

The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima & Nagasaki: A Military Necessity?

Directions

The following documents focus on the Pacific Theater during World War II and the decision by President Harry S. Truman and his advisors to use the world's first atomic weapons on Japan. You are to read/analyze each of the following documents in the order that they appear and complete a SOAPS primary source think sheet for each document. Then you will utilize the documents and your prior knowledge to fill out a graphic organizer to create a thesis statement. You will then write a paragraph that includes three reasons that answer your questions

Question?

Was the decision to drop atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki a military necessity? If not, was it justifiable for a reason other than military necessity?

Historical Background

In the early morning hours of July 16, 1945, great anticipation and fear ran rampant at White Sands Missile Range near Alamogordo, New Mexico. Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Manhattan Project, could hardly breathe. Years of secrecy, research, and tests were riding on this moment. "For the last few seconds, he stared directly ahead and when the announcer shouted, „Now!' and there came this tremendous burst of light followed abruptly thereafter by the deep growling of the explosion, his face relaxed into an expression of tremendous relief," recalled General L. R. Groves of Oppenheimer, in a memorandum for Secretary of War George Marshall. The explosion, which carried more power than 20,000 tons of TNT and was visible for more than 200 miles, had succeeded. The world's first atomic bomb had been detonated.

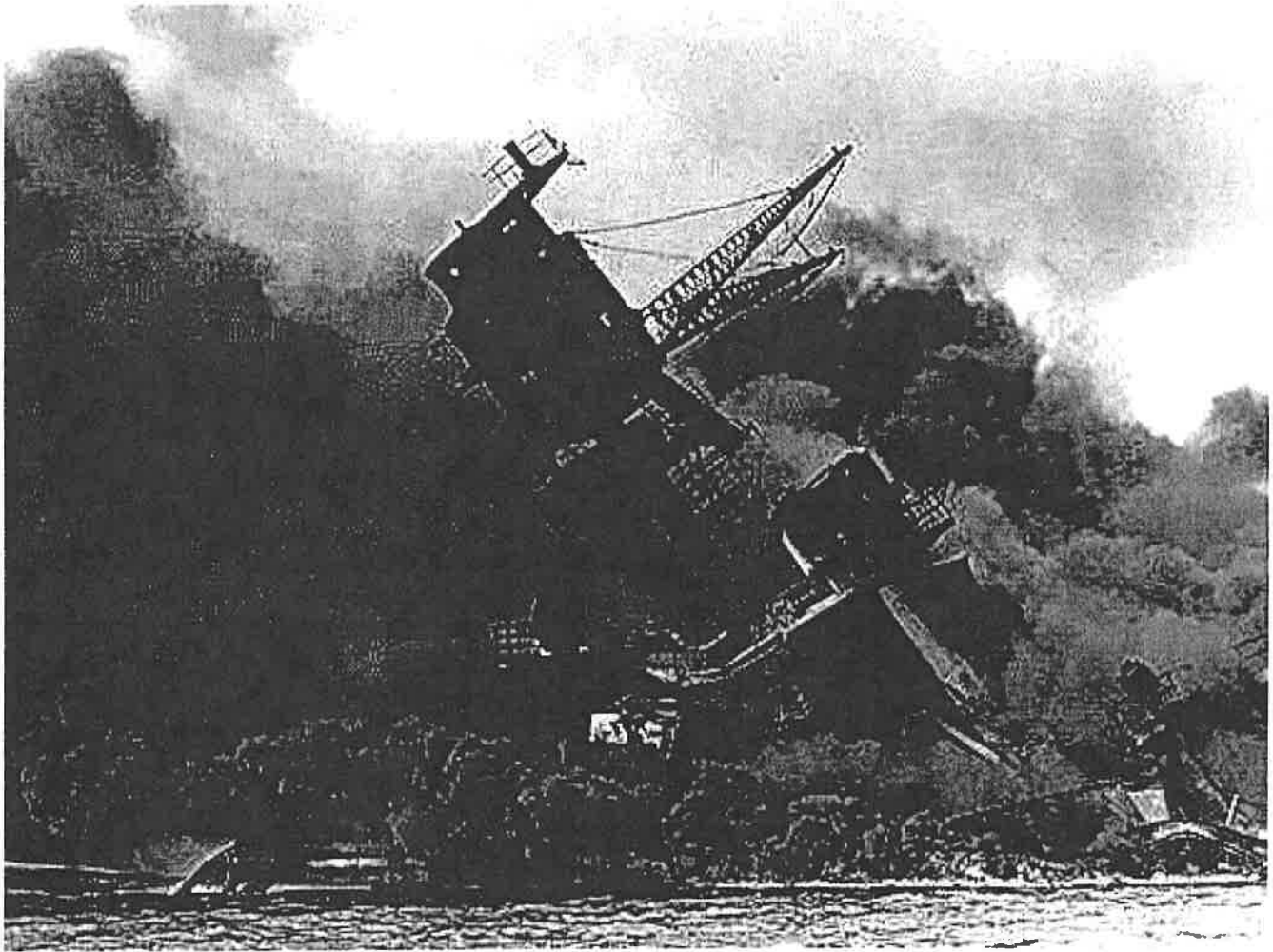
With the advent of the nuclear age, new dilemmas in the art of warfare arose. The war in Europe had concluded in May. The Pacific war would receive full attention from the United States War Department. As late as May 1945, the U.S. was engaged in heavy fighting with the Japanese at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. In these most bloody conflicts, the United States had sustained more than 75,000 casualties. These victories insured the United States was within air striking distance of the Japanese mainland. The bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese to initiate United States entrance into the war, just four years before, was still fresh on the minds of many Americans. A feeling of vindication and a desire to end the war strengthened the resolve of the United States to quickly and decisively conclude it. President Harry Truman had many alternatives at his disposal for ending the war: invade the Japanese mainland, hold a demonstration of the destructive power of the atomic bomb for Japanese dignitaries, drop an atomic bomb on selected industrial Japanese cities, bomb and blockade the islands, wait for Soviet entry into the war on August 15, or mediate a compromised peace. "Operation Olympia", a full-scale landing of United States armed forces, was already planned for the Japanese island of Kyushu on November 1, 1945, and a bomb and blockade plan had already been instituted over the Japanese mainland for several months.

