

# VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC



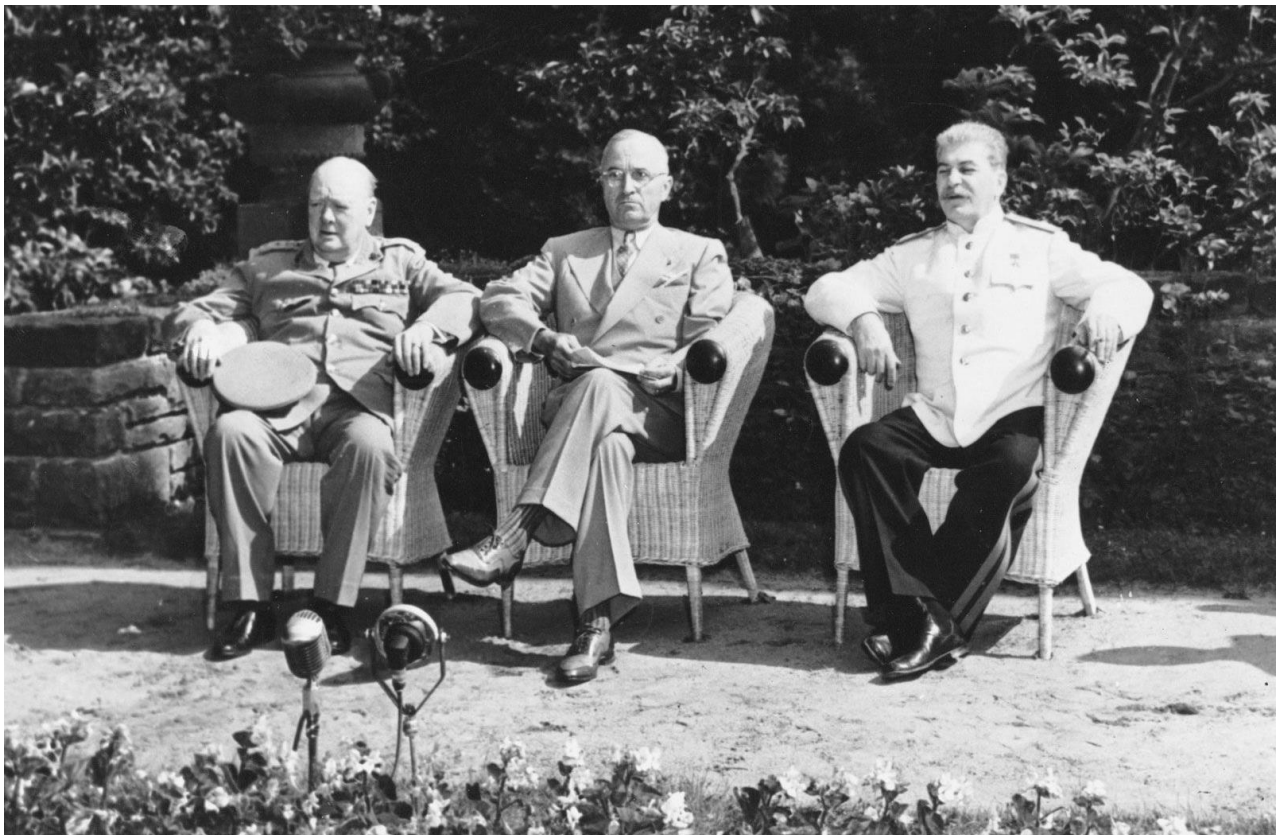
*An atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.*

The final battles in the Pacific were among the war's bloodiest. In June 1944, the Battle of the Philippine Sea effectively destroyed Japanese naval air power, forcing the resignation of Japanese Prime Minister Tojo. General Douglas MacArthur, who had reluctantly left the Philippines two years before to escape Japanese capture, returned to the islands in October. The accompanying Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval engagement ever fought, was the final decisive defeat of the Japanese Navy. By February 1945, U.S. forces had taken Manila in the Philippines.

Next, the United States set its sight on the strategic island of Iwo Jima in the Bonin Islands, about halfway between the Marianas and Japan. Lying only 800 miles from Japan, Iwo Jima's airfields could be used as a base from which to launch air strikes of B-29 Superfortresses on the main Japanese home islands. The Japanese soldiers, trained to die fighting for the Emperor, made suicidal use of natural caves and the rocky terrain in and around Mt. Suribachi. After a brutal struggle, U.S. forces took the island by mid-March, but not before losing the lives of some 7,000 U.S. Marines. Nearly all the 22,000 Japanese defenders perished. By now, the United States was undertaking extensive air attacks on Japanese shipping and airfields and wave after wave of incendiary bombing attacks against Japanese cities.

At the Battle of Okinawa, fought from April through June of 1945, the Americans met even fiercer resistance. With few of the defenders surrendering, the U.S. Army and Marines were forced to wage a war of annihilation. Waves of Kamikaze suicide planes pounded the offshore Allied fleet, inflicting more damage than at Leyte Gulf. Japan lost more than 100,000 troops and probably as many Okinawan civilians. The U.S. won the battle, but losses were staggering. Americans suffered 82,000 casualties, including over 20,000 deaths. Most Americans saw the fighting as a preview of what they would face in a planned invasion of Japan. The carnage at Okinawa weighed heavily on U.S. President Harry Truman. Fearing horrific American casualties in the subsequent invasion of the main Japanese islands, Truman sought another solution.

