The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb

Truman and the Bomb: a Documentary History

Below are descriptions of chapters in the 1996 book, *Truman and the Bomb*, a *Documentary History*. The documentary history was produced and edited by Truman scholar Robert H. Ferrell and is used with his permission.

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Introduction: Truman and the Bomb, a Documentary History

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

How better to understand the terrible calculus that went into the decision of President Harry S. Truman to order the dropping of nuclear weapons on two Japanese cities on August 6 and 9, 1945, than to read the basic documents, all (unless otherwise indicated) from the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri?

In the mind of the president of the United States were surely two reasons for using these new and, as it turned out, enormously destructive weapons. One was of course the way
in which the Japanese armed forces, principally the Japanese army, had conducted World War II. The barbarities of the war had their beginnings in Japan's war against China, which began in 1937. That same year, when Japanese troops occupied Nanking, the human cost was extraordinary: Between 100,000 and 200,000 people were killed by the occupying troops for no reason at all except what may only be described as blood lust.

Years later, after the end of World War II, the responsible Japanese commander, General Iwane Matsui, was arraigned before a war crimes tribunal in Tokyo and subsequently sentenced and hanged. His excuse for what had happened was that he had not known what was going on; the excuse of ignorance could not, however, absolve him of the responsibility he bore. In the war crimes trials after the war, it was impossible to seize upon subordinate commanders, both for what was described as "the rape of Nanking" and other countless horrors that marked Japanese army actions in China before American entrance into the war on December 7' 1941.

And then there was the event that brought the United States into the war. The "sneak attack"-without a declaration of war-by Japanese carrier planes upon Pearl Harbor resulted in the deaths of 1,000 men on the battleship U.S.S. Arizona, which sank so rapidly that the sailors sleeping below deck could not escape, and nearly 1,500 other deaths aboard ships in the harbor, on the surrounding airfields, and among civilians caught in the machine-gun fire and exploding bombs.

Pearl Harbor was not the only instance of Japanese barbarism that Americans knew. It was followed by the Bataan death march beginning April 9, 1942, during which 72,000 exhausted Filipino and American defenders of the Bataan peninsula were
marched for four days a distance of 50 miles without food and water, while Japanese soldiers shot or bayoneted hundreds of stragglers. And there were, in addition, the bestial conditions in the Japanese prison camps endured by military prisoners and interned civilians for the remainder of the war-three and one-half years. And the innumerable instances (seemingly random but nonetheless displaying the Japanese army's contempt for prisoners) of shootings and beheadings that continued until the end of World War II.

All of the above, moreover, were instances of maltreatment of only American prisoners; these instances were multiplied into the tens of thousands when one considered British, Dutch, and other Allied prisoners taken mostly in the war's first months at Hongkong, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and in Burma.

Japan's conduct of the war, in violation of the Geneva conventions drawn up in a series of international meetings but affixed most recently in international law during the mid-1920s, was akin to Nazi Germany's treatment of Soviet prisoners during the war and of the Holocaust itself, the genocides that came out of Germany's appalling racial policies under the Nazi regime.

And then, in calculating why President Truman and leading officials of his administration looked upon nuclear warfare as a positive good rather than terrible savagery, there was the very real issue in the summer of 1945 of the cost of a U.S. invasion of the Japanese home islands. Whatever the historical-one might describe them as emotional-reasons for "getting back at" Japan, there was the frightening cost of an invasion by the U.S. Army and Navy.
It might seem to an onlooker or casual observer that any calculation of an invasion at that time (an invasion that in fact never took place) was so speculative and so likely to partake of estimates and generally of unreality that it was incalculable, that the contemplated invasion was largely theory rather than actuality and that there was thereby no basis on which to make the decision that the president and his advisers did ultimately make, namely, to risk (and, in fact, this is what happened) the deaths of 100,000 or more Japanese, including many, many civilians—men, women, and children. But the calculus was not at all theory, for there was clear evidence that an invasion would be enormously costly. In retrospect it is improper to say that Truman and his principal assistants took their momentous decision largely out of emotion, memory of Japanese bestialities, and without serious measurement of what the U.S. forces might be up against.

The two benchmarks for the possible cost of invading the home islands were the American invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa in the spring and early summer of 1945.

The invasion of Iwo proved extremely costly: 6,200 U.S. Marines died on that small island that was so valuable as an airbase for B-29s involved in the bombing of Japan. Some of the bombers that were unable to make their runs or upon return were crippled by antiaircraft or other damage or mechanical failures, were able to land there.

The American preponderance over the Japanese defenders at Iwo Jima was four to one. The invasion of the large island of Okinawa, which was 350 miles south of the southernmost home island of Kyushu, proved twice as costly: 13,000 died, one-third of them aboard ship as a result of the dozens of kamikaze attacks. The pilots of these outmoded planes, which
often had no ability to get back to their bases, sacrificed themselves and their planes as bombs. In the single most costly kamikaze attack (on the big carrier U.S.S. Franklin), the cost in U.S. deaths was 1,000 men, and the attack turned the ship into a flaming near-wreck, useless for any further campaigns.

While this carnage was taking place, the Marine and army troops on Okinawa were fighting across the island foot by foot, encountering the defenders who battled until they died. The entire Japanese high command committed hara-kiri. The civilian populace meanwhile served as beasts of burden and frequently as cannon fodder: They were driven ahead of Japanese lines to take the initial fire of the Americans and to detonate mines along the way. American casualties—wounded, missing, and dead—totaled 35 percent of the attacking force, despite the preponderance of U.S. ground forces of two and one-half to one.

By mid-June 1945, the huge question in the minds of American commanders and members of the Truman administration was whether it was possible to persuade the Japanese government and military to surrender. The Japanese military (though clearly beaten) was not willing to surrender. If the decision could have been made by Japan's civilian leaders or even the Japanese people, the war probably would have come quickly to an end, but unfortunately the decision was not theirs: It lay in the hands of the military, and particularly in the hands of army leaders. (By this time the Japanese Navy had virtually ceased to exist, almost all its ships having become either unserviceable or having been sunk.)

Leaders of the Japanese army had decided to fight on, whatever the cost, and thereby honor the Japanese military
code of bushido, that of warriors whose careers might be traced back to the distant past. That the struggle, in the early summer of 1945, could not be waged in the manner of past struggles-through man to man clashes-but had to be fought in the twentieth-century manner with weapons, did not concern the Japanese military leaders. They would fight with whatever lay at hand. And the defensive weapons they did have, which was an array of artillery pieces and about 5,000 planes that could be used as kamikazes, were bound to cost the attackers heavily, as on Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

By mid-June American military leaders were becoming fearful of what their military services might be up against, and calculations of a tentative sort were made, all of them frightful in their implications. A joint war plans committee, army and navy, came up with an estimate that 25,000 men would be killed in an invasion of Kyushu on two fronts; 40,000 might die if an invasion on a single front was followed by invasion of the island of Honshu, on which Tokyo was located; and 46,000 deaths were estimated as a result of a two-front invasion of Kyushu followed by an invasion of Honshu.

These figures, however, were so tentative that the army's chief of staff, General George C. Marshall, did not discuss them or even mention them during a White House meeting on June 18, 1945. Instead Marshall rather confusedly said that he thought an invasion might not be more costly than the invasion of the Philippine Island of Luzon, which in its first thirty days accounted for a little more than 1,000 casualties per day- that is, 31,000 casualties (wounded as well as dead, the latter usually amounting to one-fourth of the casualties). Marshall apparently advanced this figure with little or no thought, for the Japanese commander on Luzon, General Tomoyuki
Yamashita, had pulled back his force during the first month of the invasion so as to avoid naval gunfire, and the fighting thereafter had been much more deadly.

A more likely figure for casualties was advanced at this meeting by President Truman's personal chief of staff, Admiral William D. Leahy, who said that he thought casualties in an attack upon Kyushu and Honshu would be about the same as on Okinawa—that is, about 35 percent of the U.S. attacking force. During this discussion the president remarked his horror at the possibility that an invasion would amount to another Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other.

Any careful contemplation of the cost of an invasion would have shown a horrendous number of American casualties, as the attendees at the June 13 meeting knew, even though they did not make their points - even Leahy failed to say precisely the casualties he had in mind - as carefully as they should have. If Leahy had extrapolated for the force the U.S. Army was proposing to put on Kyushu, he would have related a figure for casualties that would have been more than one-third of 767,000, that is, more than 250,000 casualties. And if one calculated the deaths from the casualties it would have been (figuring that the American troop strength on Okinawa had been as high as 150,000, with deaths running to 13,000, as mentioned) five times the Okinawa figure, which meant 65,000.

And there was another figure that needed to be taken into consideration: the Japanese troop strength on Kyushu. In the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa the U.S. forces always had had a preponderance, respectively four times to one and two and one-half times to one. In mid-June General Marshall had estimated Japanese strength on Kyushu at 350,000. By July 24 he was saying 500,000, and by August 6 his figure rose to
560,000. He was drawing these figures from the analysis by intelligence of Japanese radio traffic, an operation known as Ultra. What he did not know was that Ultra's estimates were unduly low and that by August 6 the Japanese force on Kyushu had reached 900,000. The invasion of Kyushu was scheduled for November 1, and by that date Japanese troop strength on Kyushu could well have been over 1 million, which meant that U.S. invasion forces would be heavily outnumbered.

