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75 Years Ago, World War II, The Inquirer, Philadelphia, PA

WWII Weekly Front Pages

5 August - 11 August 1945

The Inquirer, Philadelphia, PA

"I am become Death, destroyer of worlds"



PACIFIC

On 5 August fleets of B-29s scattered "surrender or die" warnings over 12 Japanese cities spread the entire length of the homeland. This ran to 31 the number of cities told they face imminent destruction. Despite the tremendous weight of warplane and warship bombs and shells being heaped on the country, Tokyo declared it would never be forced to its knees by air power and said it was ready to meet any Allied invasion. On 6 August a fleet of 580 Superfortresses heaped 3,850 tons of explosives on four more Japanese "death list" cities across the islands of Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu in the most widespread B-29 assault of the war.

Official Chinese reports alleged that 50,000 Chinese had been killed by the Japanese or were missing from the previously liberated city of Kanhsien, 240 miles north of Hong Kong. The reports asserted that residents were

killed or disappeared during a six-month Japanese occupation. Kanshien was the site of a former advance base of the US 14th Air Force, and was re-won the past week by the Chinese.

On Monday 6 August, at 8:15 local time, an atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, with a population of 318,000. The blast was the equivalent of 20,000 tons of TNT and held more than 2,000 times the blast power of the largest bomb ever used in the history of warfare. An impenetrable cloud of smoke and dust over the drop site made early damage assessment impossible, but tests in the US indicated that the bomb should obliterate everything within a 40 block radius from the point of detonation. Indeed, the next day the Army revealed that 60 percent of the city, 4.1 square miles, had been destroyed. The bomb had been developed at a cost of \$2 billion [\$28.6 billion in 2020] by American and British scientists, was made in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and had been first tested on 16 July in the New Mexico desert at Alamogordo. US government officials immediately predicted a shorter war due to the attack.

The crew of the B-29 which had dropped the bomb on Hiroshima reported that they felt the concussion from ten miles away, and that it felt like a close flak burst. They had turned the plane broadside to get a better view. Their captain, COL Paul Tibbets, saw that “a mountain of smoke was going up in a mushroom with the stem coming down. At the top was white smoke, but up to 1000 feet there was swirling, boiling dust. Soon afterward small fires sprang up on the edge of town, but the town was entirely obscured. We stayed around two or three minutes and by that time the smoke had risen to 40,000 feet.”

Russia declared war on Japan on 8 August, and launched a sudden attack on the Japanese Kwantung Army, in the eastern section of the far-flung Manchurian region of China. The second war in 40 years between the two countries became a reality shortly after midnight Soviet time. It was clear that the gigantic Russian military machine had been set in motion as part of an Allied master plan to bring the war in Asia to a close. On 10 August the Soviet Union also invaded Korea along a wide front and bombed northern sections of the country. By the end of the week, Russian mobile columns had swept 160 miles into Manchuria along the Chinese Eastern Railroad.

At noon local time on 9 August the second atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki, with a population of 255,000. It was believed to be more vulnerable than Hiroshima given its closely packed eave-to-eave buildings, and was more important industrially. Damage assessment indicated that 30 percent of the city had been destroyed, including at least 13 factories. The irregular nature of the city’s built-up areas, many contained in low gullies, apparently had some effect in preventing damage as extensive as that at Hiroshima.

HOME FRONT

In an address to the Nation, President Truman warned the Japanese people that only immediate surrender would save them from the devastating effects of new “military secrets,” as well as a continued rain of atomic bombs and the full force of the Russian armies. He urged Japanese civilians to leave industrial cities immediately, warning that bombs would continue to be dropped until all their war industrial centers were wiped off the map. On 10 August Japan sued for peace, accepting all the terms of the Potsdam agreement but with the condition that the Allies promise to allow Emperor Hirohito to remain. On this issue the Big Four (the US, Britain, Russia and China) were conferring that night, but there were sharply divided opinions on this within and without the US Government.

At week’s end, the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, the central controlling agency with direct responsibility for reconversion policy, called in representatives of all major war and civilian agencies to discuss plans for coordinated announcement of each agency’s V-J Day program, on the assumption that the end of the war was at hand.

(Photo courtesy newspapers.com, Philadelphia Inquirer)