roost."
-- Jeremiah Wright (A Note to Readers paragraph 2)

Importance: By calling Hiroshima and Nagasaki crimes, and greater ones than the September 11 terrorist attacks, Wright motivated the authors to write a response justifying those bombings.

Alex, what you are after is to see that the Nazis don't blow us up.
-- Franklin Roosevelt (Introduction paragraph 1)

Importance: Roosevelt's reply to Alexander Sachs, who has told him about the potential of nuclear weapons and the Nazis' acauisition of materials that could be used to make them, motivates the president to launch the program that will eventually produce the atom bomb.

Do not survive in shame as a prisoner. Die, to ensure that you do not leave ignominy behind you."
-- Senjinkin (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: Written in the Japanese military field manual, this quote helps motivate Japanese soldiers to fight until death and take as many enemy troops with them.

People of the Philippines, I have retured!"
-- Douglas MacArthur (chapter 2 paragraph 4)

Importance: Usually used to describe MacArthur's determination to fulfill his promise to return to the Philippines two years after the Japanese drove him out, the quote in this context is used to demonstrate MacArthur's need for attention.

The Japs weren't on the island, they were in the island. One cave was big enough to house about fifteen hundred Jap soldiers."
-- An American Marine on Peleliu (chapter 4 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote, from an unnamed Marine, establishes the effectiveness of Japanese defenses, in addition to their determination to not be taken alive.

About twelve or fifteen different ones took me. The last one was so large that he hurt me. I actually bled. He took all of my clothes and put me on a bed. He kept me there about a half hour, raping me several times."
-- Esther Garcia Moras (chapter 7 paragraph 1)

Importance: Moras was one of the Filipina victims of Japanese war crimes, here describing in vivid detail her gang-rape at the hands of Japanese soldiers.

Is there anything we can do for you? For you are the one in trouble now."
-- Eleanor Roosevelt (chapter 9 paragraph 7)

Importance: The first lady's reply, when Harry Truman asks if there is anything he can do for her after her husband's death. Her answer demonstrates the enormous responsibilities Truman faced as president with the war still under way.

If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst into the sky, that would be like the splendor of the mighty one … Now I am become death, the shatterer of worlds."
-- The Bhagavad Gita (chapter 10 paragraph 1)

Importance: A favorite quote of J. Robert Oppenheimer, physicist in charge of producing a functioning atom bomb.

If we hold out long enough in this war, then we may be able to win it."
-- Emperor Hirohito (chapter 11 paragraph 3)

Importance: With Americans about to take Okinawa, Hirohito continues to hold onto the misguided belief that his country can still prevail. The quote reveals his level of delusion which, along with the determination of his soldiers, pushed the Americans into drastic measures to finish the conflict.

When one first looked up, one saw the fireball, and then almost immediately afterwards, the unearthly hovering cloud."
-- Frank Oppenheimer (chapter 13 paragraph 6)

Importance: The brother of Robert Oppenheimer, who witnessed the first successful test, realizing that an unprecedented weapon had been created.

You'd hear guys scream, especially late in the afternoon. Seemed like the sharks were the worst late in the afternoon than they were during the day."
-- Woody James (chapter 16 paragraph 3)

Importance: James, a sailor who survived the sinking of the USS Indianapolis, recalls how the shark attacks gradually claimed more men who had not drowned after the ship sank.

Finally a fire broke out, endangering us. So we had no choice but to leave her. She was conscious and we deeply bowed to her with clasped hands to apologize to her and then we left."
-- Akira Onogi (chapter 21 paragraph 1)

Importance: Sixteen-year-old Akira, a survivor of the Hiroshima A-bomb, recalls leaving

a woman trapped under a beam to die when it became clear that he and other onlookers could not lift the beam in time to save her.

It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East."
-- Harry Truman (chapter 22 paragraph 7)

Importance: After the use of the bomb in Hiroshima, a confident Truman issues a radio address promising victory over Japan in the very near future.

The general impression, which transcends those derived from our physical senses, is one of deadness, the absolute essence of death in the sense of finality without hope for resurrection."
-- Eyewitness in Nagasaki (chapter 24 paragraph 5)

Importance: An unnamed eyewitness describes the immediate after-effects of the Nagasaki bombing, three days after Hiroshima was hit with the A-bomb.

