

PACIFIC 1939-1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

WAS HIROSHIMA THE BIGGEST EVENT OF WORLD WAR 2?

Extracts from an American report on the impact of the bomb on the people of Hiroshima

Catalogue ref: FO 371/59640

The accentuated effect of these bombs came not only from the surprise and their crushing power, but also from the feeling of security among the inhabitants of the two cities before the attacks. Though Nagasaki had undergone five raids in the previous year, they had not been heavy, and Hiroshima had gone almost untouched until the morning of 6 August 1945. In both cities many people felt that they would be spared, and the various rumors in circulation supporting such feeling covered a wide range of wishful thoughts. There were so many Christians

Typical comments of survivors were:

"If the enemy has this type of bomb, everyone is going to die, and we wish the war would hurry and finish."

Of greater significance are the reaction of the Japanese people as a whole. The two raids were all-Japan events and were intended so: the Allied powers were trying to break the fighting spirit of the Japanese people and their leaders, not just of the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Virtually all the Japanese people had a chance to react to the bomb, though the news had not reached to full spread at the time of the surrender. By the time the interviewing was done, only about two per cent of the population in rural areas and one per cent in the cities had not heard of the bomb.

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What is this source?

This extract comes from an American report looking at the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. It was very long and detailed and looked at the damage caused to buildings and people. It also looked at the lessons that could be learned from the dropping of the bomb.

This particular extract came from a section that looked at the psychological impact of the bomb on people in Hiroshima.

What's the background to this source?

The war in the Pacific was fought mostly (but not solely) between US forces and the forces of Japan. It began in December 1941 and cost many thousands of lives. By early 1945 US forces were beginning to invade the islands that made up the Japanese homelands. In February–March 1945 the Allied forces suffered huge casualties when they invaded the tiny island of Iwo Jima. Soon afterwards they suffered heavy casualties again when they invaded Okinawa. After assessing the situation US military and political leaders decided to use the new weapon that they had just developed, the Atom Bomb.

US President Truman consulted his commanders, scientists and also his allies, particularly British leader Winston Churchill. Churchill felt the bomb should be used to shorten the war. The military leaders were divided and many of the scientists who developed the bomb also felt that it was wrong to use it. In the end, Truman did decide to use it, and even said later in his life that the decision was easy.

It's worth knowing that...

Hiroshima had not been heavily bombed during the war and as a result the population was less familiar with air raid protection than other Japanese cities.

Before Hiroshima, US bombers had attacked Japanese cities with firebomb raids that were devastatingly effective. Raids on the Japanese capital Tokyo actually killed more people than the Hiroshima bomb, but obviously not with just one weapon.

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How will you use this source?

1. Why did the bombs come as such a shock to the two cities?
2. What psychological impact did the bomb have on people in Hiroshima?
3. How widely did news of the bomb spread? Was this surprising in wartime?
4. Do you think people in Britain or the USA would have had much sympathy for the people of Hiroshima?
5. Which parts of the source do you think will be useful in preparing for your TV debate?

Use this table to help you plan your work.