The Japanese resolve to fight had been seriously hampered in the preceding months. Their losses at Iwo Jima and Okinawa had been staggering. Their navy had ceased to exist as an effective fighting force and the air corps had been decimated. American B-29 "Superfortresses" made bombing runs over military targets on the Japanese mainland an integral part of their air campaign. Japan's lack of air power hindered their ability to fight. The imprecision of bombing and the use of devastating city bombing in Europe eventually swayed United States Pacific theater military leaders to authorize bombing of Japanese mainland cities. Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Kobe all were decimated by incendiary and other bombs. In all, hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed in these air strikes meant to deter the resolve of the Japanese people. Yet, Japanese resolve stayed strong and the idea of a bloody "house-to-house" invasion of the Japanese mainland would produce thousands more American and Allied casualties. The Allied leaders declared at the Potsdam Conference in late July 1945 that the Japanese must unconditionally surrender.

After Japanese leaders flatly rejected the Potsdam Declaration, President Truman authorized the use of the atomic bomb anytime after August 3, 1945. On the clear morning of August 6, the first atomic bomb, nicknamed "Little Boy", was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. Leveling over sixty percent of the city, 70,000 residents died instantaneously in a searing flash of heat, while many thousands more were killed as buildings crumbled as a result of the explosions shock wave throughout the city. Three days later, on August 9, a second bomb, "Fat Man", was dropped on Nagasaki. Over 20,000 people died instantly. In the successive weeks, tens of thousands more Japanese died from the after-effects of the radiation exposure of the blast.