Moreover, the danger from kamikazes, so readily apparent during the Okinawa operation, would have been much more serious in the Kyushu invasion; the kamikazes had had to fly south to Okinawa from Kyushu, but would have to fly almost no distance before meeting the attackers on Kyushu itself. A single successful kamikaze attack on a large American ship, such as the U.S.S. Franklin, or on a troopship, could have raised the U.S. death toll markedly.

All this, then, was the calculus as American officials, from the president on down, sought single-mindedly to save the lives of U.S. soldiers and sailors during the crucial days and weeks in the summer of 1945. As one may well imagine, they were willing to take almost any measure to end what had become a fight to the finish against the forces of Imperial Japan.

Chapter 2: From the President's Diary, July 16
Commentary:

From April 1945 to July, the president was incredibly busy. The war in Europe came slowly to an end. Adolf Hitler, the leader of Germany, committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin on April 30, and on May 8, his forces arranged to surrender; those in the West surrendered to a deputy of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme commander of Allied forces, at Rheims on May 7, and forces on the Eastern front surrendered to the Soviet high command in Moscow the next day.

The president then supervised the transfer of some of the U.S. troops in Europe to the Far East, while others began the long passage by ship back to the United States for demobilization. At the same time Truman prepared to meet the leader of the Soviet Union, Marshal Joseph V. Stalin, and the prime minister of Great Britain, Winston Churchill, at a conference scheduled for mid July in the Berlin suburb of Potsdam. Truman reached Berlin after a voyage aboard a heavy cruiser to Antwerp and a plane flight from Brussels.

The Potsdam Conference opened the day after the president learned about an extraordinary event, the successful explosion of a nuclear device in a remote area of Alamogordo Air Base in New Mexico.

At the outset of his presidency, President Truman had begun to keep a diary, making occasional notations of what he was doing and why and what he thought of visitors or events of the moment. He jotted down notes between conversations or duties of one sort or another, or perhaps early in mornings.
when alone in his office. Taken together, these usually dated annotations constituted a presidential diary. Under date of July 16 he wrote of what he was doing in Berlin.

Read the official diary entry:

**July 16:** Pages 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Source: "Ross, Mr. and Mrs. Charles G. (handwritten)," box 322, president's secretary's files.

**Notes:**

1. Fleet Admiral William D Leahy was the president's personal chief of staff.

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**Chapter 3: Major General Leslie R. Groves**

**To Secretary Stimson, July 18**

**Edited by Robert H. Ferrell**

During World War II the United States and Great Britain set in motion the project known in the United States as the Manhattan Project (the British referred to it as Tube Alloys), and shortly after the end of the war in Europe a test device was ready. The work of separating the uranium isotope U-235 from ordinary uranium ore and of obtaining Nie element plutonium, which like U-235 was fissionable, from uranium, was done in the United States for safety reasons. Shortly after the explosion of the test device the project commander, Major General Leslie R. Groves, sent a report to Secretary Stimson.
Read the report that General Groves sent to Secretary Stimson

Chapter 4: Cloud Drawings by Luis W. Alvarez

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

Like so many scientists who took part in the Manhattan Project, Luis W. Alvarez, professor of physics at the University of California at Berkeley, was on the scene of the Alamogordo detonation. Unlike the others, he immediately made a sketch of what he saw.

View the drawing

SOURCE: "Research notes," box 1, Lansing Lamont papers.

Chapter 5: From the President's Diary, July 17, 18, and 25.

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell
Commentary:

At the Potsdam Conference, which opened on July 17 and ended in the early morning hours of August 2, the president found himself occupied with so many concerns that he must have shaken his head months and years later when he looked back in his mind's eye upon them. The meetings were for Truman the first occasions to be with both Churchill and Stalin. He met with them in the grand hall of the Cecilienhof, the palace of the last crown prince of the German empire, which came to its abject end in 1918.

The palace, which had not been damaged by bombing, was a vast rabbit warren of rooms and hallways; its grounds were put in order by Russian soldiery who saw to it that at the palace's entrance lay a huge floral display of cannas set in the form of a red star. Guards, of course, were everywhere; Soviet soldiers were under the immediate command of Russian intelligence officials. And in various large houses in the vicinity - Truman's "Berlin White House" was in the suburb of Babelsberg - the principals and their delegations were housed.

The peaceful enclave of the Cecilienhof and its surroundings was strangely at odds with the vast, broken city, the erstwhile German capital, just a few miles away.

Truman's diary of three crucial days at Potsdam is, in retrospect, fascinating.

Diary entries:

JULY 17

Just spent a couple of hours with Stalin. Joe Davies called on
Maisky and made the date last night for noon today. (1) Promptly a few minutes before twelve I looked up from the desk and there stood Stalin in the doorway. I got to my feet and advanced to meet him. He put out his hand and smiled. I did the same, we shook, I greeted Molotov and the interpreter, and we sat down. (2)

After the usual polite remarks we got down to business. I told Stalin that I am no diplomat but usually said yes and no to questions after hearing all the argument. It pleased him. I asked him if he had the agenda for the meeting. He said he had and that he had some more questions to present. I told him to fire away. He did and it is dynamite - but I have some dynamite too which I am not exploding now. He wants to fire Franco, to which I wouldn't object, and divide up the Italian colonies and other mandates, some no doubt that the British have. (3) Then he got on the Chinese situation, told us what agreements had been reached and what was in abeyance. Most of the big points are settled. He'll be in the Jap war on August 15. Fini Japs when that comes about.

We had lunch, talked socially, put on a real show, drinking toasts to everyone. Then had pictures made in the back yard.

I can deal with Stalin. He is honest, but smart as hell.

**JULY 18**

Ate breakfast with nephew Harry, a sergeant in the field artillery. He is a good soldier and a nice boy. They took him off Queen Elizabeth at Glasgow and flew him here. Sending him home Friday.(4) Went to lunch with F.M. at 1:30, walked around to British headquarters. Met at the gate by Mr. Churchill. Guard of honor drawn up. Fine body of men -
Scottish Guards. Band played "Star Spangled Banner." Inspected guard and went in for lunch. P.M. and I ate alone. Discussed Manhattan (it is a success). Decided to tell Stalin about it. Stalin had told F.M. of telegram from Jap emperor asking for peace.(5) Stalin also read his answer to me. It was satisfactory. Believe Japs will fold up before Russia comes in. I am sure they will when Manhattan appears over their homeland. I shall inform Stalin about it at an opportune time.

Stalin's luncheon was a most satisfactory meeting. I invited him to come to the U.S. Told him I'd send the battleship Missouri for him if he'd come. He said he wanted to cooperate with U.S. in peace as we had cooperated in war, but it would be harder. Said he was grossly misunderstood in U.S. and I was misunderstood in Russia. I told him that we each could help to remedy that situation in our home countries and that I intended to try with all I had to do my part at home. He gave me a most cordial smile and said he would do as much in Russia.(6)

We then went to the conference and it was my job to present the ministers' proposed agenda.(7) There were three proposals and I banged them through in short order, much to the surprise of Mr. Churchill. Stalin was very much pleased. Churchill was too, after he had recovered. I'm not going to stay around this terrible place all summer just to listen to speeches. I'll go home to the Senate for that.

**JULY 25**

We met at 11:00 a.m. today. That is, Stalin, Churchill, and the U.S. president. But I had a most important session with Lord Mountbatten and General Marshall before that. We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world. It may be the fire destruction prophesied in the Euphrates Valley
era, after Noah and his fabulous ark. Anyway we think we have found the way to cause a disintegration of the atom. An experiment in the New Mexican desert was startling - to put it mildly. Thirteen pounds of the explosive caused the complete disintegration of a steel tower sixty feet high, created a crater six feet deep and twelve hundred feet in diameter, knocked over a steel tower a half mile away, and knocked men down ten thousand yards away. The explosion was visible for more than two hundred miles and audible for forty miles and more.

This weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10. I have told the secretary of war, Mr. Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop this terrible bomb on the old capital or the new.(8) He and I are in accord. The target will be a purely military one and we will issue a warning statement asking the Japs to surrender and save lives. I'm sure they will not do that, but we will have given them the chance. It is certainly a good thing for the world that Hitler's crowd or Stalin's did not discover this atomic bomb. It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful.