Nobody is more disturbed over the use of atomic bombs than I am but I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and the murder of our prisoners of war."
-- Harry Truman (chapter 25 paragraph 6)

Importance: Truman makes clear he understands the significance of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but declares that the Japanese were worthy targets because of the crimes against Americans.

After pondering deeply the general trends of the world and the actual conditions obtaining in Our Empire today, we have decided to effect a settlement of the present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure…"
-- Emperor Hirohito (chapter 26 paragraph 3)

Importance: Without using the word "surrender," Hirohito's first public address, broadcast on August 15, acknowledges that the war is lost and and asks the public for help in rebuilding the country.

Topics for Discussion

Were the Allies right to insist on Japan’s unconditional surrender?

Even those who believe Japan was in the wrong and needed to be defeated in World War II may question the "unconditional" aspect of the demand. By insisting that Japan accept all of its terms this decision eliminated the need for negotiations, but also may have backed the Japanese into a corner, especially their leaders, who worried of war crimes prosecution.

Were members of the winning side, such as those that authorized the conventional bombings of Japan, guilty of war crimes?

General Curtis LeMay, who ordered the fire bombings of Japan, expected to be prosecuted for war crimes if the U.S. lost the war. Are certain actions war crimes regardless of whether the victor or the loser carry them out? If so, would the A-bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki count?

Why do you think most of this book is told in present tense?

History books typically speak of past events in the past tense, but the author's of this book chooses a different approach. What are the advantages of this approach? Considering that the ending of this story is well known already, does this approach actually make the storytelling more gripping?

Do you agree with the authors’ depictions of MacArthur’s arrogance?

MacArthur had an accomplished military career by this point, but Harry Truman seems to have decided early on that he could not be trusted. Yet, MacArthur not only maintained his position, but was placed in charge of Japanese reconstruction and eventually the mission to save South Korea from North Korea's invasion. If Truman saw trouble in MacArthur, this prompts the question of why the general was not removed sooner.

Should Hiroshito have been allowed to avoid war crimes prosecution?

Hirohito lost all governing powers after Japan's surrender, but MacArthur and others felt he was a necessary symbol to keep around so that Japan could recover from the war and be restored as a U.S. ally. Yet, the book establishes that he was responsible for many of the war crimes Japan committed, leading to the question of whether his guilt outweighed his usefulness, and whether he was that useful to begin with.

What do you think of Jeremiah Wright's statements about Hiroshima and Nagasaki now?

Think back to Wright’s statements at the beginning of the book. Having read about the effects of the bombings on the people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also about Japan’s war crimes, what do you think of Wright’s statements? If he is right about how horrible the bombings were, can they still be justified? If he is right, is it still appropriate to say they were worse than 9/11?

Why do you think the authors describe the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in such detail?

Considering that the authors argue against Jeremiah Wright's point and content that the bombings were necessary, do you think the descriptions of the bomb's victims undercut their case? Or for the sake of the story was it necessary to be as detailed with these bombings as they were with Japanese war crimes?

How does J. Robert Oppenheimer symbolize the concepts of sacrifice and death in this book?

Oppenheimer's story is not as well known as Truman's or MacArthur's, but his scientific know-how is actually more important to the development of the bomb. As much as, his knowledge, though, Oppenheimer's work ethic and eccentricity appear to contribute to his success in carrying out the Trinity test. What are the signs of the sacrifice his work schedule demands? How do his unusual beliefs contribute to his work? Is he a sympathetic figure?

Had the U.S. not used the bomb on Japan, do you think it would have been used later?

Assuming an alternative both to the A-bombs and a bloody invasion could have been found, both the Americans and the Soviets knew about the potential for nuclear

weaponry at this point. Would one or both have still acquired the technology, and one one or both have used it against an enemy in the future?

How do the authors establish what kind of character Harry Truman has ahead of his decision to drop the bomb?

How would you describe Truman's personality? Based on the book, is he charismatic, outgoing, friendly (or none of these)? How do the authors establish his character over the course of this story? Contrast his character with other important figures in this book (besides MacArthur) who behave differently.