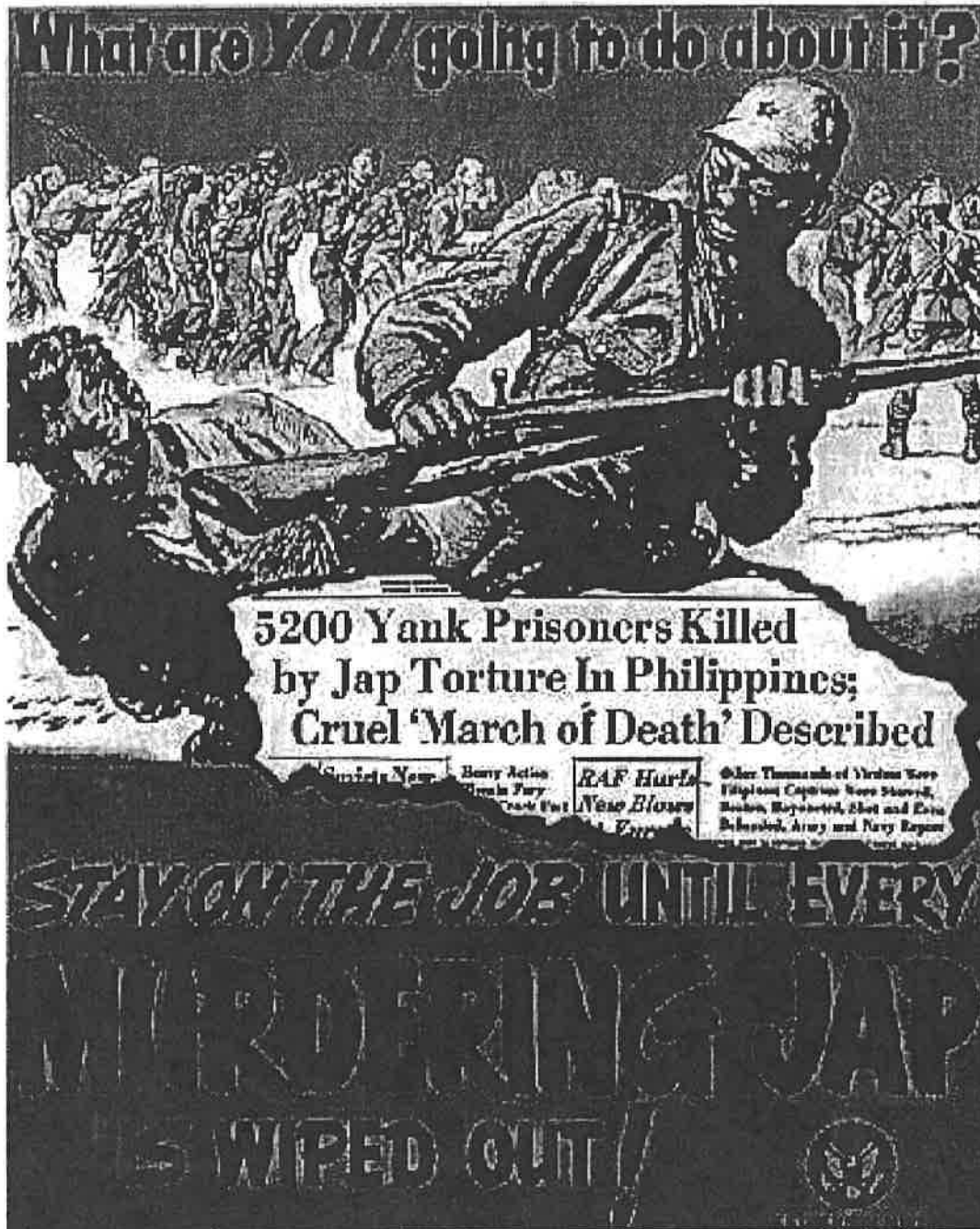
Document A: The Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

(from http://www.solarnavigator.net/history/pearl_harbour.htm)