View the official handwritten diary entries:

1. **July 17**: Pages 1
2. **July 18**: Pages 1, 2
3. **July 25**: Pages 1, 2

Sources: Diary, July 17, box 333, president's secretary's files; diary, July 18, 25, "Ross, Mr. and Mrs. Charles G."
On July 24, after the end of a session at the Cecillenhof, Truman walked carefully around to Stalin, who had stood up and was preparing to leave the hall and told about the test explosion of a nuclear bomb. Truman did not use the word "nuclear" and simply related that the United States had just successfully tested a new weapon of great explosive power and that he wanted the Soviets to know this fact. Stalin did not appear very impressed and, indeed, gave Truman the feeling that he had not quite understood the purpose of the revelation. But indeed he had, for when he got back to his quarters, Molotov was heard to say to Stalin, "We 'll have to talk it over with Kurchatov and get him to speed things up" (Memoirs of Marshal Zhukov). Professor Igor Kurchatov was in charge of the Russian nuclear program, which, after a lapse because of the removal of laboratories from Moscow during the war, had quickly resumed. At Potsdam the President obviously did not know that Russian spies had penetrated the bomb project and that Stalin would have the bomb "secret" within weeks of Alamogordo. Actually the first Russian bomb, which was tested August 1949, was a copy of the American plutonium bomb. Truman proudly annotated the photograph of adjournment of the July 24 session, "This is the place I told Stalin about the Atom Bomb, which was exploded July 6, 1945 in New Mexico. He didn't realize what I was talking about.

NOTES

1. Ivan Maisky, former Soviet ambassador to Great Britain, deputy foreign minister; Joseph F. Davies, former ambassador to the Soviet Union, member of the American delegation to the Potsdam Conference.

3. Francisco Franco, Spanish dictator.

4. This Harry Truman was the son of the president's brother, John Vivian Truman.

5. The cable "asking for peace" was not that but an inquiry asking permission to send a personal representative, a former Japanese premier, Prince Fumimaro Konoye, who would negotiate presumably to keep the Soviet Union from entering the war against Japan or perhaps to seek the USSR's good offices in negotiating with the United States. The cable was not news to President Truman, who because of the interception by American intelligence of Japan's diplomatic radio traffic and its translation (an operation known as Magic), already knew about it. Stalin's relation of the cable doubtless was a relief to the president who thereby knew that the Soviet leader was not withholding information from him.


7. By "ministers," Truman meant Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, and Foreign Minister Molotov.

8. The new capital was Tokyo; the old was Kyoto.

Chapter 6: General Thomas T. Handy
To General Carl Spaatz, July 25
The U.S. Army's acting duet of staff - General Marshall was attending the Potsdam Conference - sent out a fateful instruction to General Carl Spaatz, commander of the U.S. Army Strategic Air Forces, on July 25, the same date that the president in Babelsberg wrote of the new nuclear weapon. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur was in command of the Pacific theater, except for naval forces and Marines under Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. The latter forces had been moving east from Pearl Harbor while MacArthur's traveled north from Australia; both were converging on the Japanese home islands.

The invasion of Japan, the first phase of which was to take place on Kyushu, was to be under MacArthur. The odd name, 509 Composite Group, indicated a group containing B-29 bombers mod fled to carry nuclear weapons. The planes had large under-the-belly hatches through which the heavy bombs had to be lifted from underground walk-in holding areas. The bombers also had to be structurally strengthened to hold the bombs' parachutes, timers, and other paraphernalia.

July 25, 1945
To: General Carl Spaatz
Commanding General
United States Army Strategic Air Forces

1. The 509 Composite Group, 20th Air Force will deliver its first special bomb as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3 August 1945 on one of the targets: Hiroshima, Kokura, Nugata and Nagasaki. To carry military and civilian scientific personnel from the War Department to observe and
record the effects of the explosion of the bomb, additional aircraft will accompany the airplane carrying the bomb. The observing planes will stay several miles distant from the point of impact of the bomb.

2. Additional bombs will be delivered on the above targets as soon as made ready by the project staff. Further instructions will be issued concerning targets other than those listed above.

3. Dissemination of any and all information concerning the use of the weapon against Japan is reserved to the Secretary of War and the President of the United States. No communiques on the subject or releases of information will be issued by Commanders in the field without specific prior authority. Any news stories will be sent to the War Department for special clearance.

4. The foregoing directive is issued to you by direction and with the approval of the Secretary of War and of the Chief of Staff, USA. It is desired that you personally deliver one copy of this directive to General MacArthur and one copy to Admiral Nimitz for their information.

THOS. T. HANDY] General, G.S.C.
Acting Chief of Staff

Chapter 7: The Potsdam Declaration, July 26

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

On July 26 a declaration was issued, signed by the president and Prime Minister Churchill and with the concurrence of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of Nationalist China, that in its result was as fateful, if not more so, than the instruction of General Handy to General Spaatz. If the recipient of the Potsdam Declaration, the government of Japan, had responded with the surrender that the president and prime minister asked for, the instruction of the day before would not have been carried out.

Unfortunately the declaration was not an explicit warning that the United States possessed nuclear weapons and would use them. Truman was unwilling to be explicit, for Congress had tolerated an unknown project costing nearly $2 billion and might object to an explanation offered an enemy government without informing the legislative body that paid the bill.

Perhaps because the warning was only a general statement, the Japanese government responded with something approaching contempt. The prime minister chose to ignore it, employing the ambiguous word mokusatsu, which means literally "to kill with silence," although it carries a nuance of uncertainty. Tokyo radio used the word, saying the government would mokusatsu the declaration and fight on. The English translation became "reject," and the president took it as a rebuff. Years later he remembered, "When we asked them to surrender at Potsdam, they gave us a very snotty answer. That
is what I got. . . . They told me to go to hell, words to that effect."

In addition to being unaware that the United States possessed nuclear weapons, the Japanese leaders also believed, foolishly, that they could negotiate with the Americans, even though the Japanese were thoroughly aware of the rapine and butchery associated with their nation's troops as they fought across East Asia. Involved in those deeds was the emperor himself about whose complicity the West knew little at the time and continued to know little until after the death of Hirohito, when officials of the imperial household revealed quite a different emperor than the world had seen: The emperor supported his military commanders and often gave political advice.

As the war was coming to an end the Americans, British, and Soviets were publicly stating that they would arraign war criminals, but Tokyo officials deluded themselves into believing it would be possible to bargain to save the people involved; they had in mind an arrangement that would put the matter delicately, in terms of preserving the imperial institution, so that Japanese authorities rather than the Allies would hold war-crimes trials. *1

"(1) We, the President of the United States, the President of the National Government of the Republic of China and the Prime Minister of Great Britain, representing the hundreds of millions of our countrymen, have conferred and agree that Japan shall be given an opportunity to end this war.

(2) The prodigious land, sea and air forces of the United States, the British Empire and of China, many times reinforced by their armies and air fleets from the west are poised to strike
the final blows upon Japan. This military power is sustained and inspired by the determination of all the Allied nations to prosecute the war against Japan until she ceases to resist.

(3) The result of the futile and senseless German resistance to the might of the aroused free peoples of the world stands forth in awful clarity as an example to the people of Japan. The might that now converges on Japan is immeasurably greater than that which, when applied to the resisting Nazis, necessarily laid waste to the lands, the industry and the method of life of the whole German people. The full application of our military power, backed by our resolve, will mean the inevitable and complete destruction of the Japanese armed forces and just as inevitably the utter devastation of the Japanese homeland.

(4) The time has come for Japan to decide whether she will continue to be controlled by those self-willed militaristic advisers whose unintelligent calculations have brought the Empire of Japan to the threshold of annihilation, or whether she will follow the path of reason. *2

(5) Following are our terms. We will not deviate from them. There are no alternatives. We shall brook no delay.

(6) There must be eliminated for all time the authority and influence of those who have deceived and misled the people of Japan into embarking on world conquest - for we insist that a new order of peace, security and justice will be impossible until irresponsible militarism is driven from the world.

(7) Until such a new order is established and until there is convincing proof that Japan's war-making power is destroyed, points in Japanese territory to be designated by the Allies shall
be occupied to secure the achievement of the basic objectives we are here setting forth.

(8) The terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out and Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and such minor islands as we determine.*3

(9) The Japanese military forces, after being completely disarmed, shall be permitted to return to their homes with the opportunity to lead peaceful and productive lives.

(10) We do not intend that the Japanese shall be enslaved as a race or destroyed as a nation, but stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals, including those who have visited cruelties upon our prisoners. The Japanese government shall remove all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people. Freedom of speech, of religion, and of thought, as well as respect for the fundamental human rights shall be established.

(11) Japan shall be permitted to maintain such industries as will sustain her economy and permit the exaction of just reparations in war. To this end, access to, as distinguished from control of raw materials shall be permitted. Eventual Japanese participation in world trade relations shall be permitted.

(12) The occupying forces of the Allies shall be withdrawn from Japan as soon as these objectives have been accomplished and there has been established in accordance with the freely expressed will of the Japanese people a peacefully inclined and responsible government.

(13) We call upon the Government of Japan to proclaim now
the unconditional surrender of all the Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurances of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction."

SOURCE:

NOTES:
1. In the midst of the Potsdam Conference it was necessary for Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden to return home to learn of the results of a British general election; the vote had been delayed because of the time necessary to receive and count the absentee votes of British army, air force, and naval personnel stationed around the world. Because of the victory of the Labor party Clement Attlee became the new prime minister; he returned to Potsdam (where earlier he had been a member of the British delegation) with the new foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin.

2. Early in the 1930s the Japanese government accepted an arrangement whereby any navy or army minister in the cabinet had to be on active service in his respective arm, which meant that the military not merely controlled such appointments but could prevent formation of cabinets by refusing to permit officers to serve.