The following month, beginning on July 17, Truman met with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin at Potsdam, a suburb outside Berlin, to discuss operations against Japan, the peace settlement in Europe, and a policy for the future of Germany. Perhaps presaging the coming end of the alliance, they had no trouble on vague matters of principle or the practical issues of military occupation, but reached no agreement on many tangible issues, including reparations. The three leaders left the Potsdam Conference on August 2, 1945 in agreement about the fate of defeated Germany, but left many questions unanswered about the final defeat of Japan.



*Allied leaders Winston Churchill, Harry S. Truman, and Joseph Stalin met in Potsdam, Germany to discuss the fate of Germany and the end of the war in the Pacific.*

The day before the Potsdam Conference began, U.S. nuclear scientists engaged in the secret Manhattan Project exploded an atomic bomb near Alamogordo, New Mexico. The successful test of the bomb was the culmination of three years of intensive research in laboratories across the United States. It lay behind the Potsdam Declaration, issued on July 26 by the United States and Britain, promising that Japan would neither be destroyed nor enslaved if it surrendered. If Japan continued the war, however, it would meet "prompt and utter destruction." President Truman, calculating that an atomic bomb might be used to gain Japan's surrender more quickly and with fewer casualties than an invasion of the mainland, ordered that the bomb be used if the Japanese did not surrender by August 3.

A committee of U.S. military and political officials and scientists had considered the question of targets for the new weapon. Many argued successfully that Kyoto, Japan's ancient capital and a repository of many national and religious treasures, be taken out of consideration. Hiroshima, a center of war industries and military operations, became the first objective. When the Japanese ignored the warning, the United States took action.

On August 6, 1945, a single B-29 Superfortress, the *Enola Gay*, dropped an atomic bomb over the city of Hiroshima. The bomb flattened four square miles and instantly killed more than 70,000 people. The blast razed and burnt 70 percent of all structures in the city. Only steel and reinforced concrete structures remained standing. Human beings within a half-mile of the blast were vaporized. Bronze statues melted and roof tiles fused together. Water flowing through the city in the Ota River boiled. In the weeks and months that followed, many more would die from radiation sickness, and it is estimated as many as 140,000 Japanese died as a result of the bomb by the end of 1945.

The day following Hiroshima, Truman warned the Japanese that if they did not surrender, they could expect "a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this Earth." And on August 8, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and invaded Manchuria. Again, Japanese leaders did not respond. The next day, the United States dropped a second atomic bomb, this time on the city of Nagasaki. More than 40,000 people were killed in this second explosion.

Some members of the Japanese cabinet wanted to fight on. Other leaders disagreed. Finally, on August 10, Emperor Hirohito intervened, an action unheard of for a Japanese emperor. A few days later, on August 15, 1945, Japan agreed to surrender. The formal peace treaty was signed on board the American battleship *Missouri* anchored in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945. After more than five years of fighting, World War II was over.



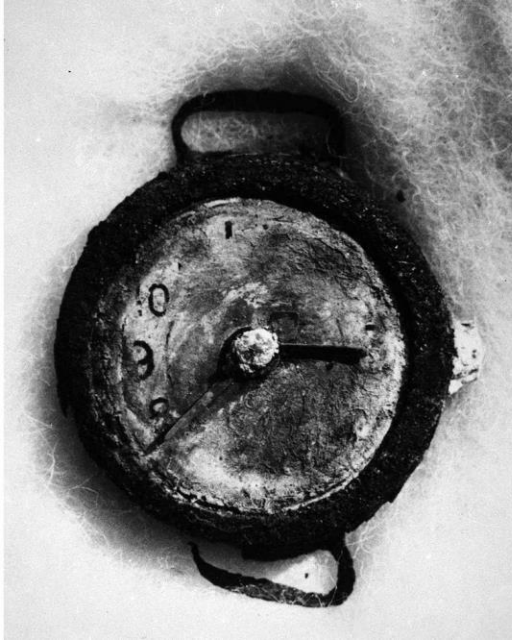


*The Enola Gay and its crew are pictured at a training base in Utah in June of 1945. Mission leader Paul W. Tibbets, standing at far right, named the B-29 after his mother.*



*The photo of Hiroshima above was taken eight months after the attack. Water in the Ota River boiled during the blast.*





*Left: This scorched watch, found in the rubble at Hiroshima, stopped at the time of the blast-8:16 AM.*



*Right: A human shadow scars the steps of a bank in Hiroshima, imprinted by the extreme heat of the blast.*



*In August of 1945, Nagasaki, Japan, like Hiroshima, was obliterated by an atom bomb. Only a few reinforced concrete buildings remained standing after the blast. Everything else was blown away.*





*Representatives of the Japanese government sign the surrender document on the deck of the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo harbor on September 2, 1945.*