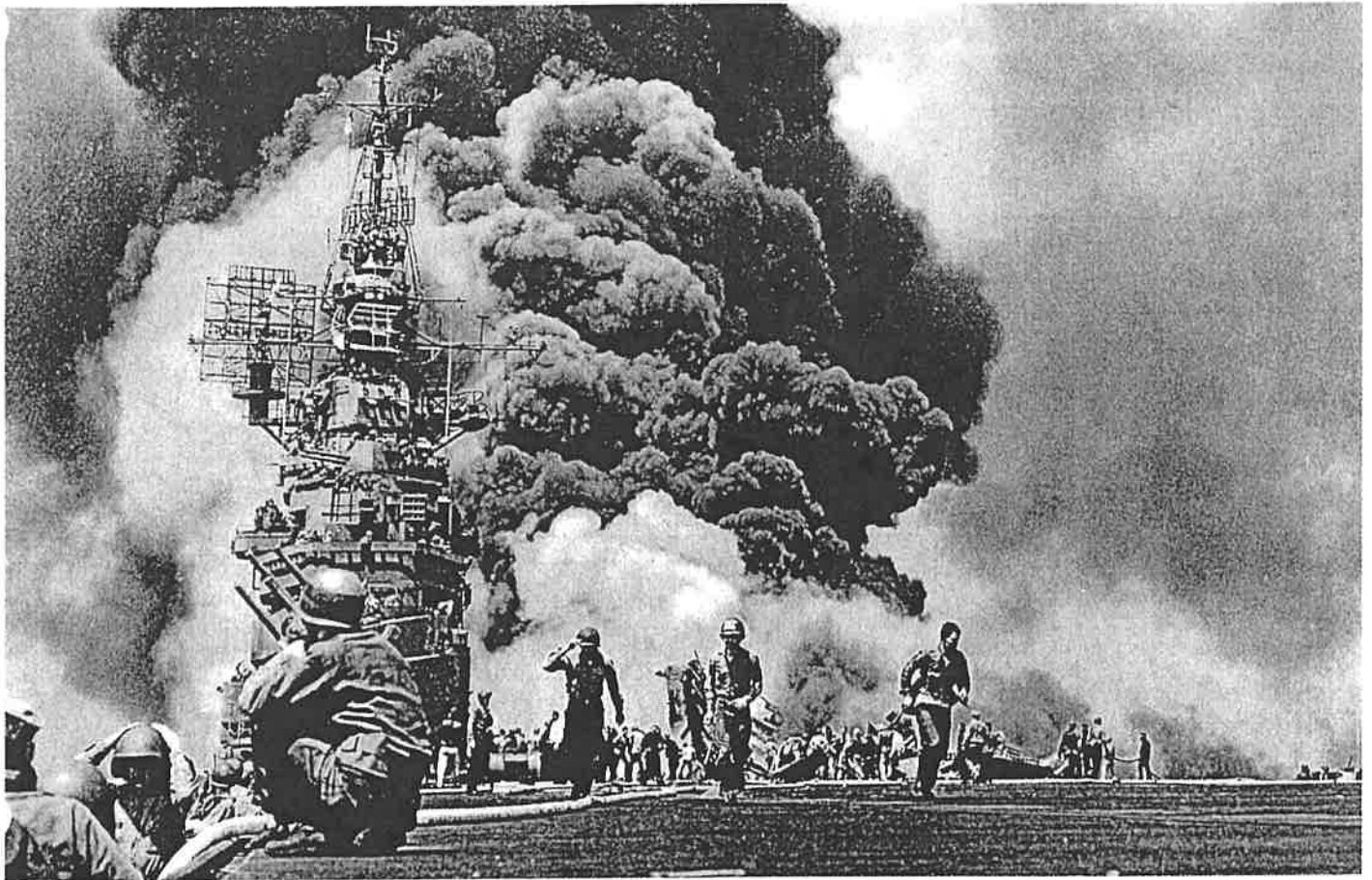


The USS *Arizona* burned for two days after the Japanese attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor. The wreckage of the *Arizona* remains at the bottom of Pearl Harbor, where it still leaks a quart of oil daily.

Document B: WWII-Era U.S. Poster Depicting the Bataan "Death March" in the Philippines
(from <http://bss.sfsu.edu/tygiel/Hist427/1940sphotos/posters/antijapanese.jpg>)



Document C: Japanese *Kamikaze* Attacks on U.S. Ships in the Pacific Theater (from



ARTIST... New York, June 27... Field and...
lano Rouland, 72, portrait and...
landscape artist, and former pres-...
ident of the Allied Artists of...
America, was found dead early...
today in his studio-apartment...
Police attributed death to natural...
causes.

known... appeared in the Ohio... here until 1933. Aled today of a... heart attack on a train en route... to New York.