3. At a Cairo Conference, November 22-26, 1943, the United States, Britain, and China, through President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and Generalissimo Chiang, promised to prosecute the war until the Japanese surrendered unconditionally. Japan was to be deprived of all Pacific islands
acquired since 1914, that is, at the beginning of World War I. Manchuria, Formosa, and other territories taken from China by Japan were to be restored to China. The three powers were "determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent."

Chapter 8: The President To His Wife, July 31

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

For many years, since his courtship of Bess Wallace beginning in 1910, when Truman was a farmer near Grandview, Missouri (which as a crow might fly was 15 miles from Independence where Bess lived), the president had been accustomed to writing longhand letters to her. He sent letters every time he was away from Bess and that included his time at the Potsdam Conference. It is interesting that he sent the letters from Babelsberg by diplomatic pouch to Washington, whereupon--affixed with five-cent, air-mail stamps--they went by ordinary mail to Independence. If a spy, Russian or Japanese, had wished to know what was happening in Potsdam, he or she had only to steal the president's letters from the mailbags.

Berlin, July 31, 1945

Dear Bess:
It was surely good to talk with you this morning at 7:00 a.m. It is hard to think that it is 11:00 p.m. yesterday where you are. The connection was not so good this morning on account of the storms over the Atlantic.

We have been going great guns the last day or two and while the conference was at a standstill because of Uncle Joe's indisposition, the able Mr. Byrnes, Molotov and Attlee and Bevin all worked and accomplished a great deal. I rather think Mr. Stalin is stallin' because he is not so happy over the English elections. He doesn't know it but I have an ace in the hole and another one showin' - so unless he has threes or two pair (and I know he has not) we are sitting all right.

The whole difficulty is reparations. Of course the Russians are naturally looters and they have been thoroughly looted by the Germans over and over again and you can hardly blame them for their attitude. The thing I have to watch is to keep our skirts clean and make no commitments.*1

The Poles are the other headache. They have moved into East Prussia and to the Oder in Prussia and unless we are willing to go to war again they can stay and they will stay with Bolsheviki backing - so you see in comes old man reparations again and a completely German-looted Poland.*2

Byrnes, Leahy and I have worked out a program I think to fit a bad situation. We should reach a tentative agreement in the Big Three this afternoon and final one tomorrow and be on the way Thursday and surely not later than Friday.

We are leaving from Plymouth, England, which gives us fouryeight hours' start of leaving from Antwerp. *3

So if we get untied from the dock Friday afternoon by
Thursday we'll be in Norfolk and Washington the next day in the morning. It may be possible of course to be a day sooner but I am giving you the extreme limit. The last pouch leaves here today and one will leave the boat when we get on it. But will receive mail right up to leaving time.

I'll sure be glad to see you and the White House and be where I can at least go to bed without being watched.

Kiss my baby. Lots and lots of love.

[HARRY]

I've got to lunch with the Limey king when I get to Plymouth.

**SOURCE:** Box 9, papers relating to family, business, and personal affairs.

**NOTES:**

*1. In regard to German reparations, agreed upon at Yalta in a hedged and general way, it was decided at Potsdam that a reparations committee should be set up, with instructions that "the Soviet Union and the United States believed that the Reparations Commission should take as a basis of discussion the figure of reparations as twenty billion dollars and fifty percent of these should go to the Soviet Union." The British opposed naming any reparations figure and managed also to write into the instructions a statement of purpose, "to destroy the German war potential," rather than the more broadly phrased Russian statement, "for the purpose of military and economic disarmament of Germany." Because of the division of Germany into zones, each occupying power - Russian, American, British, and French-tended to control reparations within its zone. For a short time the Soviets obtained*
reparations from the U.S. zone and then they were stopped.

*2. At both the Yalta and Potsdam conferences the issue of Poland loomed: What should be the nature of the postwar Polish government? During the war the Polish government-in-exile in London had proved too anti-Russian, so the Soviets claimed, because in 1943 it proposed an international investigation of the German contention that the thousands upon thousands of Polish officers, whose bodies were found buried in the forest of Katyn, had been shot by the Soviet secret police. The Soviets thereupon broke relations and established what became known as the Lublin Committee, which the Russians installed in Poland after they entered that country's territory in the latter stages of the war. A compromise reached at Yalta was the establishment of the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity, supposedly an amalgam of the government-in-exile and the Lublin Committee but in fact Lublin dominated. The United States then recognized this new regime, with which the Soviets made a private arrangement by giving the Poles a slice of their apportioned zone of Germany, the important industrial territory (containing the city of Breslau, or Wroclaw) between the eastern and western branches of the Neisse River.

*3. Truman had left the United States for the Potsdam Conference by taking a ship from Newport News to Antwerp. By flying to Plymouth he saved time. It was off Plymouth, after embarkation aboard the heavy cruiser Augusta, that Truman received King George VI, who first greeted the president aboard a Royal Navy battleship.
Chapter 9: White House Press Release, C. August 6
Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

It was impossible to announce the bombing of Hiroshima to the American people without giving particulars, including the several-year history of the bomb project. It was also impossible to release such an explanation without crediting it to the president of the United States. Officials of the war department hence put together a detailed commentary in the form of a press release, which the president agreed to while at Potsdam; Secretary of War Stimson was present during the Potsdam Conference's first days and discussed the press release with him at that time.

After returning to Washington, Stimson revised the draft of the release in light of the Potsdam Declaration, the dramatic results of the Alamogordo test of a plutonium device, and a few minor suggestions by the British government. On July 30 the secretary sent a radio message to Truman at Babelsberg asking permission to use the release at any time beginning Wednesday, August 1. He added that he was sending a courier with the text on Tuesday, July 31.

Here, in the proposal that the president "sign off" on the press release, lay a fascinating situation. The go-ahead for using atomic bombs had been given in the letter of July 25 from General Thomas T. Handy to General Carl Spaatz (document 6). This was a service document; no copy of a presidential authorization has ever appeared. Truman, of course, could have canceled the Handy letter at any time short of use of the
bomb. In effect, therefore, the presidential sign-off for the press release was a confirmation of the Handy letter. Upon receiving Stimson's radio of July 30 the president wrote an undated chit in longhand:

SecWar Reply to your 41011 suggestions approved. Release when ready but not sooner than August 2. HST

Click here to see handwritten text

Full Cable, from Secretary of War to President Truman, July 30, 1945, with a handwritten response by the President on the reverse (2 pages).

The text of the above was radioed to Washington. Truman desired to wait until August 2 because he was to leave Potsdam that day and fly to England. There he would board the heavy cruiser U.S.S. Augusta, and be, on the high seas, away from Potsdam, when the Hiroshima bomb was dropped. He had told Stalin about the bomb only in general terms, not describing it as atomic.

One point about the following document: The force of the bomb, estimated at 20,000 tons of TNT, was really an estimate of the force of the test device. The Hiroshima bomb, a uranium, or fission, bomb (dubbed "Little Boy" because of its tubular shape) was the only nuclear weapon available that employed U-235. Both the test device and the bomb (called "Fat Man") dropped on August 9 on Nagasaki, three days after Hiroshima, used plutonium and had rounded shapes and a different firing mechanism. The Hiroshima bomb, one of a kind, was of unreckoned power; it was not possible until years later, after many measurements of the collapsed buildings, to define its force as equal to 13,000 tons of TNT.
Notes:

1. In Berlin in 1938 three German scientists demonstrated that it was possible to split the uranium atom and thereby showed that a nuclear-based explosion was feasible. In the early part of World War II the fear was great that the German scientists, ahead of British and U.S. scientists in their discovery of 1938, might construct a bomb. Fear of such a possibility existed until after the Allied invasion in 1944; and when British and American troops reached the Rhine, some months later, one of the first happenings was the appearance of scientists in the company of the troops, who then took samples of the Rhine's water to see if it contained traces of uranium. There were no traces; German physicists had failed to construct a bomb or come anywhere near doing so. The well-known German V-Is were drone planes released from continental launching pads that flew over Britain and dropped their explosive cargoes. They were easily shot down and did little damage. Much more destructive, and impossible to intercept, were the ballistic V-2s that carried devastation, including the breaking of windows throughout London; the V-2s harried London's defenders until capture of their launching sites in the autumn and winter of 1944-1945.

2. At the beginning of the war, scientists in the Manhattan Project decided to go two ways in the production of fissionable material. Because of the need for enormous amounts of electrical power they constructed plants at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and at Hanford in Washington state. The Oak Ridge plant produced U-235, the lighter fissionable isotope of
uranium, by pumping U-238 in gaseous form through a long series of sieves; the heavier isotope remained behind. At Hanford the scientists employed reactors to produce plutonium from uranium.

3. The president naturally did not say that the United States at that time possessed only one other nuclear weapon: the plutonium bomb that would be dropped on Nagasaki. A second plutonium bomb would not be ready for several weeks.

4. The installation near Santa Fe was the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory under direction of I. Robert Oppenheimer.

5. Results of the experiment in Berlin in 1938 were announced immediately, in accord with usual practice of scientists, which was to publish at once. When the Anglo-American bomb project began, three years later, its discoveries of course remained secret.

6. The president eventually recommended establishment of an Atomic Energy Commission (ABC), which took over from the wartime Manhattan Project on January 1, 1947. Meanwhile discussions within the administration led to the Acheson-Lilienthal plan, named for Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson and for the then chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, David F. Lilienthal, who became the first chairman of the ABC. With minor changes the plan of Acheson and Lilienthal became the Baruch plan, named for the president's special envoy to the United Nations Organization, Bernard M. Baruch, who offered the plan to the UN-where it failed to gain acceptance.
Even a press release authorized by the president of the United States, setting out details of the bomb project, would not be enough to satisfy the intense curiosity of the American people concerning the new weapon. Secretary of War Stimson therefore prepared his own press release giving additional details.

Press Release:

Read Secretary Stimson's press release

Source:"Army press notes,: Box 4, Eben A. Ayers papers.

NOTES:

Secretary of War Stimson's press release

I. Section II (first paragraph)
On August 2, 1939, Albert Einstein signed a letter to President Roosevelt that led to the government-sponsored project to construct an atomic bomb. Actually Einstein's letter had been written for him by two physicists, Eugene Wigner and Leo Szilard, who were alarmed by the successful German experiment of 1938. They persuaded a New York City economist, Alexander Sacs, who had easy access to the president, to deliver the letter. After Sacs visited Roosevelt twice the president appointed a committee, which at first made
a $6,000 grant to the Italian emigre' scientist at Columbia University, Enrico Fermi, to purchase graphite to construct an atomic pile. It was not until the day before Pearl Harbor, December 6, 1941, that the decision came to go all out in research and development. Two years-actually three, if one considers the date of the conclusion of the Berlin experiment-were lost, with incalculable results. Had they not been lost, a bomb would have been developed perhaps by 1943, undoubtedly for use on Nazi Germany, at a time when Soviet troops had not yet entered Eastern Europe.

2. (Section III 1st paragraph) Early in the development of the Manhattan Project the informers and operatives of the Soviet Union penetrated to the heart of the nuclear research and also the technology. Evidence of spying had appeared well before the end of the war, but it seemed to be sporadic and perhaps even unimportant. The first revelation that serious damage to security had been done came when a code clerk in the Soviet embassy in Ottawa defected, carrying with him files that incriminated one of the leading British scientists, Alan Nunn May, and a member of the Canadian parliament; the files pointed toward further involvements. In 1948, when relations between the United States and the USSR had turned sour, the Federal Bureau of Investigation began an effort to decipher materials taken in 1944 from a Soviet trading agency in New York, materials on what are called one-time pads, and in a fairly short time an expert decoder had cracked the code, which pointed toward espionage by another British subject, Klaus Fuchs, a brilliant physicist who was at the heart of nuclear developments until 1947. Because of the need to contain the secret of having cracked the code, the FBI passed its information to British intelligence, and the latter undertook to extract a confession from Fuchs without informing him of the
evidence; this was accomplished at the end of January 1950. The code also pointed to two American citizens, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who had served as couriers for Fuchs and his contact at Los Alamos. The Rosenbergs were tried on other evidence, convicted, and sentenced to the electric chair; the sentence was carried out in 1953. By that time the wartime nuclear espionage of the Soviet Union was widely recognized and understood.

3. (Section V 2nd paragraph) In later years American-built reactors were given or sold to governments or citizens of other nations, but it was not possible to convert the resultant used fuel rods into weapons-grade bomb stuff, U-235 or plutonium. French reactors were different, and fear arose that some governments around the world were about to use, or had used, those spent fuel rods by converting them. By that time, unfortunately, the technology of bomb manufacture-the science was widely known-had spread everywhere and concerted efforts of would-be members of the nuclear "club" almost inevitably could result in weapons.

4. (Section V 4th paragraph) For advice on the need to use nuclear weapons against Japan the interim committee had relied on a scientific panel of Oppenheimer, Ernest O. Lawrence, Fermi, and Arthur H. Compton. After the war Oppenheimer admitted that the scientific panel "did not know beans" about the military situation. Scientists participating in the Manhattan Project meanwhile had second thoughts about the military use of their work, and dozens of them signed petitions asking if such uses were necessary. The result of the scientists' concern was the postwar establishment of an organization and a journal, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, which after fifty years is still a thriving publication
devoted to, among other subjects, nuclear proliferation and worldwide threats to the environment.

Chapter 11: Leaflets Dropped On Japanese Cities

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

The program of psychological warfare included the dropping of thousands of leaflets on Japanese cities after the bombing of Hiroshima. Leaders of the American government hoped the Japanese people would evacuate their cities, which not only would save many lives but also disrupt war production - factories were concentrated in cities. They hoped that popular revulsion against continuing the war would prompt Tokyo officials including the emperor to sue for peace according to requirements of the Rotsdam Declaration.

Unfortunately this effort at psychological warfare failed. Time was too short for it to succeed. Moreover, Japanese military authorities controlled the government, and only another nuclear bombing, that of Nagasaki, enabled the emperor to prevail against them.

View Translations of two leaflets dropped on Japanese cities shortly after the first atomic bomb was dropped, ca. August 6, 1945
NOTES

1. By comparing the power of the Hiroshima bomb to the bomb loads of 2,000 B29s, the leaflet was saying that the new bomb equaled 20,000 tons of TNT. (The capacity of a B29 was ~0 tons.) This, however, was a rough measurement. American military authorities did not know the TNT equivalent of the Hiroshima bomb and guessed it to equal that of the plutonium test device at Alamogordo. The uranium bomb later was adjudged to equal ~3,000 tons of TNT. Moreover, the leaflets implicitly were comparing the Hiroshima bomb to the napalm used over Tokyo and other Japanese cities, which created fire storms and the depletion of oxygen rather than a blast effect. Earlier in the war, on the night of March 9-10, 1945, 279 B-29s dropped 500-pound, clusters of small napalm bombs over Tokyo, burning out 10 square miles of the city, killing 80,000 people, injuring 41,000, and leaving 1 million homeless. By early August, B-29s had destroyed 105 square miles in the six major Japanese urban areas comprising 257 square miles. By that time 240,000 Japanese had been killed, and 300,000 injured.

2. The USSR entered the war on August 8.
Chapter 12: Senator Richard B. Russell to the President, August 7, and the President's Response, August 9

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia was a respected member of the Senate, who had read the accounts of the development of the bomb offered by the president and secretary of war. The day after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, he sent a telegram to President Truman, giving him advice on how to deal with Japan.

Read the cable from Senator Richard B. Russell to President Truman, August 7, 1945

Read President Truman's response

NOTES

1. Undersecretary of State Joseph C. Grew, a career member of the foreign service, had served as ambassador to Japan from 1932 to Pearl Harbor; he favored retention of the emperor as head of the Japanese state.

2. Shintoism was the official Japanese state religion, believed by scholars to glorify militarism and to have been greatly responsible for Japan's imperial course including participation in World War II on the side of the Axis powers, Germany and Italy.
3. The Russians entered the war on August 8. The president must have dictated the letter at least a day before he signed it.

Chapter 13: Samuel McCrea Cavert to the President, August 9, and the President's Response, August 11

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

With the issuance of press releases acquainting both members of Congress and the American people with the nation’s new nuclear bomb, President Truman found himself the recipient of considerable attention. During the Pacific war’s hectic final days, most Americans backed the president and supported nuclear bombing. The president could not answer all the telegrams and letters addressed to him, pro or con, but the following telegram of protest from an eminent Protestant clergyman elicited an answer.

Read the telegram from Samuel McCrea Cavert to President Truman, August 9, 1945
Read President Truman's response to Samuel McCrea Cavert, August 11, 1945

Notes:
1. Bishop C. Bromley Oxnam was a leading Methodist; John Foster Dulles (secretary of state in the Eisenhower administration, 1953-1959) was a leading Presbyterian layman.

2. There is a remarkable contrast between this letter and the president's response to Senator Russell (document 12). It is explainable only by the almost daily rise and fall of hopes for peace as event followed event: Hiroshima, Russian entry, Nagasaki, and five more days (August 10--14) until Japanese acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration.

Chapter 14: Albert Einstein to President Roosevelt, March 25, 1945, and subsequent correspondence

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

As the Manhattan Project moved toward achievement of nuclear weapons, Albert Einstein addressed a letter to the then president, Roosevelt, introducing the physicist Leo Szilard. The latter, like many of the other physicists working on the bomb, was concerned about participation in a project that might kill tens of thousands of Japanese including many civilians.

After Truman became president, Szilard and a friend called
upon the new president's appointment secretary, Matthew J. Connelly, who after consultation with President Truman arranged for Szilard and two other physicists to see James F. Byrnes, at that time living in South Carolina. Byrnes was a member of the interim committee, which was considering problems involved in using nuclear weapons. Early in July 1945, Byrnes would become secretary of state. To the surprise of the three scientists Byrnes spoke almost triumphantly of how the bomb, not yet tested, would make Soviet Russia more amenable to American policy toward Europe and East Asia.