(Continued on Page 9, Col. 2)

Mitscher's Flagship, Carrier Bunker Hill, Blasted and Set Afire by Jap Suicide Planes, To Port Under Own Power; 656 Casualties

Washington, June 27.—(AP)—Japanese suicide planes scored two direct bomb hits on the carrier Bunker Hill, causing 656 casualties, but the flagship of Vice-Adm. Marc A. Mitscher survived four hours of flaming death and will fight again.

The Navy disclosed today that the Bunker Hill, despite losses of 373 dead, nineteen missing and 264 wounded in the tragic episode off Okinawa May 11, is home under her own power for repairs at the Puget Sound Navy Yard.

Kansas Sailor Credited With Saving Nine

Aboard USS Bunker Hill Puget Sound Navy Yard Bremerton, Wash.—(Delayed)—(AP)—Nine shipmates owe their lives to Wilson M. Dickson, 21, quartermaster second class, of Ft. Doris, Kan.

Dickson carried the men, one by one, from the machine gun one, from the smoke-filled ship during the attack which swept the Bunker Hill after the great aircraft carrier had been struck by two Japanese suicide planes off Okinawa May 11.

... hose," the navy related. "Fresh air whipped across the deck at their backs, forcing the heavy smoke of burning oil and gas away from them. New life breathed thru the ship. Men who were lying on blistering hot decks below knew, even as they drew their first breath of fresh air, that some miracle had saved them. They knew, too, that the Bunker Hill would live to fight again."

Mitscher's Flagship
Comdr. A. A. ("11 Knot") Burke, chief of staff to Admiral Mitscher, said the admiral was in the ship when the attack came three hours after the attack on the Bunker Hill.

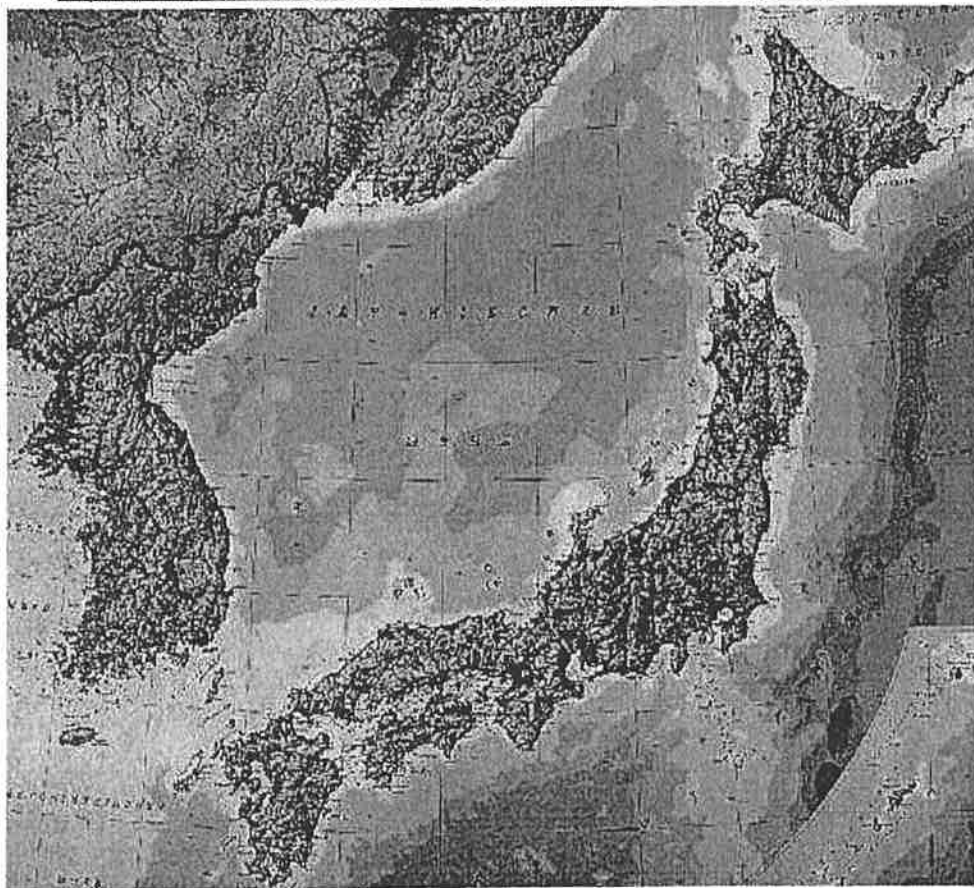
Document D: Japanese Defenses of Iwo Jima, 660 miles south of Tokyo