In July 1945, scientists at the Metallurgical Laboratory at the University of Chicago, which was one of the laboratories of the Manhattan Project, signed a petition against dropping bombs on Japan without warning. A similar petition was signed at Oak Ridge. Unfortunately the scientists sent those petitions to the War Department where either the rush of events, the absence of the highest administration officials including Secretary Stimson (who was at Potsdam), or - as the scientists afterward suspected the unwillingness of the military to consider their proposal prevented action in the subsequent days and weeks.

112 Mercer Street
Princeton, New Jersey
March 25, 1945
The Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt
The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Sir:

I am writing you to introduce Dr. L. Szilard who proposes to submit to you certain considerations and recommendations.
Unusual circumstances which I shall describe further below induce me to take this action in spite of the fact that I do not know the substance of the considerations and recommendations which Dr. Szilard proposes to submit to you.

In the summer of 1939 Dr. Szilard put before me his views concerning the potential importance of uranium for national defense. He was greatly disturbed by the potentialities involved and anxious that the United States Government be advised of them as soon as possible. Dr. Szilard, who is one of the discoverers of the neutron emission of uranium on which all present work on uranium is based, described to me a specific system which he devised and which he thought would make it possible to set up a chain reaction in unseparated uranium in the immediate future. Having known him for over twenty years both for his scientific work and personally, I have much confidence in his judgment and it was on the basis of his judgment as well as my own that I took the liberty to approach you in connection with this subject. You responded to my letter dated August 2, 1939 by the appointment of a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Briggs and thus started the Government's activity in this field.1

The terms of secrecy under which Dr. Szilard is working at present do not permit him to give me information about his work; however, I understand that he now is greatly concerned about the lack of adequate contact between scientists who are doing this work and those members of your Cabinet who are responsible for formulating policy. In the circumstances I consider it my duty to give Dr. Szilard this introduction and I wish to express the hope that you will be able to give his presentation of the case your personal attention.

Very truly yours,
Chapter 15: Secretary Stimson to the President, September 11, and enclosures

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

On September 21, 1945, President Truman held a cabinet meeting to discuss the question of sharing nuclear secrets with the British and particularly the Soviet governments. He chose the topic because it was Secretary of War Stimson's last day in government service; Stimson was retiring that afternoon. The aging secretary - he was in his late seventies - had begun government service as district attorney in New York under President Theodore Roosevelt and had served as secretary of war in the Taft administration and secretary of state in the Hoover administration.
The subject of nuclear sharing was appropriate, for Stimson had spent much time during the war considering the Manhattan Project and how it would affect both the war and foreign policy. After the day's debate at the cabinet meeting, he could leave such issues to other hands. But as it turned out (in the words of Undersecretary of State Acheson), "the discussion was unworthy of the subject." Stimson desired only a diplomatic approach, not an openhanded passing of information U.S. scientists had. The presumption was that the Soviets would offer a quid pro quo for the cost of the nuclear project. Instead, some cabinet members misconstrued the debate to be whether to give away the secrets. They were totally unprepared to handle this complicated subject and hardly knew the difference between a nuclear secret and common scientific knowledge. They responded by offering their opinions in airy detail. After the discussion, and reception of papers prepared thereafter (with the exception of Stimson's, which was prepared well in advance), the president released an ambiguous public statement. Stimson's letter and prepared paper follow.

Read Stimson's letter
Read Stimson's prepared paper

Source: Atomic Bom, box 112, president's secretary's files

NOTES

1. How much Stimson knew of the defection of Gouzenko, the Soviet code clerk in Ottawa, a few days before the date of his memorandum, is uncertain. But there had been earlier evidence that the Soviets had penetrated the Manhattan Project.
2. As it turned out, the Soviet Union produced a nuclear explosion in four years, the inside estimate, although the Russian program was helped greatly by acquisition of the American technical procedures and gun device for the Nagasaki plutonium bomb.

3. Stimson is referring to the use of poison gas-first employed by the Germans in World War I. The U.S. course in World War II had been to create a vast superiority over the Germans in techniques and supplies of poison gas, so that if the German military first used gas, then the United States would follow in an overwhelming way.

4. The presumption was that a grand peace conference would follow World War II, as the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 followed World War I. In fact, there was no such conference.

5. Here Stimson betrayed the American belief at that time that the United States could deal more effectively with the USSR than could Britain. The Americans considered the British anti-Soviet. The British attitude, which dated back to the Conservative Party's dislike of the Bolsheviks immediately after World War I, was embodied in Churchill's wartime policy of supporting the Soviet Union because the latter was fighting against the Hitler regime rather than because the USSR was an ideal ally.

6. During the war President Roosevelt had included Nationalist China---the China of Generalissimo Chiang-as one of the "four policemen" who would manage postwar affairs. At the end of World War II both Roosevelt and his successor, Truman, sought to reenlist France, despite the weakness of the government (reconstituted first by General Charles de Gaulle in 1944) in matters of European and world affairs.
7. Stimson was implying that the United Nations Organization, which had been created at the San Francisco Conference early that summer, was too large and probably too weak an organization to deal with nuclear issues.


Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

At the end of World War II the Truman administration arranged for surveys of the damage done to both Germany and Japan by the bombers of the U.S. Army Air Forces - by the autonomous air arm of the U.S. Army that in 1947 achieved independence as the U.S. Air Force.

Supporters of the latter dominated the bombing survey for Japan. They were champions of conventional bombing, even though USAAF planes carried the atomic bombs. They sought to show that the atomic bombs were less important than people thought, and intimated that conventional air power had brought Japan to its knees. They stressed the failure of the atomic bombs to affect civilian morale, as if this failure were
important; within the Japanese government the civilians were powerless, the military in control. They beheld a decision for peace taken earlier than August 1945, when in fact the decision of the Supreme War Guidance Council on June 26 was ambiguous. All they could say for the atomic bombings was that the latter "considerably speeded up" the move toward peace.

It was understandable that the writers of the bombing survey asked President Truman to publish these conclusions.

Read letter from Franklin D'Olier, chairman of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, to President Truman, June 20, 1946


Source: NSC Atomic--Hiroshima and Nagasaki, box 197, president's secretary's files.

NOTES

1. Estimates of deaths at Hiroshima and Nagasaki are imprecise, for the dead could not easily be counted, but usually run between 100,000 and 130,000, with far fewer at Nagasaki because the bomb was not dropped in the city's center and because the terrain was mountainous.

2. The wartime prime minister, General Hideki Tojo, resigned in 1944 after American forces captured Saipan and his successor, Admiral Kuniaki Koiso, gave way to Admiral Kantaro Suzuki.

3. The Russians declared war on August 8, effective the next
day. The bombing of Hiroshima was on August 6 and Nagasaki on August 9.

Chapter 17: Karl T. Compton article and the President to Compton, December 16

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

A physicist and brother of Arthur H. Compton, president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology since 1930, Karl T. Compton served on scientific projects during the war and was an observer on the staff of General Douglas MacArthur immediately after V-J Day. When in December 1946, he published an essay in the Atlantic Monthly entitled "If the Atomic Bomb Had Not Been Used," he sent a copy to President Truman, who read it with enthusiastic approval.

Truman's response to Dr. Compton

Response to Dr. Compton

See also "If the Atomic bomb Had Not Been Used," by Karl T. Compton, The Atlantic Monthly , December 1946

NOTES

1. Compton did not have access to war department estimates
that later became available (see Introduction to this volume). Moreover, Pentagon officers believed that MacArthur played down anticipated casualties, expecting to become commander of the greatest amphibious force ever assembled, fourteen divisions scheduled for Kyushu on November - compared to the nine divisions commanded by General Dwight D. Eisenhower in the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944.

2. Strictly speaking, the Potsdam Declaration was not an ultimatum because it did not have a specified time limit.


Chapter 18: Selected White House Memoranda, 1952-1953

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

James L. Cate, professor of history at the University of Chicago, spent the initial years after World War II helping to write and edit a multivolume history of the U.S. Army Air Forces during the war; in 1952 he wrote a letter to the president in regard to what he believed to he a problem of research, that is, what exactly had happened within the Truman administration in July and August 1945, when the president made the
decision to use nuclear weapons on Japan.

The moment for writing was propitious, for the president of 1952 was the same as in 1945 and Truman was in a ruminative mood. That year he had decided not to run for what, had he done so, would have been virtually a third term. He was exempt from the provisions of the Twenty-Second Amendment, which had gone into effect in 1951 and limited presidents to two terms. But he was tired. And it must be said that the country had tired of him (which he was well aware of); the Korean War had turned into a stalemate, which greatly affected his popularity.

Cate sent the letter on December 6, 1952, at which time General Dwight D. Eisenhower was president-elect, following the defeat of the Democratic presidential candidate, Adlai Stevenson. Truman responded to Cate on January 12, 1953.

The University of Chicago
Chicago 37, Illinois
Department of History
1126 East 59th Street

The President
Washington, D.C.

Sir:

For several years it has been my privilege to serve as one of the editors and authors of The Army Air Forces in World War II, a history published on a nonprofit basis under the joint sponsorship of the U.S. Air Force and the University of Chicago. (1)

One of my tasks for the fifth volume, now in press, was to write
an account of the atomic bomb attacks against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In respect to the decision to use the bomb I have been faced with an apparent discrepancy in the evidence which I have been unable to resolve, and, in spite of a reluctance to intrude upon the time of the President, I am turning to you for information for which you are the best and perhaps the sole authority.