"...seeing that it was impossible to conduct our air, sea, and ground operations on Iwo Jima toward ultimate victory, it was decided that in order to gain time necessary for the preparation of the Homeland defense, our forces should rely solely upon the established defensive equipment in that area, checking the enemy by delaying tactics. Even the suicidal attacks by small groups of our Army and Navy airplanes, the surprise attacks by our submarines, and the actions of parachute units, although effective, could be regarded only as a strategic ruse on our part. It was a most depressing thought that we had no available means left for the exploitation of the strategic opportunities which might from time to time occur in the course of these operations."

- USA, FEC, HistDiv, "Operations in the Central Pacific"--Japanese Studies in World War II (Japanese Monograph No. 48, OCMH), p. 62.; cited in George W. Garand and Truman R. Strobridge (1971). *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*. Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. Vol IV, Part VI, Ch 1

Document E: Physical Map of Japan

(from <http://www.seoulkoreaasia.com/images/Maps/korea-and-japan.jpg>)



Document F: The Boeing B-29 "Superfortress"



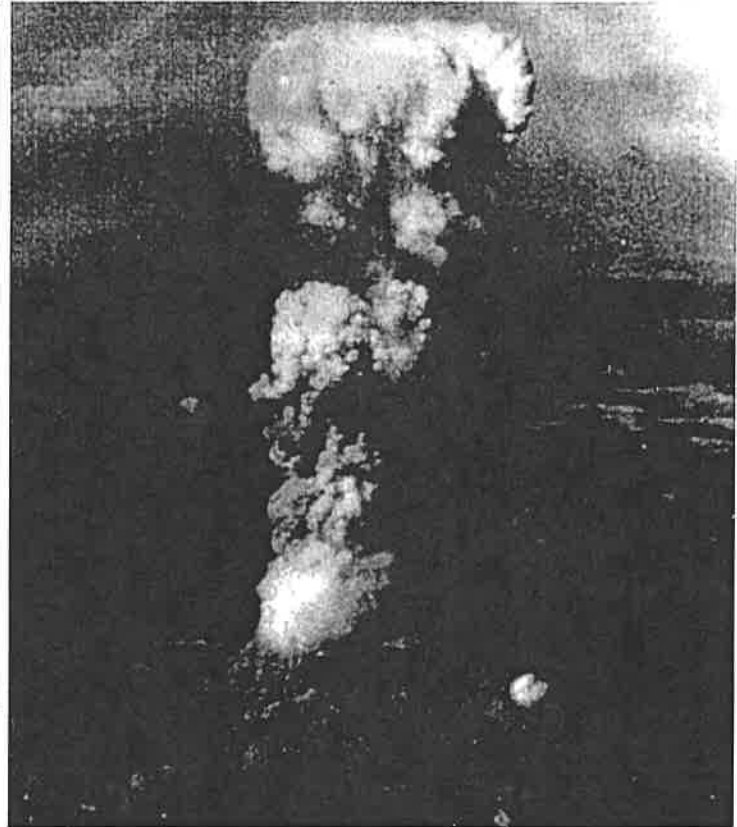
This is a picture of a Boeing B29 "Superfortress" bomber. The Superfortress was a larger, faster bomber used by the American Army air force in the last months of World War II. It was also able to carry a larger payload than other American bombers.

Document G: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima (from <http://www.hiroshima-remembered.com/history/hiroshima/image4.html>)

This is the mushroom cloud rising over Hiroshima, Japan. The city of Hiroshima was the target of the world's first atomic bomb attack at 8:16 a.m. on August 6, 1945. The cloud rose to over 60,000 feet in about ten minutes.