I have read with great interest your own statements—that released on 6 August 1945 and that contained in your letter to Dr. Karl T. Compton, dated 16 December 1946 and published in the Atlantic Monthly of February 1947. I have read also the late Mr. Stimson's more detailed account in Harper's Magazine of February 1947 which is in perfect accord with yours—the gist being that the dread decision for which you courageously assumed responsibility was made at Potsdam "in the face of" Premier Suzuki's rejection of the warning contained in the Potsdam Declaration of 26 July, and that the motive was to avoid the great loss of life that would have attended the invasion of Kyushu scheduled for November.

More recently I have seen a photostatic copy of the directive to Cen. Carl Spaatz ordering him to deliver the first atomic bomb against one of four designated targets; the document has been declassified and I am enclosing a true copy. The letter is dated at Washington on 25 July 1945 and bears the signature of Gen. Thomas T. Handy, Acting Chief of Staff during General Marshall's absence at Potsdam. According to General Arnold's statement elsewhere [H. H. Arnold, Global Mission (New York: Harper, 1949), p. 589], this directive was based on a memorandum dispatched by courier to Washington after a conference on 22 July between himself, Secretary Stimson, and General Marshall. (2)
The directive contains an unqualified order to launch the attack "as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3 August 1945." There is no reference to the Potsdam Declaration which was to be issued on the next day and no statement as to what should be done in the event of a Japanese offer to surrender before 3 August. It is possible that the written directive was qualified by oral instructions, or that it was intended that it be countermanded by a radio message if the Japanese did accept the Potsdam terms, or that the directive was an erroneous representation of Secretary Stimson's real intentions. Nevertheless, as it stands the directive seems to indicate that the decision to use the bomb had been made at least one day before the promulgation of the Potsdam Declaration and two days before Suzuki's rejection thereof on 28 July, Tokyo time. Such an interpretation is in flat contradiction to the explanation implicit in the published statements, that the final decision was made only after the Japanese refusal of the ultimatum.

Because of the extraordinary importance of this problem, I am appealing to you for more complete information as to the time and the circumstances under which you arrived at the final decision, and for permission to quote your reply in the volume of which I have spoken. Your well-known interest in history has encouraged me to seek my information at the source, as the historian should, without apology other than for having intruded on your crowded schedule with a letter made overly long by my desire to state the problem accurately.

Very truly yours,

JAMES L. CATE
An important-and difficult-inquiry such as Professor Cate addressed to the president required staff work, and the president's assistant press secretary sent Cate's inquiry to the air aide, Major General Robert B. Landry.

The White House
Washington
December 23, 1952

Memorandum to General Landry:

Attached is a letter from Professor Cate of the University of Chicago asking clarification of the precise circumstances under which the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

If this letter is to be answered, it may take some research in official files and discussion with the President. Since this is an Air Force project, perhaps it would be more appropriate if you checked into this thing.

If, when the information is available, you wish us to write a reply, we will be glad to do so.

IRVING PERLMETER

General Landry already had done historical work for the president, having investigated the antecedents of American "witch hunts," with special attention to hunters active during the Truman administration. Perhaps in an effort to get out of a
new assignment the general carefully inquired of the president as to what the nation's chief executive knew of the bomb decision.

The White House
Washington
30 December 1952

Memorandum for the President

Mr. President, it would be very desirable, if you could do it, to let this historian have such information as could be used in the history that he is writing concerning the circumstances under which the first atomic bombs were dropped.

[R. B. LANDRY]

The president thereupon offered a draft of his own letter to Professor Cate.

The White House
Washington
Dec.31, 1952

My dear Professor Cate:

Your letter of Dec. 6th, 1952 has just now been delivered to me.

When the message came to Potsdam that a successful atomic explosion had taken place in New Mexico, there was much excitement and conversation about the effect on the war then
in progress with Japan.

The next day I told the Prime Minister of Great Britain and Generalissimo Stalin that the explosion had been a success. The British Prime Minister understood and appreciated what I'd told him. Prime Minister Stalin smiled and thanked me for reporting the explosion to him but I'm sure he did not understand its significance. (3)

I called a meeting of the Sec. of State, Mr. Byrnes, the Sec. of War, Mr. Stimson, Adm. Leahy, Gen. Marshall, Gen. Eisenhower, the Sec. of the Navy, Adm. King and some others to discuss what should be done with this awful weapon. (4)

I asked Gen. Marshall what it would cost in lives to land on the Tokyo plain and other places in Japan. It was his opinion that 1/4 million casualties would be the minimum cost as well as an equal number of the enemy. The other military and naval men present agreed.

I asked Sec. Stimson which cities in Japan were devoted exclusively to war production. He promptly named Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We sent an ultimatum to Japan. It was ignored.

I ordered atomic bombs dropped on the two cities named on the way back from Potsdam when we were in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.(5)

Dropping the bombs ended the war, saved lives and gave the free nations a chance to face the facts.

When it looked as if Japan would quit, Russia hurried into the fray nine days before the surrender so as to be in at the settlement.(6) No military contribution was made by the
Russians toward victory over Japan. Prisoners were surrendered and Manchuria occupied as was Korea north of the 38th parallel.

Russia in Asia has been a great liability since.

For whatever reason, the task of drafting a reply to Cate passed into the hands of one of the president's civilian assistants, Kenneth W. Hechler, who held a doctoral degree in political science from Columbia University; shortly after the new year, Hechler sent an explanation to another of the president's special assistants, David D. Lloyd.

The White House
Washington
January 2, 1953

Memorandum for Mr. Lloyd:

There are two points in the President's draft which should be changed. On page 2, it is stated: "I asked Gen. Marshall what it would cost in lives to land on the Tokyo plain and other places in Japan. It was his opinion that 1/4 million casualties would be the minimum cost as well as an equal number of the enemy." Stimson says in his book On Active Service, p. 619: "We estimated that if we should be forced to carry this plan to its conclusion, the major fighting would not end until the latter part of 1946, at the earliest. I was informed that such operations might be expected to cost over a million casualties, to American forces alone." I think it is important that the President's casualty figure be changed to conform with that of Secretary Stimson, because presumably Stimson got his from
Gen. Marshall; the size of the figure is very important. (7)

On page 4, it is stated: "When it looked as if Japan would quit, Russia hurried into the fray nine days before the surrender so as to be at the settlement." Actually, Russia announced her decision to enter the Japanese War on August 8, effective August 9; the surrender of Japan was tendered on August 14. Therefore, the statement should be amended to read "five days before the surrender" or "less than a week before the surrender."

In his letter to the President, Professor Cate calls attention to the directive of July 25, 1945 from Gen. Handy to Gen. Spaatz, containing an unqualified order to launch the atomic bomb attack. Professor Cate asks whether this directive does not contradict published statements that the final decision was made only after the Japanese refusal of the ultimatum.

According to Dr. Rudolph Winnacker, Historian of the Office of Secretary of Defense, it is clear that the Gen. Handy order could have been countermanded in the event Japan had responded to the Potsdam ultimatum---just as any military order can be countermanded. The fundamental decision to use the bomb preceded the Gen. Handy letter, and the decision to "trigger" its use and define the targets was made by the President as indicated in his memorandum. I do not feel this needs elaboration. (8)

KENNETH W. HECHLER

Three days later, Hechler elaborated.
The White House
Washington
January 5, 1953

Memorandum for Mr. Lloyd:

Dr. Winnacker called regarding the dropping of the atomic bombs, and said that all his records show are that General Groves reported on the effectiveness of the bomb test in New Mexico, reporting on July 21, and Secretary Stimson and others at Potsdam conferred daily with the President on July 22, July 23, and July 24. Presumably Secretary of the Navy Forrestal was not present at the conference to which the President refers inasmuch as he did not arrive at Potsdam until July 28 at 5:00 P.M. The only other information which Dr. Winnacker has is that the operation, initially scheduled for August 3, was postponed on two occasions (presumably due to weather). (9)

Dr. Winnacker says that Admiral Dennison has all of the Potsdam papers, which Winnacker believes it will be necessary for us to look at in order to get a conclusive answer to the questions raised by the President's note.(10)

Roberta Barrows says that the President left Washington for Potsdam on July 6 at 11:00 P.M., arrived on July 15, departed on the return trip on August 2 at 8:00 P.M., and arrived in Washington, D.C., on August 8 at 10:50 P.M. The Potsdam Conference actually lasted during the days July 17 to August 2, 1945.

KENNETH W. HECHLER
David Lloyd then summed up the evidence in a memo to the president.

The White House
Washington
January 6, 1953

Memorandum for the President:

At your request I have reviewed your draft letter to Professor Cate, and I have made a few slight revisions after checking the details.

In your draft, you state that General Marshall told you that a landing in Japan would cost a quarter of a million casualties to the United States, and an equal number of the enemy. Mr. Stimson, in his book written by [with] McGeorge Bundy, says that Marshall's estimate was over a million casualties. Your recollection sounds more reasonable than Stimson's, but in order to avoid a conflict, I have changed the wording to read that General Marshall expected a minimum of a quarter of a million casualties and possibly a much greater number - as much as a million.