About 30 seconds after the explosion, the *Enola Gay* circled in order to get a better look at what was happening. By that time, although the plane was flying at 30,000 feet, the mushroom cloud had risen above them. The city itself was completely engulfed in a thick black smoke.

After the detonation and the subsequent destruction of Hiroshima, one of the crewmembers of the *Enola Gay* muttered, "Good God, how could anyone survive that down there?"



Document H: Paul Fussell, U.S. Infantryman in Europe, upon Receiving Word of the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima & Nagasaki

"When the atom bombs were dropped and the news began to circulate that we would not be obligated in a few months to rush up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being machine-gunned, mortared and shelled we broke down and cried with relief and joy. We were going to live. We were going to grow to adulthood after all."

— "Thank God for the Atom Bomb" by Prof. Paul Fussell

Document I: President Harry S. Truman's Press Release Announcing the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and Statement Defending the Use of Atomic Weapons

"...The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold. And the end is not yet. With this bomb we have now added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction to supplement the growing power of our armed forces. In their present form these bombs are now in production and even more powerful forms are in development... We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war... It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth."

"We have used it against those who attacked without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have abandoned the pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans."

Document J: The Soviet Invasion of Japanese-Held Manchuria, August 8, 1945



Document K: Critics of Truman's Decision to Use Atomic Weapons

"...It is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945 (well before the date of the [proposed] invasion) Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped."

-United States Army Air Force Strategy Bombing Survey, 1946

"It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons...My own feeling was that being the first to use [the atomic bomb], we adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make wars in that fashion, and that wars cannot be won by destroying women and children"

-Admiral William D. Leahy, President Truman's Chief of Staff, in his memoir "*I Was There*" (Whittlesey, 1950)

Document L: Colonel Paul Tibbets, Jr., and His Thoughts on the Use of Atomic Weapons on Japan

Colonel Tibbets was the pilot of the *Enola Gay*, the B29 Superfortress that dropped the world's first atomic weapon on Hiroshima. In 1995, on the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, Tibbets was asked how he felt about his role in the world-altering events of August 1945:

"I was anxious to do it... I wanted to do everything that I could to subdue Japan. I wanted to kill the bastards. That was the attitude of the United States in those years...I have been convinced that we saved more lives than we took. It would have been morally wrong if we'd have had that weapon and not used it and let a million more people die."

-"The Men Who Brought the Dawn: The Atomic Missions of *Enola Gay* and *Bock's Car*", Smithsonian Channel (1995)

Part II

For Part II, use your answers from Part I, information from the documents, and your prior knowledge related to these issues to write a well-organized 5-to-7-paragraph essay. In that essay, please address the following DBQ question:

One of the most controversial turning points in history was the decision made by U.S. President Harry S. Truman to use atomic weapons on Japan, the lone remaining Axis Power at the conclusion of World War II. In your opinion, was the decision to drop atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki a military necessity? If not, was it justifiable for a reason other than military necessity?

Academic Paragraph Outline

THE TOPIC SENTENCE: The topic sentence states the **overall point** of the paragraph and introduces the main supporting points (usually 3). One or two sentences defining unfamiliar terms in the paragraph may be inserted before proceeding to the first point.

FIRST MAIN POINT: The next sentence presents the first supporting point.

EVIDENCE FOR FIRST POINT:
Specific examples, quotations, logic, explanations, or ideas

ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE FOR FIRST POINT:
Explanation of evidence logically, how it ties into main idea.

SECOND MAIN POINT: The next sentence presents the second supporting point.

SUPPORT FOR SECOND POINT:
Specific examples, quotations, logic, explanations, or ideas

ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE FOR SECOND POINT:
Explanation of evidence logically, how it ties into main idea.

THIRD MAIN POINT: The next sentence presents the third supporting point.

SUPPORT FOR THIRD POINT:
Specific examples, quotations, logic, explanations, or ideas

ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE FOR THIRD POINT:
Explanation of evidence logically, how it ties into main idea.

THE CONCLUDING SENTENCE: The concluding sentence ties back to the topic sentence and summarizes the main points developed in the paragraph.

The concluding sentence does not introduce new information, but it may make an appeal for more research or study.