Secretary Forrestal does not appear to have been at the Potsdam meetings until July 28, and your conferences about the atom bomb appear to have taken place early in the meeting, on July 22, 23 and 24. Accordingly, I have deleted the Secretary of the Navy from the list of those with whom you conferred.

I have also inserted a paragraph explaining why the orders to General Spaatz were dated July 25 rather than after the ultimatum. This has been checked with the historian of the Department of Defense.
Russian entry into the war was less than a week before the surrender.

I have deleted the last sentence of your draft, since I think that it might be unfairly used by the propagandists of the political opposition. It states a fundamental truth, but in a very restrained way, and it seemed to me that it might raise more problems than it would help.

I attach various memoranda to me on this subject from Kenneth Hechler who did the research.

[DAVID D. LLOYD]

There followed the presidential letter, a version of his December 31 letter that reflects the changes suggested by Hechler and Lloyd.

The White House
Washington
January 12, 1953

My dear Professor Cate:

Your letter of December 6, 1952 has just now been delivered to me.

When the message came to Potsdam that a successful atomic explosion had taken place in New Mexico, there was much excitement and conversation about the effect on the war then in progress with Japan.

The next day I told the Prime Minister of Great Britain and Generalissimo Stalin that the explosion had been a success.
The British Prime Minister understood and appreciated what I'd told him. Premier Stalin smiled and thanked me for reporting the explosion to him, but I'm sure he did not understand its significance.

I called a meeting of the Secretary of State, Mr. Byrnes, the Secretary of War, Mr. Stimson, Admiral Leahy, General Marshall, General Eisenhower, Admiral King and some others, to discuss what should be done with this awful weapon.

I asked General Marshall what it would cost in lives to land on the Tokyo plain and other places in Japan. It was his opinion that such an invasion would cost at a minimum one quarter of a million casualties, and might cost as much as a million, on the American side alone, with an equal number of the enemy. The other military and naval men present agreed.

I asked Secretary Stimson which cities in Japan were devoted exclusively to war production. He promptly named Hiroshima and Nagasaki, among others.

We sent an ultimatum to Japan. It was rejected.

I ordered atomic bombs dropped on the two cities named on the way back from Potsdam, when we were in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

In your letter, you raise the fact that the directive to General Spaatz to prepare for delivering the bomb is dated July twenty-fifth. It was, of course, necessary to set the military wheels in action, as these orders did, but the final decision was in my hands, and was not made until we were returning from Potsdam.

Dropping the bombs ended the war, saved lives, and gave the
free nations a chance to face the facts.

When it looked as if Japan would quit, Russia hurried into the fray less than a week before the surrender, so as to be in at the settlement. No military contribution was made by the Russians toward victory over Japan. Prisoners were surrendered and Manchuria occupied by the Soviets, as was Korea, north of the 38th parallel.

Sincerely yours,
[HARRY S. TRUMAN]


NOTES

1. As completed the work was edited by Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Gate, The Army Air Forces in World War II, 7 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940-l958).
2. General of the Army Henry H. Arnold was wartime commanding general of the U.S. Army Air Forces.
3. Actually Truman told Stalin on July 24, casually, after the end of a formal conference session, that the United States had developed a new weapon of "unusual destructive force," not mentioning it was a nuclear weapon.
4. A formal meeting may not have occurred, for several of the supposed participants-Stimson, Leahy, Secretary of the Navy James V~ Forrestal- were keeping diaries, and none of them mentioned a meeting. Moreover, Forrestal could not have been present; neither could Eisenhower who was at Potsdam for only a short time.
5. Truman meant to say that he did not want the atomic
bombs used while he was at Potsdam.

6. The president of course was in error—because the Soviets declared war on August 8 and the war ended August 14; see the White House memoranda below.

7. It is not clear what casualty figures Marshall might have given Stimson. What must be remembered, however, is the two-month period during which casualty figures were being discussed, from mid-June to mid-August. During this time the size of Japanese forces on Kyushu changed markedly. Moreover, the longer the casualty discussion continued, the higher the figures mentioned by participants.

8. Ideally it did need elaboration, for the historian would like to know when the president decided on use of nuclear weapons. As the president's special assistant related, the decision surely came earlier—neither General Marshall nor General Handy could have made it, and the president must have made it either in the larger meeting he claimed or, perhaps more likely, in a series of discussions with his military and civil advisers.

9. The order to General Spaatz said, "as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3 August."

10. Rear Admiral Robert L. Dennison was the president's naval aide in January, 1953.

11. Roberta Barrows was one of the president's secretaries.

Chapter 19: Interview with former
In the mid-1950s the former president began writing his memoirs; he employed several assistants, among them newspaperman William Hillman and a former professor at Georgetown University, Morton Royce. Hillman and Royce taped some of Truman's recollections.

**TRUMAN:** . . . the same as you would an armored division to go around on the ground and cause the surrender and as you say when you go to win a war it takes the foot soldier, the armored division and artillery on the ground no matter what sort of weapons you have. It was the estimate of General Marshall that this action would probably save the lives of 250,000 of our soldiers and probably twice as many casualties - that was what I was trying to avoid.

**HILLMAN:** What the professor is trying to get at is despite the plastering from the air the ordinary bombs on Germany and Japan wouldn't have the effect of a knockout blow.

**TRUMAN:** The atomic bomb was the knockout blow-the same as the armored division would have on the ground behind the enemy.

**ROYCE:** Mr. Stimson in his book says he urges a psychological blow which would perhaps be the means of making the Japanese give in and he keeps talking about that.

**TRUMAN:** That is all right and, of course, in the long run it takes the psychological condition of the enemy's mind to cause
a surrender but my objective was to use the atomic bomb purely as a military blow to create a military surrender. That in the long run is what happened. In the First World War if you will remember the Germans were not completely defeated--Germany was never invaded and never touched except by a few air raids which we made along toward the end, but the fact that nine hundred thousand Americans had marched up to...[?] and were about to take over caused them to surrender. They never would have surrendered otherwise. I don't believe in speculating on the mental feeling and as far as the bomb is concerned I ordered its use for a military reason - for no other cause - and it saved the lives of a great many of our soldiers. That is all I had in mind.


Chapter 20: Tsukasa Njtoguri to former President Truman, March 1, 1958, and the President's Response, March 12
Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

In the 1950s, after he went back to Independence, and until the mid-1960s when an accident in his house and a series of
physical ailments combined to make him curtail his activities, the retired president pursued a very active life-composing his memoirs, raising money for construction of the Truman Library, and making political speeches across the country. Correspondence poured into the small-town post office, and Truman answered much of it. In March 1958, a letter arrived, with an enclosure, that especially caught his eye. It was a resolution of the city council of Hiroshima, protesting his action in 1945 when he authorized the nuclear bombing of that city and subsequently of Nagasaki, in hope that these acts would end the war.

Truman himself had precipitated the resolution of censure by making a television tape the year before, for the reporter Edward R. Murrow's show entitled "See It Now." That show was aired for viewers on February 2, 1958. It covered many episodes during the Missourian's presidency, including a contention by President Eisenhower that Truman had offered the then general the presidency in 1948, if Eisenhower desired to run that year. (Truman said he did not offer the presidency.)

The point about using the nuclear bombs was a small part of the television program. Nonetheless, the point was perfectly clear. Truman told Murrow that the alternative to the bombs would have been an invasion in which casualties probably would have run to a half million. "And when we had this powerful new weapon, I had no qualms about using it because a weapon of war is a destructive weapon. That's the reason none of us want war and all of us are against war, but when you have the weapon that will win the war, you'd be foolish if you didn't use it...

Under questioning he expressed a hope that the "new and terrible hydrogen weapon," tested by the United States in
1952, by the Soviet Union three years later, would not be used. "If the world gets into turmoil, however," he said, "it will be used. You can be sure of that."

How long Truman held the resolution from the Hiroshima city council before answering it is difficult to say. Its covering letter was misaddressed and doubtless the communication needed extra time to arrive. The former president might have done better for himself and for the passions in Japan over his televised remarks, if he had not answered the resolution. Such procedure was not part of his makeup, and he not merely answered it but did so in a stinging manner.

Read letter from Tsukasa Nitoguri, chairman of the Hiroshima city council, to former President Truman, March 1, 1958.

Press release of letter from Truman to Hon. Tsukasa Nitoguri, March 12, 1958

Chapter 21: Handwritten notes by former President Truman, 1958

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

It is not possible to know when the retired president penned the following thoughts, but it must have been about the time he wrote his letter to the Hiroshima city council. His private
secretary, Rose Conway, filed them in a folder that remarked both a newspaper article, to which Truman had put his name (and had nothing to do with nuclear bombs), and the handwritten notes themselves. Many years later an archivist in the Truman Library came upon the file and its enclosed note - in which the writer showed that his letter to the city council had constituted only part of his thoughts about the nuclear age.

Read handwritten notes by former President Truman beginning "The world is faced..." ca. 1958

Recommended Readings

Edited by Robert H. Ferrell

2. Paul Boyer, By the Bomb's Early Light (New York: Pantheon, 1985)
4. Robert J. C. Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1954)